

**EXAMINING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE HIGH DROP OUT RATE OF FEMALE
STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NKHATA-BAY DISTRICT**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE AWARD OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION (MEd) DEGREE IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND
MANAGEMENT
OF
MZUZU UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION
MZUZU, MALAWI**

MARCH 2016

DECLARATION

I, **Cornelius N. Malongo**, hereby declare that this study is my own original work, and it has not been submitted for a degree or examination at any other university. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by complete references.

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ABSTRACT

It is natural that some learners who start school should fail to complete it at some point in the educational cycle. However, this becomes an issue of concern where a majority of learners withdraw before completion. The situation is even worse where one sex is predominantly affected by this phenomenon. A similar situation taking place in the northern part of Malawi in Central Africa is what has prompted this study. The researcher and other people had observed that there was a high dropout rate among female learners both at primary and secondary school level. Thus, the researcher was at pains to find out factors which influenced them to withdraw from school prematurely.

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that contribute to high dropout rate of female learners in secondary school in Nkhata bay, a district in the northern part of Malawi. The study involved junior and senior secondary female learners, school managers both at district (DEM) and at regional level (EDM), secondary school head teachers, leaders of civil societies concerned with educational welfare of the girl child(CAMFED, FAWEMA, & Keep the Girl Child at School organization), and local leaders in the Northern Education Division . Data was obtained largely through interviews. The attribution and resilience theories inform this study and the results are discussed using qualitative approach within the interpretive paradigm.

The findings of this study has yielded that cultural and economic factors are the major factors that influence female learners to withdraw before completion. However, the economic factors have surfaced as the factors which have the worst impact on female dropout rate in Nkhata bay district.

Key words: school dropout, resilience, single mother effect, attribution, migrant workers effect, lakeshore effect

DEDICATION

This work has been dedicated to my last born son Wighane (i.e. God's will) who was born when I was about to begin my MED Programme. Perhaps more than anyone else he so much missed my attention for I was busy with academic work. Occasionally he popped in the study room to remind me about my role to take care and entertain him. It is my wish that he grows in the knowledge and fear of the almighty God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Mr Mariseni Mwale who greatly encouraged me to come up with this work. Apart from guiding and inspiring me in my work he instilled confidence in me. He speedily offered feedback and challenged me to aim for the best. He was more than a parent for me for his burning desire was that I achieve what I want in the best way possible within the required limited time. His impact on me has been enormous such that he has left indelible marks on me.

Special thanks go to Dr S Safuli and Dr Momezulu who helped me to identify the chosen issue to be suitable for the research study. Also to be thanked are Mr. Godfrey Msukwa and Sr. Cecilia Mzumara whose academic advise not only shaped the direction of my research but also brought a new tone to it. I am also greatly indebted to them.

Lastly but not least I would like to thank all that supplied valuable information that has beefed up this research study right from up to bottom of the social ladder. A special mention should be made of the District Education Manager, the DEM of Nkhata Bay district, and head teachers of schools I visited, the leaders of civil societies, the local leaders and the female learners of the concerned schools.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Development of human capacity is one of the objectives of every nation (Malunda, 2004). Thus, each nation ensures that its citizens are offered education since it is an effective tool for political and socio-economic empowerment. This is augmented by Obeng-denteh et al (2011) who assert that education is a key to industrialization and modernization without which one may find it difficult to develop socially, economically and politically. UNICEF (2010) also captures this so well when it asserts that educating a girl means that as a woman, she is empowered and more likely to participate in development efforts and in political and economic decision making. Not only does education open up a person to the world of people and things but it also equips one for future responsibilities, both personal and social ones. This is why education is considered as a fundamental key to employment in America (Posner, 1990). Not only is this true for America but also for all nations. Thus education means expansion of cultural horizons and employment opportunities to an individual. As for nations, it means enhanced prospects of social and economic development.

Much as education is offered to both male and females, it is surprising to note the high number of females who drop out of school before completion of a particular educational cycle. This comes in the wake of a call by the world Education forum in the year 2000 to eliminate gender disparity at all school levels and to ensure that all children complete their basic primary education (IRIN, 2010).

School dropout rate has been noted to be a universal challenge (Katahoire, 2014; IRIN, 2010) Citing the Editorial Projects in Education (2008), the REFT Institute Inc.(2010) states that school dropout issue is a persistent crisis in the United States. Approximately one million students drop out of school every year. Prior to this, Posner (1990) reported that more than two million American girls and women between the ages of 14 and 24 were high school dropouts.

In the same vein, Loveys (2011) asserts that new studies reveal that the U.K has one of the worst dropout rates in developed world. Katahoire (2014) also observes that despite improvements in getting girls in school during the last decade, 54% of the 57 million children globally out of

school are girls. The three regions with the highest proportions of girls out of school are: the Arab States (65%); Sub Saharan Africa (64%) and South and West Asia (55%) (UNESCO, 2014). UNESCO is said to count children as 'out of school' if they are expected never to enrol, or if they have dropped out; or if they are expected to enrol later. Data on net enrolments in primary and secondary education in most regions show that for females they are lower in secondary than in primary education. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest net enrolments for females in both primary and secondary education (ibid).

The differences between the net enrolment rates for females in primary and secondary education are indicative of high female drop-out rates during primary education (Katahoire, 2014). Not only did Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest female drop-out rate in primary education of all world regions in 2012, but the dropout rate had increased from 40 percent in 1999 to 42 percent. South and West Asia had the second highest rate of 34 percent, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean at 21 percent. In East Asia and the Pacific the female drop-out rate was 6.7 percent (UNESCO, 2012).

High drop-out rates among girls in Sub Saharan Africa are found not just in primary education, but continue through secondary education. There is considerable variation though in the cumulative drop-out rates between countries. Malawi, Central Africa Republic and Niger have the highest, and Mauritius, Sudan and Ivory Coast have the lowest. These differences are not straightforwardly indicative of success in keeping girls in schools (UNESCO, 2012).

In Malawi, there are three levels of education namely primary, secondary, and tertiary education. It should be noted that primary school level has eight grades namely standards 1-8, secondary school has four grades namely form 1-4 and university education takes four to five years depending upon the nature of programme. School dropout occurs both among boys and girls. Actually there is no specific period when school dropout does not occur. Al- Sammarrai and Zaman (2002) contend that the dropout rate remains high at primary school in Malawi.

Research has shown that between males and female learners, female learners are the ones who drop out of school the most. This is confirmed by World Vision (2001) which reports that the dropout rate for those attending school in Malawi is high especially for the girls. This is also

supported by Valentini (2004) whose study in the year 2003 indicated that 10.5 percent of girls who enrolled in schools each year dropped out against 8.4 percent of boys. The Girl up United Nations Foundation (2012) also asserts that less than a quarter of girls finish up elementary school in Malawi.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

High school dropout rate among girls has been observed as a great challenge in Malawi. The World Bank indicates that out of 27% of Malawi's girls who enrol in secondary school, 13% will attend school and only a fraction of that 13% will actually finish 4 years of secondary school. Only 5% of women nationally are said to have passed their MSCE examinations (MoEST, 2010; NSOM, 2008)

Among the districts in the northern region, Nkhata bay registers the highest dropout rate among girls in secondary schools (Chimombo, 2000). However, little is known as to why girls in this particular geographical location drop out of school at a higher level. There is need for this particular study so as to unravel factors contributing to high dropout rate among girls in Nkhata bay district. Are the factors attributed to culture, poverty, or lack of motivation or otherwise?

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine factors that contribute to high dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Nkhata-bay district.

1.3 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To examine factors which are contributing to high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata bay district.

1.4.1 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The study seeks:

- i. To investigate the cultural, economic, and environmental factors which are contributing to high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata-bay district.
- ii. To uncover factors that may determine girls to stay in school until completion of their educational cycle i.e. tertiary education in Nkhata-bay district.

- iii. To find out measures or mechanism that can be put in place to reduce high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata-bay district. To find out what can be done to ameliorate this problem. To find mechanism that can be put in place to mitigate the problem of high dropout rate among female learners.

1.5 THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The rationale for this study is to see to it that that the dropout out rate among the female learners in Nkhata bay is tremendously reduced. It is envisaged that the reduction of the high dropout rate will have multiple advantages to the female learners and nation as a whole. Among other things, reduction in dropout rate will enhance human resource development, empower the women, and reduce population to manageable size. The following is a brief explanation of each of these three advantages.

Firstly, reduction in dropout rate will enhance human resources development i.e. promote capacity building. Malawi is very rich in terms of human resource. The only drawback is that we have a lot of unskilled human labour brought about due to lack of education it is strongly believed and hoped that any check to the phenomena of high dropout rate will positively bring about improvement in human resource development.

Secondly, reduction in dropout rate will increase the number of educated women. This will in return reduce fertility rate of women thereby leading to reducing population to manageable levels. This finds confirmation in the claims of the National Statistical Office of Malawi (2008) which reports that after completing secondary school education, a woman's total fertility rate drops from 6.2 to 4.3 children. More than that, gender report (2008) contends that if a girl completes primary school, her average age of marriage raises to 19.5; if she has completed secondary school, the age raises again to 22.1.

Thirdly, reduction of dropout rate of female learners will see most of them attaining some desirable measure of education. Most likely, education will empower politically, economically and socially. The attained education will enable learned women to make informed decisions as they relate with others at a local and international level. In fact it takes education for a woman to contribute effectively in the production of goods and services. Related to the same, research from

the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2011), argues that a 1% increase in female secondary school attendance adds 0.3% to the country's average annual per capita in income growth.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this study may be of benefit to female learners who, through various relevant authorities, will be encouraged to continue with their education. Where possible, this study will provide information for civic education of parents as regards the adverse effects of school dropout of girls and what impact this has on the individual, the community and the nation as a whole.

This study may also help education planners and policy makers to consolidate earlier findings on this problem and enact laws that may help to curb high dropout rate in female learners. This study may also have a bearing on the community as a whole. It may prove informative and could act as a reminder and suggestive as to which values need to be reviewed. The community, through the parents' teachers association and the community traditional leaders will be reminded what role they are to play to discourage female students from dropping out of school.

1.6 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Dropout learner: a learner who leaves school before the completion of the educational cycle i.e. primary school, secondary school and university according to the Malawi education system.

School environment is used in two senses; broadly it refers to the community set up of a learner from home to school. In a narrow sense, it refers to the school compass such as that of Chintheche and Sanga Community Day Secondary school.

Attribution: the scientific attempt to explain the cause of behaviour of people.

Resilience: This is ability to become personally and professionally successful despite severe adversity.

Single Mother Effect: The effects the single mother were having on their subordinates most especially their biological daughter.

Migrant Workers' Effect: This is the effect that Malawians who work in foreign countries of South Africa and Tanzania have on female learners.

Lakeshore effect: This is the impact that fishermen who live along the lake shore do have on female learners and indeed on some females of the area.

1.7 ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS STUDY

Camfed: Campaign for female Education

CDSS: Community Day Secondary School.

DEM: District Education Manager

EDM: Education Division Manager

FAWEMA: Forum for advancement of female Education of Malawi.

GOM: Government of Malawi

VDC: Village Development Committee.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Bonneau (2008) defines a dropout as any student who leaves school for any reason before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another elementary or secondary school. More than that, Hua (2008) defines a dropout as an individual student who was previously enrolled in a school and has discontinued schooling indefinitely or has not graduated from the required education program cycle. Predominantly, this will be the sense in which the word should be used throughout the course of our study.

According to Malunda et al. (2004) dropout rate is the percentage number of learners who leave school before they complete a particular educational level. It is a percentage over and above those who had enrolled in a particular cohort. This dropout rate can be calculated in various ways. UNESCO Institute of Statistics, (2009) reports that dropout rate by grade is calculated by subtracting the sum of promotion rate and repetition rate from 100 in the given school year. For cumulative dropout rate in primary education, it is said to be calculated by subtracting the survival rate from 100 at a given grade. More than that, the dropout rate is said to be derived by analysing data on enrolment and repeaters by grade for two consecutive years (department of basic education/ South Africa, 2011).

2.2 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE HIGH DROPOUT RATE AMONG FEMALES

There are several factors that influence high dropout rate among female learners. For instance, Poverty, early marriages, school environment, and lack of parental guidance, negative community values, and long distances to school are among those identified factors. The others are lack of role models, lack of interest in school, feelings of embarrassment and shyness, some demands at school, failure by the government, some demands at school, physical features and some physical and psychological challenges. The above mentioned factors have been fully explained below.

2.2.1 POVERTY

As Kadzamira and Rose (2001) indicate, the primary cause of school dropout is poverty. This is also confirmed by Samati (2013) who reports that primary and secondary school data indicate that the children from the poorest households are underrepresented at the primary level and are close to absent at the secondary level. Primary school completion among rural students is said to be at 34 percent lower than those of urban students. Similarly, the completion rate for students in the poorest income quintile is said to be 44 percent lower than the richest income quintile. In her view, this reflects the “triple handicap” of being poor, rural and female, which is the situation for the majority of women and girls in Malawi.

Poverty may adversely affect the chances of girls to remain in school. A female learner may be asked to fend for herself when she has not grown of age. This usually happens where parents are poor and perhaps even fail to provide for their own needs. Again, it is in this situation in which parents who are destitute force girls into marriage. Either the parents may ask their daughter to get married in order to support their parent’s family, or the girl herself may feel the necessity to get married and support her family. These are marriages of expediency.

New analysis for the 2013/4 EFA Global Monitoring Report vividly underlines the fact that girls and young women, especially those from the poorest families, have continued to be denied opportunities for education over the past decade. Unless special efforts are urgently taken to extend educational opportunities to the marginalized, the poorest countries may take several generations to achieve universal completion of primary and lower secondary education, according to new analysis for this Report – and within these countries the poorest girls will be the last to fully enjoy the right to education. In sub-Saharan Africa, if recent trends continue, the richest boys will achieve universal primary completion in 2021, the poorest boys will do in 2069 but the poorest girls will not catch up until 2086 – and will only achieve universal lower secondary school completion in 2111.

2.2.2 EARLY MARRIAGE

Girl up United Nations Foundation (2013) observes that nearly half of all girls in Malawi are married by the age of 18 and one in four teen girls have a child. It would appear then that people's mind set also account for high dropout rate among female learners. There is a belief among many people in Malawi that education is for boys and not for girls because women are culturally keepers of homes. Therefore, the girl child takes such beliefs as true.

2.2.3 NEGATIVE COMMUNITY VALUES

Some community values do negatively impact on a girl child. Valentini (2004) relates that a girl who experiences her first menses in Chikwawa are required to undergo an initiation ceremony where she is given advice on how to behave once she comes of age. At the end of this ceremony a man (fisi) is appointed to have sexual intercourse with her as a proof that she is sexually mature. Valentini (2004) bemoans the fact that such cultural practices have promoted early pregnancies, early marriages, and transmission of STIs'and HIV/AIDs. The community may be holding marriage in very high esteem to the effect that they push the young girls into it at the earliest convenience. Similarly, other communities do value business more than school. In such circumstances, one should not expect learners to perform wonders at school. For such learners school is viewed as a sheer waste of one's precious time.

2.2.4 FEELINGS OF SHYNESS/ EMBARRASSMENT

By the time a girl child reaches secondary school level, adolescence will have been attained. Namate et al (2000) asserts that psychological feelings of shyness and embarrassment creep in as one attains adolescence. This is supported by Betemani (2000) who outlines shyness as one of the feelings one experiences as one attains puberty. Such feelings are usually pronounced among girls than boys partly due to cultural demands. More often than not, an adolescent girl will try to dispel embarrassment faced at school at all cost.

Such situations as learning in a class of underage when one is many years older, putting on tight clothes which expose sensitive parts of the body such as breasts and wearing torn up clothes, are enough to scare the female learners away. It should be borne in mind that girls are naturally shy. One wonders as to whether feelings of shyness and embarrassment could account for the poor

performance of female learners in co-educational schools as opposed to those in female single sex educational schools. Unless such feelings are properly addressed it will continue to be an avenue for their exit from the academic arena.

2.2.5 SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

As already pointed out, the terms school environment will be used in two senses; the general and specific senses. In a general sense, it will be used to mean the general surrounding of a learner from home to school. In a specific sense, it will be used to mean the school premise. In this paragraph the specific sense is highlighted.

The school environment as observed by Chimombo et al (2000) plays a great role in the increase of school dropout of a female child. Among other things, the quality and quantity of sanitary facilities may discourage a female learner from pursuing her academic goals. For instance, pit latrines which are not properly covered with doors or other door substitutes, may scare the female learner. Furthermore, where pit latrines and toilets are not properly cleaned or carelessly used, the school becomes detestable, avoiding the bad and unpleasant experiences. The fear of contracting diseases is enough reason to scare female learners from school.

The number of toilets and pit latrine available at an education institution is an important issue to reckon with. The minimum recommended ratio of toilets to female learners is one to fifteen for girls and one to twenty-five for boys according to the Malawi government policy. Unfortunately no country statistics are available for secondary school sanitation (Water aid Report, 2011). Having few toilets may lead the girl child to endure a lot of pain. This may turn the school environment into a prison of some kind for them. In situations where the toilets and pit latrines do not have proper doors, privacy of the girl child particularly during times when they are experiencing their monthly cycles is compromised and this could be enough to scare the girl child.

Related to the same, UNESCO (2013) argue that gender equality can be improved by making sure the school environment is safe, improving facilities to provide, for example, separate latrines for girls and boys, training teachers in gender sensitivity, achieving gender balance among teachers and rewriting curricula and textbooks to remove gender stereotypes

2.2.6 LACK OF PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Chimombo et al (2000) relate that some mothers preferred to equip their daughters with feminine gender roles at home than send them to school. Thus, lack of parental guidance is another contributing factor to high dropout rate. The behaviours of some parents seem to suggest as if their obligation as parents end as soon as the girl is old enough to stand on her own. Whatever happens after that seems not to be any of their business. In those instances, the girl is free to do anything they feel like doing.

Given the parents with low literacy level, there is little if anything they can offer to their children. Obviously, such parent cannot give what they do not have. Most of such parents will mostly talk about house chores rather than education. They will suggest that the girl do economic activities rather than “waste” time with school. In some circles, some parents view their adolescent daughters as burdens and may directly or indirectly ask them to go and establish homes of their own.

2.2.7 DEMANDS AT SCHOOL

School demands do play a part in promoting school dropout. Chimombo et al (2000) register cases of female learners who were battered and dropped out of school on account of that. In his findings Mkandawire (2002) also unearthed the fact that some girls pulled out of school at Ekwendeni simply because they had been battered. Indeed, female learners who are frequently battered by teachers or given punishment may decide to shun from school.

Others do drop out simply because they fail to cope up with academic demands, for instance failing to measure to the demands in some subjects such as Mathematics, Biology and Physical Science. In other instances, contribution of some fees to school development projects is enough to scare some needy female students from school. In the same vein, some female students are simply not interested in manual work done at school such as scrubbing, mopping and slashing.

2.2.8 PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Physiological and psychological challenges also factors that are causing the school dropout among girls. Among the challenges outlined by Betemeni (2000) which adolescents face are physiological and psychological ones. This is augmented by Chidalengwa et al (2008) who intimate that the desire to practice sexual intercourse is one of emotional and psychological

changes taking place both in both boys and girls. How one handles inner tensions does have a bearing on one's academic pursuit. This is the period when the adolescent girl is battling up with inner tensions and the demand for the opposite sex as nature demands. How well such tensions are handled is dependent on how successful the community is, in socializing its members on sexual matters as highlighted by Chimombo et al (2000).

This is what people in the areas of T.A Lukwa and T.A Kaomba in Kasungu do. Research (MHRC, 2005) found that the initiation of girls aged 12 to 15 years who have attained puberty, takes place in the areas of T.A Lukwa and T.A Kaomba. Over a period that may be as long as 2 weeks, the girls are counselled by 'anamkungwi' (female counsellors) on the developments taking place in their bodies and how they should take care of themselves.

The research established that during the counselling sessions the girls are taught how to dance chisamba before they are presented to the community as young women. The MHRC found that the girls are taught this dance as a way of preparing them for their role of satisfying their husbands in bed. The girls dance bare-breasted in a very explicit manner as they are being presented to the whole community. To a certain extent, this can be referred to as an institutionalized gender discrimination at home, if we are to borrow the term of Age Africa (2013).

Unfortunately, reports about cultures in Social Studies books of forms one to four in Malawi seem to suggest that such issues are often left unattended by most communities or are simply referred to as a taboo. This is in agreement with what Age Africa (2013) asserts when it outlines lack of knowledge and resources around sexual and reproductive health issues as a cause of dropout among female learners in Africa. If not properly addressed at school, such information may be obtained from peers. Pressed with such demands, the simplest way out for them could be expressing them naturally by affiliating oneself to whomever claims to be interested in them. In a society where marriage is highly prized and valued, what could be better than settling down for it! Unless one has learnt to prize education more than anything else, physiological and psychological tensions will surely take their toll.

2.2.9 FAILURE BY THE GOVERNMENT

Given the limited resources that the government has, it has built very few good schools which are academically furnished. This is compounded by pilfering of government funds by a few greedy officials as is the case in the current cash gate scandal (Tilly, 2013). Failure by the government in creating a favouring learning environment also contributes to high dropout rate among female learners. For example, learners may not feel comfortable learning under trees during a cold day or a rainy day in a situation where there are few classrooms. It may not also be pleasing to learn in dilapidated blocks whose roofs leak during rainy season. Dropping out of school seems a better option in the light of what has been highlighted. According to Chimombo et al (2000) this is what has prompted UNICEF to assist in the construction of some school blocks.

2.2.10 PHYSICAL FEATURES

Chimombo et al (2000) assert that physical features such as mountains, hills, rivers standing between a student's home and school stand as a stumbling block to learning. Just imagine a girl child always thinking about how to climb up hills, or cross over the rivers which flood at times. Such predicaments tend to stand on the way of the girl child's education and being that they are, usually lacking the skill of resiliency; they succumb to nature and prefer to stay behind and stop school.

2.2.11 LONG DISTANCES TO SCHOOL

Again, Chimombo et al (2000) give an account of the long distance the girl child takes to move to certain educational institution. Age Africa (2013) calls this problem this long school commutes. Sometimes, these problems are compounded by the physical features such as hill, mountains and rivers. At times, this accounts for the long distances in between the educational institutions. This been the case, little girls take time to access school for fear of covering long distances beyond their capabilities. When such girls start school at a later stage they may be looked at as misfits by others due to overage. This could lead to their drop out. For some, merely covering a long distance is a very big challenge enough to make them drop out of school.

2.2.12 PEER PRESSURE

Chidalengwa et al (2008) intimate that it is during adolescence that young people often explore new things that they previously had no interest in. Many adolescents are said to develop a desire

to emulate what they friends are doing. They often succumb to peer pressure. Peer pressure also accounts for high dropout rate among girls. Some girls are deceived into thinking that a genuine girl must at least have a boyfriend or a lover. More often than not this is what leads to unwanted teenage pregnancy. Very few teenage mothers pick up school after child birth. They simply choose to settle down.

As the Chewa adage goes, ‘goat which has tasted salt may find it difficult to stop going for it again.’ Sometimes female learners are deceived by fellow young girls that lovers are the ones who most of the time assist them meet their basic necessities such as soap, perfume hairstyles, and makeup’s. In a situation in which almost everyone would like to look good, such sentiments may become very tempting. To an immature mind, this may look an easy way to look decent and modern. What may not be foreseen is the fact that such a conduct could be a short cut to teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and not forgetting school dropout.

2.2.13 POST-SECONDARY OPPORTUNITY KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Age-Africa (2013) lists post-secondary opportunity knowledge gaps to be one of the factors that contribute to high dropout rate among the female learners. Among other things, this refers to the act of giving guidance and counselling as regards potential future jobs that learners would wish to embrace in relation to their interest and ability. Most of the times, the learners are not told what they are to become after finishing their secondary school education. This is particularly true in rural area where learner often lack role models. In situations where career guidance has not been offered, most learners lack the resources to go in cities where they could find opportunities to get employed.

2.2.14 LACK OF PROFESSIONALISM AMONG TEACHERS

The Malawi public Service Regulation (MPSR) clearly stipulates that it is as an act of misconduct for a teacher to be involved in a relation with a female learner talks less of behaving immorally with her. Not only is the expected social distance not observed when a teacher has an affair with female learners but also an act of academic murder is committed through such acts. More often than not, female learners are too preoccupied with the love affair than the lessons offered by those teachers, in those instances. Thus, school dropout among female learners is sometimes caused by lack of professionalism on the part of teachers. Having failed to maintain a social distance with their female learners such teachers, particularly the young unmarried ones,

may be looked at as potential husbands. Hence they may begin making advances towards them so as to be courted by them. In this way, teachers fall in love with their learners and establish relationships. Unfortunately, the female learners are killed academically since they cannot concentrate in class while in love and most especially when they get impregnated and expelled from school.

2.2.15 INDIVIDUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

A Review of 25 Years of research by Rumberger et al (2008) has enabled them identify two types of factors that predict whether students drop out or graduate from high school: factors associated with individual characteristics of students, and factors associated with the institutional characteristics of their families, schools, and communities.

2.2.15.1 INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS:

Individual factors that predict whether students drop out or graduate from high school fall into four areas: (1) educational performance, (2) behaviours, (3) attitudes, and (4) background.

2.2.15.1.1 Educational Performance.

Several aspects of educational performance have been widely identified in the research literature as strong predictors of dropping out or graduating: test scores and grades in high school; academic achievement in both middle and elementary school (with grades a more consistent predictor than test scores); non-promotional school changes (student mobility) during middle and high school; and, retention (being held back one or more grades), in elementary, middle, and high school

2.2.15.1.2 Behaviours.

A wide range of behaviours both in and out of school have been shown to predict dropout and graduation. One of the most important is student engagement, which includes students' active involvement in academic work (e.g., coming to class, doing homework) and the social aspects of school (e.g., participating in sports or other extracurricular activities). Research consistently finds that high absenteeism—one specific indicator of engagement—is associated with higher dropout rates. Misbehaviour in high school and delinquent behaviour outside of high school are both significantly associated with higher dropout and lower graduation rates.

In addition, drug or alcohol use during high school is associated with higher dropout rates. Teenage parenting and childbearing increase the odds of dropping out. Having friends who engage in criminal behaviour or friends who have dropped out also does increase the odds of dropping out. Such associations appear as early as the seventh grade. Finally, a number of studies have found that students who work more than 20 hours a week are significantly more likely to drop out.

2.2.15.1.3 Attitudes.

Although a substantial body of research has explored the relationship between student achievement and a wide range of student beliefs, values, and attitudes, far less research has explored the links between these factors and dropping out. The dropout literature has generally focused on a single indicator—educational expectations (how far in school a student expects to go)—and has found that higher levels of educational expectations are associated with lower dropout rates.

2.2.15.1.4 Student Background.

A number of student background characteristics—including demographics and past experiences—are linked to whether students drop out or graduate. Dropout rates are generally higher for males than for females, and they are higher for Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans than for Asians and Whites; yet these differences may be related to other characteristics of students as well as characteristics of their families, schools, and communities.

Some studies have found that second generation students (one parent foreign-born), especially Latino students, have higher graduation rates than either first generation (foreign born) or third generation (native-born students and parents). Higher English language proficiency also lowers the odds of dropping out.

One past experience—participation in preschool—has been the subject of extensive, rigorous research and has been shown to not only improve school readiness and early school success, but also to affect a wide range of adolescent and adult outcomes, including high school completion, crime, welfare, and teen parenting.

2.2.15.2 Institutional Predictors

Research on dropouts has identified a number of factors within students' families, schools, and communities that predict dropping out and graduating. The three aspects of families predict whether students drop out or graduate: (1) family structure, (2) family resources, and (3) family practices.

Students living with both parents have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates, compared to students living in other family arrangements. More important, changes in family structure, along with other potentially stressful events (such as a family move, illness, death, adults entering and leaving the households, and marital disruptions) increase the odds of dropping out.

Students in homes with more family resources—as measured by parental education, parents' occupational status, and family income—are less likely to drop out of school. A number of parenting practices—sometimes referred to as social resources or social capital—have been shown to reduce the odds of dropping out, including: having high educational aspirations for their children; monitoring their children's school progress; communicating with the school; and, knowing the parents of their children's friends. Finally, students are more likely to drop out if they have a sibling who dropped out.

2.2.15.3 Schools.

Although student and family characteristics account for most of the variability in dropout rates, about 20 percent can be attributed to four characteristics of schools: (1) the composition of the student body, (2) resources, (3) structural features, and (4) policies and practices.

But there is strong evidence that small classes improve high school graduation rates. School policies and practices in high school do matter. Students are less likely to drop out if they attend schools with a stronger academic climate, as measured by more students taking academic courses and doing homework. On the other hand, students are more likely to drop out in schools with a poor disciplinary climate, as measured by student disruptions in class or in school. There does not appear to be a consistent effect of exit exams on dropout rates, although more recent high school exams appear to lower high school completion rates.

2.2.15.4 Communities.

Communities play a crucial role in adolescent development along with families, schools, and peers. Population characteristics of communities are associated with dropping out, but not in a straightforward manner: living in a high poverty neighbourhood is not necessarily detrimental to completing high school, but rather living in an affluent neighbourhood is beneficial to school success. This suggests that affluent neighbourhoods provide more access to community resources and positive role models from affluent neighbours

Rumberger et al (2008) argues that this review of the research which he claims to be the most comprehensive to date, examines all the factors that have been studied over the last 25 years, from individual factors to institutional factors in families, school and communities. The review yielded valuable insights:

No single factor can completely account for a student's decision to continue in school until graduation. Just as students themselves report a variety of reasons for quitting school, the research literature also identifies a number of factors that appear to influence the decision. The decision to drop out is not simply a result of what happens in school. Clearly students' behaviour and performance in school influences their decision to stay or leave, but students' activities and behaviours outside of school—particularly engaging in deviant and criminal behaviour—also influences their likelihood of remaining in school.

Dropping out is said to be more of a process than an event; for many students, the process begins in early elementary school. A number of long-term studies that tracked groups of students from preschool or early elementary school through the end of high school were able to identify early indicators that could significantly predict whether students were likely to drop out or finish high school. The two most consistent indicators were early academic performance and academic and social behaviours.

According to Rumberger et al (2008) the research literature has identified a number of factors within families, schools, and communities that affect whether students are likely to drop out or graduate from high school. They include access to not only fiscal and material resources, but also social resources in the form of supportive relationships in families, schools, and communities. One implication of this review is that there are a variety of leverage points for addressing the problem of high dropout rates. Intervention in preschool and early elementary school is clearly

warranted. Rigorous experimental evaluations of high quality preschool programs and small classes in early elementary school have proven to improve high school graduation rates.

2.3 CONCLUSION

In a nut shell, a few factors that influence high dropout rate among female learners have been elaborated. The following are the factors have been expounded: poverty, lack of parental guidance, peer pressure, early marriage, some demands at school, physical features, failure by the government, school environment, long distances to school, some negative community values, feelings of shyness and embarrassment, lack of role models, some physiological and psychological challenges, lack of professionalism and post-secondary opportunity knowledge gaps.

A close analysis of these will reveal the two main factors underlying all those. These are poverty and ignorance. More precisely, poverty is the underlying factor behind early marriage, physical features, long distances, some demands at school, school environment and failure by the government. For instance, if the government were rich, it would have built schools within walk able distances. Similarly, a rich government would offer infrastructure to circumvent such physical features as rivers, swamps, hills and mountains. Furthermore, ignorance account for several predicaments faced by the girl child in her academic endeavours which eventually make them to pull out. For instance, negative community values, feelings of shyness and embarrassment, lack of parental guidance, peer pressure, lack of professionalism, some physiological and psychological challenges and post-secondary opportunity knowledge gaps are all outcome of ignorance.

The reviewed literature displays the fact that female learners are often victims of circumstances. Perhaps, they have more challenges than their male counterparts as they battle it out academically. It is my contention that most of these causes can be dealt with. However, there is need for a collaborative effort among all stakeholders to address these challenges effectively.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research design which has been employed in informing this study. The chapter also focuses on the following areas: theoretical frame work, paradigm, participants and research site, sampling techniques data collection instruments, data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations and delimitations.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Basically, the qualitative research design has been used. The nature of the issue which was researched i.e. school dropout rate of female learners in selected secondary school in Nkhata bay and the nature of task undertaken which is in depth examination of the causative factors from the perspective of learners, school managers, civil society and local leaders did warrant that this design be employed. Furthermore, this study stresses an understanding of setting, nature of data, holistic approach, selection of participants, inductive data analysis.

The qualitative research design was used because it allows for an in depth, more open and detailed study of selected issues (Mason, 1996). Furthermore, it was used because the problem concerns the behaviour, feelings, and thoughts and lived experience of dropout female learners, school managers, civil society and local leaders as they interact in their environment (Carson, 2001; Holliday, 2002).

The qualitative research design was adopted because it helps to obtain a more realistic feel of the world that cannot be experienced in the numerical data and statistical analysis used in quantitative research and it provides a holistic view of the phenomena under investigation (Matveev, 2002). Additionally, qualitative approach was used in order to provide a better understanding of the circumstances under which female learners are forced to withdraw from school.

As a qualitative study, it seeks to probe into the causes of high dropout rate not in a correlation way but as perceived by those experienced by it. Thus it is an in depth study of twenty-one participants from five schools sampled purposively.

Above all, this study is mainly interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events. The researcher was and is concerned with meaning.

3.3 A PARADIGM

For Mertens (2005), a paradigm can be defined as an ideal or model. He asserts that there are three philosophical grounding of paradigm in research. The first is positivism. The second is constructivism also known as interpretivist and the last on is emancipatory also known as critical theory.

The researcher believes probing into the causes and effects of high dropout rate among female learners in selected secondary schools is an exercise which requires a constructivist (interpretivist) paradigm. This paradigm was the most appropriate because it allowed interaction between the researcher and the participants. Secondly, the unstructured interviews enabled that multiple constructed realities which were anticipated to be experienced. This is due to the fact that no two people perceive realities in the same way. Ndengu (2012:14) sheds more light on this when he relates that interpretivism captures the lives of participants in order to understand and interpret the meaning they attach to social issues. Thirdly, the values of the researcher are acknowledged, made explicit and adopted. Additionally, attempts have been made to construct meaning and understand dropout rate from the participant perspective. As it is required, judgments have been based upon consensus of participants and researcher. Most importantly this study is fully dependent on the researcher to interpret the meaning of the results.

3.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study has employed two theories; the motivation theory of attribution and the resilience theory. The theory of motivation informs the first objective of our study while resilience addresses the last objective .i.e. ways of curbing high dropout rate among female learners.

It should be noted that it was social psychologist Fritz Heider (1958) who introduced the term attribution to refer to an explanation people give for their own or another person's action or beliefs (Sprinthall, 1990). The theory seeks to explain the cognitive processes whereby individuals make explanatory inferences regarding the causes of events. He distinguished two types of attribution; the dispositional and situational one. The two general categories of explanation are also referred to as internal and external.

When the attribution is based on an internal factor, it is called a dispositional attribution and when it is based on external factors it is called a situational attribution. Internal attributions are said to implicate characteristics of the individual (such as ability, attitudes, personality, mood,

and effort) for having caused a particular behaviour, whereas external attributions are said to implicate external factors (such as the task, other people, or luck) for causing an event or outcome to occur. The theory of attribution is employed to probe the causes and effects of high dropout rate among female learners.

Subscribing to Fritz Heider's ideas, Baron (2004) asserts that attribution is part of social perception. He relates that social psychologists believe that we have a basic desire to understand cause- and – effects relationships in social world. Thus, he defines attribution as a process through which we seek to understand the causes of others' behaviour and so gain knowledge of their stable traits and disposition

While Heider established that successes and failures are interpreted by an individual within this causal framework, Weiner (1971) added an additional dimension to causal interpretation when he proposed that the stability of the cause is also included in individual's explanations of outcomes. The distinction between stable, non -variable causes (such as innate ability for internal attributions and inherent task difficulty for external attributions) and unstable, variable causes (such as effort and luck respectively) was combined with Heider's internal/external dimension to form a basis for classifying the performance attributions made by individuals (Martinko 1998).

Following the emergence of two-dimensional attribution theory, many studies have been conducted which observed patterns governing the type of attribution which individuals tend to make in given situations. Three phenomena which are commonly observed when studying attributions are the actor-observer bias, the fundamental attribution error, and the self-serving bias.

The fundamental attribution error refers to a general bias on the part of an observer, whereby individuals tend to explain the behaviour of others in terms of internal factors to a greater extent than situational factors (Jones & Harris 1967). Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2003) describe it as a tendency to attribute the behaviour of others to internal, personal characteristics, while ignoring or underestimating the effects of external situational factors. Furthermore, they argue that the fundamental attribution error plays a role in common explanatory pattern called blaming the victim. The innocent victim of a crime, disaster, or serious illness is blamed for having somehow caused the misfortune, or for not having taken steps to prevent it.

The belief that the world is fair is also another bias that goes along with the fundamental attribution error contributing to unfairly blaming the victim of misfortune (Hockenbury and Hockenbury, 2003). Psychologist Melvin Lerner is cited to have called this Just-world hypothesis. With this belief, we get what we deserve and deserve what we get in life. Such a bias is based on a misconception that the world is just. As such, victims are believed to have done something to deserve their fate. In disapproval of this, Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2003) argue that if we believe the world is unfair, then no one- including yourself is safe from tragic twists of fate and chance, no matter how virtuous, careful or conscientious you may be.

The actor-observer bias is the phenomenon where the perceived cause of an event follows from the particular perspective of the explainer. An observer of an individual's behaviour displays a tendency to attribute the causes of that behaviour to internal characteristics of the actor whereas the person carrying out the act in question explains their own behaviour as having resulted from external circumstances. Hockenbury and Hockenbury (2003) call this an actor-observer discrepancy. This is referred to as the tendency to attribute ones behaviour to external, situational causes while attributing the behaviour of others to internal, personal causes; especially likely to occur with regards to behaviour that lead to negative outcomes

Finally, self-serving bias is a common pattern of explanation for personal success or failure and refers to the tendency for individuals to explain success as internally derived and failure as resulting from external, situational factors (Zuckerman 1971). These three patterns of attribution type exhibit fallacious and biased reasoning in action.

Resilience is the other theory which informs my study. It was chosen because it best suits my second and third objective whose intention is to uncover factors that may determine girls to stay in school until completion of their educational cycle i.e. tertiary education in Nkhata-bay district and to find out measures or mechanism that can be put in place to reduce high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata-bay district. Thus, it has been chosen because proponents of Resilience Theory believe that an individual's response to his/her environment, whether successful or unsuccessful, is greatly influenced by a host of risk (predisposition to danger) and protective (safeguards) factors (Powell, 2014).

Garcia et al (2013) contend that resiliency can be described in various ways. Ultimately they consider it as:

- i. The ability to become personally and professionally successful despite severe adversity (Paine & Paine, 2002)
- ii. Innate trait to adapt to the demands of the environment
- iii. Interplay between competence, adversity, asset and risk. (Linley& Joseph, 2004)

3.4.1 COMPONENTS OF RESILIENCE

Garcia et al (2013) postulates that resiliency constitutes developmental assets. In their view, there are two types of developmental assets; the internal and external ones. The Internal development assets are the internalized qualities that shape judgment and choices of individuals. On the other hand, the external development assets refer to positive experiences from people and organizations in the environment. For Paine (2002) external development assets of resilience refers to support and empowerment. For him, support includes positive family communication, caring neighborhood, and family support, caring school climate and parent involvement in school. The notion of empowerment is reported to entail community values, service to others and safety (ibid). Paine reports that research indicate that students with a high number of developmental assets are less likely to engage in risky behaviours and are more likely to succeed in schools and maintain good health.

3.4.1.1 FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON RESILIENCE

Henderson (2012) asserts that there are steps one can take today and every day to make it more likely that one will bounce back from any problem or challenge “stronger, smarter & with more self-esteem...”and more likely ones’ family and others you care about will bounce back, too. Paine (2002) calls these factors that impact on resilience .The factors are as follows:

- i. **An active coping style:** This is concerned about problem solving and managing emotions that accompany stress and learning how to face fears. Whereas task oriented coping is said to determine increase in resilience, emotional-oriented coping is said to be associated with low resilience.
- ii. **Physical exercises:** These are said to improve mood and health.
- iii. **A positive outlook:** With this, one is said to use cognitive behavioral strategies to enhance optimism and decrease pessimism while embracing humour.

- iv. **Moral compass or spirituality:** This is said to enable one to develop and live by meaningful principles. It is also contended that this enables one to put principles into action through altruism.
- v. **Social support:** This is brought forth by developing and nurturing friendship, seeking resilient role models and learning from them. Paine (2002) asserts that studies have shown that resilient individuals were more likely to have more social support than non-resilient individuals. Social support has also been associated with decreased traumatic stress and depression symptoms.
- vi. **Cognitive flexibility:** This is said to be expressed by finding good in adverse situations and by remaining flexible in ones approach in solving problems.
- vii. **Cognitive explanatory:** This is reported to enable one to place blame where it realistically belongs rather than blaming oneself or others.
- viii. **Reappraisal.** With it one is given the ability to reframe an adverse event into a situation with a more positive meaning.
- ix. **Acceptance:** This enables one to understand that an event is happening and has happened.
- x. **Stress inoculation:** which occurs only where one has had previously experienced a stressful event. It has been reported that early life exposure to severe uncontrollable trauma can cause long term stress response damage while exposure to milder events may build resilience.

Looked at from a different perspective, Powell,(2014) asserts that literature on Resilience, identifies **five protective factors of families, schools, and communities:**

- 1) **Supportive relationships**, particularly encouragement from school personnel and other Adults.
- 2) **Students' characteristics**, such as self-esteem, motivation, and accepting responsibility.
- 3) **Family factors**, such as parental support/concern and school involvement.
- 4) **Community factors**, such as community youth programs (e.g., sports, clubs, hobbies),
- 5) **School factors**, such as academic and pro-social skills training.

Garcia et al (2013) argue that resilience is essential to success in school and life since it can improve school outcomes and personal outcomes by reducing risk behaviour. Furthermore, research indicates that students with a high number of developmental assets are less likely to engage in risky behaviours and more likely to succeed in school and maintain good health (Paine & Paine, 2002). It is also said to play a central role in a person's recovery after exposure to trauma or adversity. The relevance and significance of the resilient theory to the problem of high school dropout rate among females cannot be over emphasized. Its relevance and significance can be seen right from the definitions, the protective factors, and ways of building resilience and factors that impact on resilience.

Prevention is better than cure. To a great extent, the components and factors that build resilience are valuable tools for preventing high dropout among our female learners. Should families and schools and other communities encourage resilience among our female learners dropout rate would be reduced to a negligible degree.

3.5 THE POPULATION AND SAMPLE

3.5.1 STUDY SETTING

Nkhata bay is the social setting for the research. Nkhata bay is in Malawi, one of the countries found in Central Africa. It is one of the districts in the northern region of Malawi. It is along the lake shore sharing boundaries with Rumphi district in the North, Nkhota Kota district in the south and Mzimba district in the west. More than 90 percent of the people of Nkhata bay district are 'Tongas'. The word 'Tonga' represents both a group of people and a culture.

3.5.2 STUDY POPULATION

The population comprised of school managers, some civil societies concerned with educational welfare of female learners and local leaders, female learners of Nkhata bay district. Ideally, all the secondary schools where female learners commute from home (i.e. Community Day Secondary Schools) would have been taken aboard for this research. In the same vein, all head teachers, female learners of community Day Secondary would have been targeted. Since, Nkhata bay learners are the special object of this study; boarding secondary schools have deliberately been left out since they also cater for learners other than those from Nkhata bay.

3.5.3 SAMPLE

A total of twenty-one participants were chosen from the selected five schools. The participants comprised of two school managers i.e. Education Division Manager and District Education Manager, five head teachers, ten female learners, three local leaders and three officials from civil societies concerned with the education of female children.

3.5.4 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

In view of limitation of resources (i.e. finance and time among others) convenient sampling was used. This explains the reason why places like Mpamba, St Augustine, Sanga and Chitheche and Kavuzi were chosen for they are in close proximity to the main road. Purposeful sampling was also used in identifying female learners as participants. This is due to the fact that the female learners are targeted group who are under study. Thus, the researcher sought to discover, understand and gain deeper insight into the phenomenon of high dropout rate from them (Merriam, 2009). Having been purposively sampled, for it was assumed that a lot of information would be learnt from the female learners (ibid). As Patton (1990) puts it, these learners would provide information rich cases for an in depth study.

Purposeful sampling was also used in the choice of locations. Broadly speaking, locations under our sphere of study are categorized into two, namely the rural and semi-urban. Believing that most of the variables under study are likely to manifest themselves in rural areas than semi-urban areas, the researcher chose more schools from rural than semi-urban areas. The choice of rural areas is supported by CREATE (2011) who contends that particular groups of children belonging to disadvantaged communities and living in remote areas are vulnerable to problems of irregular attendance, extended absenteeism, repetition and dropout. Thus, Mpamba, Sanga and Chitheche and Kavuzi are community day secondary schools which are in rural areas. Only St Augustine could be taken as semi-urban area. The latter location acts as a control measure. It should be noted that Nkhata-bay boma has been taken to be a semi-urban area. Attempts to interview female dropout learners proved abortive. This was due to the fact that it was too difficult to trace where these female learners could be found.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

There are several ways of collecting data in a qualitative research. Some of them include interviews, observation, and review of documents and records (Mertens, 2005). As regards interviews, Punch (2009) distinguishes three types of interviews namely the structured interviews, the focused or semi- structured interviews also known as group interviews, and the unstructured interviews.

Basically, interviews were the researcher's main way of collecting data. Both the semi-structured and the unstructured interviews were used. In the five schools that were chosen purposively, ten participants were quizzed.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves taking what you have apart, examining it in details and putting it back again in a more condensed and meaningful way (sharp, 2012). An effectiveness data analysis process involves, a clear exposition of complex arguments and issues, identifying causal relationships, comparing, contrasting, identifying and challenging assumptions (Burton, et al., 2008).

Data was analysed soon after collecting. This was done by transcribing the recorded interviews. Transcribing is making sense of the data collected to identify patterns or trends in relation to a specific phenomenon by coding. Coding is defined as marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words or category names: codes define categories (Cohen et al., 2005). Coding in this study involved breaking down and reassembling data collected in order to identify the data and allocate them to a particular system of categories and sub-categories (Ndengu, 2012; Burton, et al., 2008). The process of coding continued until all the data had been transcribed and identified into themes, so as to generate meaning from the data that address specific research questions.

In brief, the recorded interviews were transcribed, coded and classified into themes and sub-themes consistent with the research objectives. The categories of themes were prepared for interpretation.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher made sure that he obtained the permission of the relevant authorities before encountering earmarked participants. Secondly, the researcher saw to it that he did not force participants to give whatever information that was needed. Participants were informed that they are free to withdraw from participating in the interview. Prior to that, the researcher acknowledged the informants about the benefits of the research undertaken. The researcher reassured the participants that the information provided would be treated with utmost confidentiality where it is sensitive and that the informant's identities would always be anonymous.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research findings from location A, B, C, D and E in Nkhata bay district. Twenty-one participants were taken aboard in this study. Thus, this is a presentation of the views of the EDM, DEM, female learners, headmasters, civil society's leaders and local leaders of Nkhata bay.

Seven head of education institutions were approached in the quest of knowing what the cause of high dropout rate among female learners were in Nkhata bay. The researcher used a question guide put in the indices .In line with the first research objective, the researcher wanted to find out in a particular study area any three major factors that contributed to high dropout rate among the female learners in secondary schools of Nkhata bay district. In the same vein, the researcher also wanted to find out some other related factors which may in one way or another have a bearing on the drop out of female learners. This came in the wake of the fact that human being are naturally forgetful and that they need to be reminded.

Thus, the participants were asked to what extent any of the following had an impact on the drop out of female learners in their areas : teaching and learning materials, distance to school, household chores, physical features such as hill and rivers, weather (rains / hotness/ coldness), several forms of entertainment, sports activities, participation in rites such as marriage and funerals, limitation of infrastructures, child labour, church activities such as choir festivals, lack of interest in school, lack of role models, menstrual hygiene, lack of career guidance, sexual and reproductive health issues, peer pressure, and lack of good hobbies.

4.1.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

The participants comprised of school managers, both at district (DEM) and regional level (EDM) both of them graduates, leaders of civil societies .i.e. Camfed, *keep the Girl child in school* and FAWEMA) whose educational background ranged from school certificate to graduate, local traditional leaders whose educational background is below school certificate and the junior and senior female secondary school learners. The adults' age range was thirty to sixty years while that of female learners was thirteen to eighteen. Of the twenty-one participants, eleven were

females one of whom was an adult (.i.e.FAWEMA official). Two of the respondents namely the regional school manager and FAWEMA official were residents of Mzuzu and the rest were Nkhata bay residents.

To be noted are the areas of jurisdiction of participants with the exception of the learners. This is considered important because it serves to show the level of authority each one had. The schools were under the jurisdiction of head teachers, the DEM has all schools in the district under his jurisdiction, the EDM has all schools in the region under its jurisdiction, and the FAWEMA official has the region under her jurisdiction. However, her concern is the educational welfare of the female child. Also concerned about the educational welfare of the female child are Camfed and *Keep the Girl child in school project*. The only difference is that the jurisdiction of the later is limited only to the district.

For anonymity, the researcher has made use of pseudo names to refer to some respondents other than the EDM, FAWEMA official and DEM. The use of pseudo names has been done most especially to refer to learners and the local leaders. The title of Head 1, Head 2, and Head 3 etc have also been used to refer to head teachers as respondents, arranged according to the sequence of the specific location under study. The implication is that Head1 was the head teacher of the first school to participate in this study and so on and so forth.

4.1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY AREA

Nkhata bay is the chosen study area and five specific locations were using convenient sampling. According to Malawi standards, locations in Nkhata bay can be categories into three: urban, semi-urban and rural. Using the convenient sampling the location under study could be group into two: the semi- urban and urban. Of the five specific location of study, only one location is as urban. The rest are semi-urban. The specific locations are labelled A, B, C, D, and E according to the sequence in which the study was undertaken. No typical rural area was targeted in this respect.

4.1.3 DROPOUT RATE RANKED

The regional school manger was asked to identify the district which was worst hit in terms of dropout rate. Furthermore, he was to rank the district in the north in terms of how bad they were affected by female learner's dropout rate in secondary schools. His response was as follows:

Nkhata bay is the district which registers the highest dropout rate in the northern region according to research and interviews. Ranking districts in the north according to dropout rate Nkhata bay is the worst hit followed by Mzimba, then Karonga, and then Chitipa. Rumpi registers the least number of dropouts

4.2 THEMES AND CATEGORIES

The researcher came up with four sub-themes clarifying one major theme which are the social, cultural, economic and environmental factors that contribute to high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata bay district. Each of the aspects has been considered independently as a sub theme. Initially, about forty five categories were postulated. The number swelled up to fifty one as the research study progressed. Most of these falls perfectly well on the sub-themes as is highlighted below:

4.2.1 CULTURAL FACTOR

Several categories emerged as cultural factors in the course of this study. Some of them were as follows:

4.2.1.1 UNWANTED AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Asked as to which major factor contributed to high dropout rate among female learners of Nkhata bay district, unwanted and teenage pregnancy was cited being one of them. This is what one learner had to say;

“Palive munthulume yo wangaja pa chibwezi ndi munthikazi kwambula kugonana”. Literally this means that no intimate relationship between a girl and boy thrives without at least the two sleeping with each other. Lack of parental care pushes some girls into seeking help from their lovers. Their lovers meet their basic needs at the expense of making them pregnant (Jane).

The FAWEMA also noted that teenage pregnancies are indeed a cause of dropout among female learners. This is what she said:

Intimate relationships often lead to pregnancy. Readmission is feared since such learners are usually stigmatized or called names. Whatever mistakes they make at school attract such remarks as, "That was the reason why you were impregnated," from teachers and fellow learners

The EDM too related that teenage pregnancies are as a result of intimate relationship established during youthful stage. This is what he said:

Intimate relationships established during the youthful age often ended up in teenage pregnancy or contraction of sexually transmitted diseases/ infections including HIV/ AIDs.

There are several causes of teenage pregnancies. A learner of location B and local leader of location E related their observation as regard this. This is what they said:

Our parents turn our requests down when we ask for our daily provisions. Often they say, "ndiwe namwali" which literally means you are an adolescent now. In this way, we are induced to fend for ourselves. Parents literally sent us to have lovers so as to have our needs met. This usually makes us to be victims of sexual abuse and consequent teenage pregnancy and we ended up dropping out of school (Mary)

Some parents and more especially mothers do not care much about what their daughters are doing. They allow their daughter to explore what life was like in terms of relations with boys and men at as tender age as of seven years. They rebuke any person who speaks badly about their daughters intimate relations with boys and men (Mr Manda).

In order to meet their needs and match up with others most young girls indulge themselves into intimate relationships with boys and men. Girls get impregnated in the process and do drop out of school (Mr Kamanga).

The village man of location C concurred with his friend when he attributed short-sightedness to be the cause of teenage pregnancies. This is what he reported:

Most girls are short sighted when it comes to preparing for the future. There are mostly concerned with satisfaction of their immediate needs at the expense of what they would become in the future. In the event that parents fail to satisfy their needs they do entertain boys or men who offer them temporary and immediate requirements. Consequently, they fall prey to men's traps. They are sexually abused, impregnated and drop out of school.

The head teacher of location E also confirmed this as he related that:

Most female learners get impregnated as teens in the course of trying to meet their basic needs(Head 5).

4.2.1.2 EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGES

Early and forced marriage appears to be posing a great threat to academic pursuit of a female learner in Nkhata bay district. Bearing witness to this the coordinator of *Keep the girl child in school project* that had this to say:

There is a cultural expectation among the Tongas that a girl should get married upon attainment of puberty. Thus, whenever a girl is not married after that period there will be mounted pressure from the society that she should get married. She may be constantly threatened that, "uchekulenge, tengwa waka" which literally means get married or you will be too old for marriage.

The coordinator further added that:

Early marriage is a cultural trend in Nkhata bay such that there is hardly a learner who reaches standard eight in some schools. For instance, for many years now at Mughogho primary school in Tukombo Zone, South of Nkhata bay, no female learner has reached standard eight. This serves as an indicator that early marriages are taking place on a large scale there.

A learner from location C concurred with coordinator of the *Keep the girl child in school project* when she said:

Most girls are forced to get married to the man responsible for pregnancy due to parents' unwillingness of taking care of the illegitimate child. Parents do not want to take care of an illegitimate child. Thus, they force the girl into marriage in order to dispel the disgrace of having a daughter who has conceived out of wedlock.

Accounting for early marriages in the area, the village headman of location E, had his own story to tell, unique though it was. This was the way he put it:

Girls in Nkhata bay attain maturity faster than in many other places. Most girls will have attained their adolescence by age of 10 – 12. Thus, they are easily drawn to get married because they admire their friends who are already into it(Mr Longwe).

4.2.1.3 ENTERTAINMENT

Different areas do have different forms of entertainment. The same is true of Nkhata bay. The Tongas have a captivating form of dance which captures female learners' attention away from their studies. The DEM described the dance and its impact in this way:

The popular Chilimika is a dance which is supposed to be a New Year festival only. However, it is danced almost throughout the whole year. During holidays, female learners go out and stay for a week or two in a dance competitions. They move from one place to another. While there, learners get exposed to things which are not healthy .Such things influence female so badly that teenage pregnancies are the often result. Related to the same, the team leaders of chilimika dance are not women of high standing in the society because they are all single ladies who often behave immorally.

Much as the beautiful steps of Chilimika are appreciated, the dance exposes our learners to situations which lead to teenage pregnancy.

Furthermore, there is a great temptation for those greatly absorbed into the dances to simply switch off from school. They look at school to be of no value at all. They do not see the advantages of school or the need of continuing with school.

Concurring with the DEM was the Camfed official who also highlighted it in this way:

Chilimika is quite a famous and popular dance among the Tongas. It is also quite enjoyable. Participants are young school going girls who dance to their best. The way they express their bodies while dancing is quite seductive. To that extent, the dance is not socially a healthy one.

The dance is seductively captivating to the boys and men. In the course of dancing both boys and men are beckoned at invitingly by girls. Such acts tempt males to indulge in sexual activities with such dancers. In this way, the dancers invite upon themselves knowing or unknowingly, 'troubles' from outsiders. What is surprising is that the dance which is supposed to be performed at the beginning of the year has been taken as a common dance which is performed every time and every day.

Also agreeing with the DEM and Camfed official was the head teacher of location 'A' who had this to say:

Indeed our learners patronise the chilimika dance. This is a dance performed from November to March each year. Every week learners do migrate to different areas thereby missing the classes.

This is how the EDM described the situation:

As they get set for the Chilimika dance the youth, female learners included, converge in a place for a dance where there is very little supervision by the organisers. Stories shared in those places are those that compel them to be enticed to have intimate relationships. Obviously, this makes them have very little regard for education. Since they indulge into sexual relationships, they end up getting pregnant and therefore dropout of school. Erroneously, they think that kind of life is more superior to school life and at the end of the day those relationship culminate into marriages.

4.2.1.4 SINGLE MOTHER EFFECT

The DEM of Nkhata bay narrated how single-mothers were impacting negatively on their ward, female learners included. This is what he said:

The percentage of single – headed family is very high in Nkhata bay. Most families are headed by single mothers. Unfortunately these mothers are too busy with their own activities to attend to their children including the female children / learners. Furthermore, these mothers engage the learners in marketing and vending to boost up their economic status. Marketing and vending do derail adolescent girls from concentrating with their studies while tempting them to settle for quick money. Additionally, single mothers earn their living by indulging in both immoral and amoral behaviours. They become a bad example to the female learners. Children get exposed to socially bad things due to the conduct of their parents. I cannot tell why the district registers the highest number of single mothers.

In support of this was the camfed official who had the following to add:

The situation of single motherhood was as a result of contracting marriage prematurely. Most adolescent boys who marry young girls withdraw after failing to match up to the obligations of marriage. Both young boys and girls

enter into marriage covenants without knowing fully what is entailed into it. Thus, they end up disappointing each other. This is why it is common in Nkhata bay for girls to remarry more than twice. Each male who marries usually leaves behind children under the care of the divorced woman. These divorced women are the ones who earn the status of being single mothers.

Due to poverty, the single mothers fail to manage their families. Among other things, they fail to provide for their daughters' basic needs as well as school fees. It is in this way, that learners feel that is there lack of parental care. Failure of parents to provide for learners' basic needs makes the single mother lose control over their daughters. Thus, single mothers have very little or no control at all over their daughters. Partly, this accounts for the lack of parental guidance, control and motivation prevalent in single mothers.

4.2.1.5 LACK OF PARENTAL CARE AND GUIDANCE

According to the DEMs observation, the Tonga seems to be offering their youth a free range type of parenting. This is what was he reported:

Tonga seems to be offering their youth a free range type of parenting. This is clearly observed while one is travelling by car at night from Lilongwe to Nkhata bay. While one hardly sees girls pairing with boys by the roadside in the rural areas of Salima, this is a common scene as one travels through Kande, Kachere and Chintheche which are relatively rural areas in Nkhata bay district. One usually sees girls walking along the road paired with boys at night in those areas (DEM).

Confirming this was the village headman of location E who said:

Some mothers encourage their daughters to misbehave in the name exploring the world and knowing experientially what it takes to be women.

4.2.1.6 CULTURAL PRACTICES

A few cultural practices were identified to be detrimental to the academic activities of female learners. Participation in marriage and funeral rites, preferring to send boy to school than a girl, puberty rites, and household chores were some of the cultural practices cited.

As regards the issue of sending learners to school the coordinator of *Keep Girls in school organisation* said:

Most cultures prefer to send a male child to school than a female one. This is also true for the Tonga in Nkhata-bay. This leads to gender disparity. In situation where there are limited financial resources often parents prioritize the education of a boy to that of a girl.

Concerning puberty rites, the FAWEMA official said:

Adolescence girls are involved in certain rituals upon attaining maturity. Among other things, a chosen female announcer ululates going round the village informing the community whenever a girl has grown of age. This announcer would carry a gift to the king. Such announcements make such girls to be spotted out by boys to be grownups. Hence forth, boys do coax and impregnate them at times. However, this practice is slowly becoming uncommon.

Household chores were also cited by respondents being one of the major causes of high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata bay district. This is what the coordinator of the keep the girl child in school project had to say:

Culturally most girls shoulder most of the household chores. They are asked to sweep, mop, collect firewood, cook and do the like. In certain respects, the girl child will be kept very busy with household chores while the male has nothing at all to do. Not only do household chores rob them of their precious time for studies but also make them too tired to concentrate in class talk less

of doing studies. The result is that they underperform in class. Repeated failure induces frustrations which culminate in self-withdrawal from school.

Participation in marriage and funeral rites is another cultural factor that impact negatively on female dropout rate in Nkhata bay. It is in view of this that the head teacher of location A related that,

Whenever a funeral has occurred, female learners coupled with boys sing throughout the night until 3:00 am when they disband to their respective homes. Following this most girls are found pregnant.

Additionally, marriage rites disturb female learners because they are among those asked to sing, dance, cook and act as best girls in those ceremonies. Consequently, they are distracted from concentrating with their education (Head 1)..

These sentiments were also shared by a learner of location C who said;

Truly, we girls do take the central stage in these cerebrations. We sing, dance and act as best girls. The worst part of this is that such ceremonies draw the attention of some girls from school. Such girls admire their friend (.i.e the bride) and they wish the next turn was theirs(Jane)

However, most female learners in many locations refuted the allegation that marriage was impacting negatively on their academics saying;

Participation in marriage and funeral rites does not affect us negatively in our studies. It is not true to say that it is contributing to increase on dropout rate. Participation in these rituals is not done regularly and as for funerals, relatives are the ones who are affected by it(Tupilike).

4.2.1.7 SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES AND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE FACTORS

These two issues are treated as taboos in most cultures. Culturally, those ideas are shared in closed corners. The Tongas are not the exception to it. It came as no surprise that learner in most locations the research was conducted were quite reserved despite great efforts to demystify the issue. Issues about sex petrified the majority than the issue of menses. The most important fact is that it has been learnt that the issue of menstrual hygiene is also contributing to drop out.

Asked as whether the menstrual hygiene factor had any negative impact on academic circles, this is what female learners from location E had to say;

We take a week away from school every month to take care of ourselves before we can comfortably relate with our fellow learners. A lot of time is wasted in a term talk less of an academic year. For sure, this accounts for our low performance in class. Some of us get frustrated and this becomes a reason for withdrawing from school (Jean).

Our menses make us to stay away from school for a period of one week at home. We do that in order to manage ourselves. During this time the school is not a suitable place to be because it doesn't have proper toilets (Lide).

The FAWEMA official concurred with the learners when she also said that;

When a girl has grown of age, she is instructed on how best to take care of herself during monthly period. The girl stays away for a week. During this time, she does not talk to any person and stays in closed doors.

That proper management of sexual desire is an important determinant for an adolescent to be retained at school cannot be questioned. It is for this reason why the researcher tried to probe how sexual feelings were managed. As observed from several locations it appears that female learners were ignorant about how to manage their sexual desires. Asked as to how they manage their sexual feelings, most of them gave the following as an answer;

We are asked to control our sexual desire as a best way of managing them.

While some female learners chose to keep quiet when they were asked on how they controlled their sexual feelings no definite answer was given for those who responded. Others gave the follows response;

We are told to use condoms (Linly)

We are told not to stay close to the boys (Betty)

We are told to avoid boy- girl friendship (Georgina)

4.2.3 ECONOMIC FACTORS

Among the major observed categories were the economic factors. Some of the various major ways in which the economic factor manifested itself were as follows:

4.2.3.1 POVERTY

This is the category was pointed out by almost every respondent. The head teachers had this to say;

Lack of school fees and orphan hood are some of the major causes of school dropout. Parents have difficulties to source funds for paying school fees for their learners (Head 5).

Girls are enticed by men / boys who have money, thereby impregnating them and this making them to dropout. Poverty lead them into unwanted pregnancy. It is in the quest for basic needs such as food and clothing which led a good number of girls to be impregnated (Head3).

Also in support of these ideas were the local leaders of locations D and E who put it this way;

Some poor parents fail to provide for the needs of their wards. There is lack of parental care. Consequently, girls are tempted to affiliate themselves to those who appear to be economically powerful. In most cases, those people

happen to be boys and men. Unfortunately these people end up abusing the by impregnating them, thereby leading to school dropout (Kamanga).

Furthermore, he added that;

Due to lack of one's basic needs at home, some female learners seek other unacceptable means of trying to satisfy these needs. This comes after seeing that the family is suffering untold problems. Thus, the female learners are victims of circumstances (Mr Kamanga).

Poverty is one of the major factors that contribute to dropout rate. Parents fail to find school fees so as to ensure completion of the learner's education. Again, most families do fail to meet their daughters' daily basic needs and do consider marrying them off as solution for finding means of meeting their own needs. When they marry their daughter off they feel that they are relieved of the burden of taking care of their daughters. Thus, parents persuade daughters to get married early in a bid to solve some problems encountered in their homes (Mr Manda).

The EDM echoed the above words when he said;

The parents' state of poverty has serious impact on learners' dropout rate. In situations where parents failed to pay school fees learners get discouraged and see no point in continuing with learning since they do foresee that their parents would not be able to pay for their education at some point.

Furthermore, some female learners take care of their fellow children due to loss of both parents (i.e. orphan hood) leading to emergency of child headed families. Thus, they become parents while they are still at school. The AIDs pandemic accounts for this.

Some parents hardly find any means to get money so as to support their children. In view of this, some female learners do not see themselves proceeding beyond primary school much as they attend classes.

A learner of location E concurred with the local leaders when she said;

Lack of such materials as text books, pens, note books and school fees make us to resort to prostitution in the bid of finding those things (Georgina).

From a different perspective, the leaders of civil society described the negative impact of poverty. This is how they expressed it:

Forty- four percent of the learners from poor household fail to complete primary education since the inception of free primary education in 1995. The worst hit among the learners are girls (EMIS, Lilongwe, and Ministry of education headquarters). Poverty is regarded as a fundamental barrier to attainment of education.

A few poor individuals fail to meet some related cost of education much as it was free at primary school. Some fail to pay as little some as K1, 000.00 as being development fund. This is particularly true for those who are coming from typical rural areas. All costs towards education were not met hence some learners did drop out. A poor family sees the act of marrying off a daughter as a relief from the burden of carrying a large family (coordinator, the keep Girls in school project)

Poverty is seen as the main factor that contributes to drop out rate. This may be due to lack of basic needs such as clothes. A female child finds it difficult to wear patched up clothes to school. Due to shyness some female learners decided to stay home (FAWEMA official).

The desire to satisfy their basic needs was also noted to be a contributing to dropout rate among the girls. That it comes about as a result of being poor cannot be denied. The village headman of location C had observed this among the girls and he had the following to say;

Girls are short sighted in terms of preparation for the future. There are mostly concerned with satisfaction of their immediate needs at the expense of what they would become in the future. In the event that parents fail to satisfy their needs they will entertain boys or men who offer them temporary and immediate requirements. Consequently, they fall prey to men's traps. They are sexually abused, impregnated and drop out of school(Mr Longwe).

The head teacher of location E also confirmed this as he related that;

Most female learners get impregnated as teens in the course of trying to meet their basic needs (Head 5).

The findings do indicate that the government as whole is also not spared from this state of lack i.e. poverty. In no small way is it impacting negatively on the learners. This is what the EDM had to say;

Understaffing is a challenge impacting negatively on learners in Nkhata bay. Much as we are at our best in terms of an average of teachers per school, the teacher –learner ratio is quite big. We have registered an average of six teachers per school as opposed to four teachers three years ago. Larger numbers of learners do overshadow our efforts. In a scenario where learners are offered more than six subjects, teachers are facing a lot of challenges in terms of preparation and actual delivery of lessons in class. As a result, quality of learning is compromised and some learners, female inclusive, do drop out after having failed to match up to the demands of national examination.

Furthermore, he added that;

Those organizations which intervene for the welfare of a girl child have a time frame and an expiry date. The girl child is helped but for a while and thereafter is left on her own. This perpetuates the disparities which are there between boys and girls. I wish there was a way of helping a girl child up until she becomes independent economically. There is need for a permanent reliable institution which would be available to assist needy learners for as long as they are at school.

4.2.3.2 CULTURAL PRACTICE OF MARRYING OFF A DAUGHTER AS AN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT TO PARENTS.

There are several ways of economic empowerment in families. Some of these are not all that good. One of those ways which is not good is taking place in Nkhata bay as reported by coordinator of the *keep the Girl child in school organization*. This is how he expressed it;

Just upon a girls' attainment of maturity (i.e. menstruation period), parents in Nkhata Bay see that as a golden opportunity for warding off poverty, at least for some time. In Chintheche area, for instance, a female learner who is an orphan under Camfed bursary was forced into marriage by her grandfather. Since she had her bride price paid for in readiness for marriage, was asked to be staying with her father in law up until her husband comes back from South Africa. Thus, the girl was forced to drop out of school simply to dispel the poverty of her grandparent. This was usually the cultural trend of doing thing where the girl was found to be pregnant. Surprisingly, in this case the girl was not pregnant. Efforts to withdraw the girl from marriage and retain her in school proved abortive. The grandparent challenged those who tried to intervene for the learner saying that he had never come to them to ask for their assistance in this respect.

Similarly, the Camfed official related that;

There are forced marriages in Nkhata bay. This comes from the background of social economic factors. Because parents want to have some money, giving away their daughter is seen as a simple way of averting poverty.

4.2.3.3 HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of Malawi. Family members usually comprise the group of labour force. While it is good to involve the adolescents in the production of agricultural goods, this may turn out to be equally bad where girls are involved at a large scale. This is also true for household chores. Female learners in Nkhata bay complained bitterly about household chores and these were the statement they uttered;

We are sent to the garden before and after coming from school. Not only does this make us tired but it also robbed us of our precious time (Mwaona).

These are detrimental to our academic pursuits especially where we are given a lot of work; heavy work or the work which was beyond our capacity to ably do it (Tupilike).

My parents usually ask me to go to the maize mill instead of going to school (Asimenye).

We're involved in ceaseless household chores. This is usually the case where one stays with guardians other than our parents. We usually underperform in class and do dropout in frustration (Alemekezeke)

Household chores have negative impact on us in that they leave us too tired to read. Culturally, most household chores are done by adolescent females. Both long distance and household chores leave us very tired. We even fail to concentrate and listen to teachers in class. Yes, we are overburdened with household chores. This also accounts for our low performance in class which

eventually lead us to dropout out of school. We wonder why parents shout at us whenever we fail given the circumstances we are subjected in (Zione).

The heads of location C and E echoed this when they maintained that;

Household chores left female learners with little or no time for their personal studies (Head 3).

Household chores contribute to drop out rate in that they keep learners too preoccupied with trivial things. Instead of going to school, female learners are asked to go to the garden or given some other work to do. Instead of studying, some students complain that they are sent to the field either to fetch firewood or to pound. This leaves them with very little time for studies. When this happens during examination period, failure is an obvious outcome. Due to this, some repeat a class twice or more. In this way some learners become too old for a class and decide to withdraw for fear of being laughed at (Head 5).

Also in support of this view was the local leader at location D and he said;

Household chores make a female to be too tired to concentrate on studies. In homes where there are no lights, female learners fail to do their homework during the night. One will note that they are kept busy throughout the day time. Some are even kept very busy in the morning hours such that they often report late for school (Mr Manda).

Substantiating this, the EDM on his part had this to say;

Most female learners are burdened with household chores. Farming being the major source of income, children are considered as a source of labour for

cultivating and selling agricultural products. Indeed, agricultural products are produced by family members themselves. It is common in Mzuzu to see young girls coming from Nkhata Bay to sell the agricultural products particularly sweet potatoes and bananas each and every afternoon (EDM).

On the contrary, learners of location A denied the fact that household chores had any impact at all on dropout rate. However, they could not explain how this was brought about. This is what they said;

Household do not contribute to dropout rate. Household chores actually assist us (Lide).

4.2.3.4 MOBILE MARKET (SALAULA)

It is common these days to have the so called mobile market on each day of the week. The coordinator of the *Keep the Girl child in school project* and the head of location A were quick to point out the impact such markets on our learners. Their observations were as follows;

Some parents send female learners to sell their farm products for them. The temptation for learners is to stop school and concentrate on a business so as to make much more money. Such learners are tempted to think that they would make much more money on full time basis on their own than on a part time basis supervised by their parents. Related to the same, when the female learners patronize market places it affords them an opportunity to relate with boys (Coordinator/ Keep the Girl child in school project).

The head of location A also confirmed this and had this to say;

Female learners stay out in market places where salaula takes place until around 8:00 pm. In this way, what takes place at markets derail female learners from achieving their academic goals. It also robs them of the time to study (Head 1).

4.2.3.5 EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Early and forced marriage are not necessarily one and same thing; they are just related terms. From what was reported one may take place without the other. Usually, forced marriages do occasion early marriage. Of particular interest is the fact that these variables often do come about as a result of poverty. These are marriages of convenience where they contracted either to 'enrich' parents or to ward off poverty. This is what participants had to say;

Moved by poverty and pity, the daughters decide to marry and escape the trouble encountered in the family, in certain respect. Culture, lack of seriousness and distance to school do account for this (Head 5).

Teenage and unwanted pregnancy may not always be attributed to promiscuity or reckless behaviour. Here is what learners had to say:

Parents indirectly force us to have boyfriends in order to fend for our needs. "Ndiwe mwali" they will say which means you are a mature girl now. Parents imply that we have to meet our basic needs by way of maintaining intimate relationships. More often than not, such relationships ended up in teenage pregnancy and which results into early marriages. It is poverty that causes our parents to withdraw prematurely in shouldering their responsibility to care for us (Lide).

When one is impregnated, parents will force us to go and live with the person responsible for the pregnancy. This is one of the main ways in which girls are forced into marriage (Zione).

Also sharing these views was the head of location A that had this to say;

Young men who go to work in South Africa and Tanzania bring a lot of goods. This draws the attention of both parents and daughters in the village. In a set up of poverty, some parents push their daughter to those young men so that they can ask their hand in marriage. This does promote a lot of early marriages (Head 1)

4.2.3.6 PEER PRESSURE

As the adage goes grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. That admiration draws some learners from school is well captured by the following respondents who had this to say;

Some learners admire their fellows who have dropped out and are married. Due to poverty faced in their homes, they feel their married friends are better off financially and materially. They are easily enticed to join their married friends (Mr Kamanga).

Some girls are influenced by those who have already dropped out of school and appeared to be enjoying themselves in their marriage (Goli/ learner).

Some female learners bow down to demands of friends who jeer at them saying that they are too old to be attending school with juniors. Some withdraw from school because they are laughed at by others whenever they underperform (Tumpale/ learner).

We are laughed at while at school and in our homes as being too old to be in the class we are. “Ndiwe mulala chomene” – which means you, are too old for the class. Such remarks usher in thoughts of simply leaving school and getting married. At times, we feel embarrassed to be learning with the young ones (Sinya/ learner).

What the learners said found resonance in the assertion of Head teacher of location C. This is how he expressed;

Female learners admire their friends who are married and feel they should also follow them. In part, this contributes to drop out rate (Head 3).

On a slightly different tune, some learners and a member of civil society impressed how learners were influenced negatively to withdraw from school. The bad behaviour of others made them to think otherwise. This is what they said;

No two people are the same intellectually; often those of us who underperform are object of laughter and mockery from our friends. Repeated acts of laughter and mockery tend to scare us from pursuing with school activities (Simalike).

Some learners are sometimes being laughed at by friends. This causes some learners to dropout most especially when they do underperform. At times, it happens when their friends are making cutting remarks as regards their physical appearance (FAWEMA official).

4.2.3.7 LAKE SHORE EFFECT

The lake is a valuable resource which not only offers people with something to eat but also it is for tourist attraction. Nkhata bay being a lake shore district has another side of story to tell about it in relation to the education of the girl child. The participants had this to say;

Being a lakeshore district, it has a lot of tourist. Those tourists display different kind of bizarre behaviour such as dressing indecently, smoking marijuana and womanizing. Just as tourist walk naked at the beach, learners too are tempted to behave like wise (The Head 3).

The views of the head teacher of location C were also shared by the village headman of location C. The statements uttered were as follows;

Girls are tempted to obtain easy money from tourists who influenced the natives with their bad behaviour such as walking naked at the beach thereby exposing the female learners to all forms of abuse in the circumstance where these learners were poor (Mr Manda).

More than that, the coordinator of *Keep Girls in school project* added that;

Some tourists engaged themselves into intimate relationships with female learners. This often led to sexual activities which usually end up in teenage pregnancy. (Coordinator /Keep Girls in school project)

The coordinator of *Keep Girls in school project*, the FAWEMA official and EDM narrated about fish business and how it has affected the female learners. This is how they put it;

In certain shallow area of the lake in Nkhata bay like Chintheche a lot of fish are caught .Some female learners go to buy fish at awkward hours such as very early in the morning, let us say, 3:00 am or very late in the night at around 8:00 pm. This puts them at the risk of been raped or sexually harassed. Not only does this promotes promiscuity but also leads to the spread of the HIV / AIDs pandemic in the community (coordinator -Keep Girls in school project).

Furthermore, he had this to say;

Many school going girls are engaged in fish business. Consequently, some leave school altogether in order to engage themselves in full time fish business (coordinator- keep girls in school project).

Lake shore districts are prone to fish business. Fish businesses empower young men economically with quick money. As such they are able to entice girls with that money. In this way girls are coaxed, simply impregnated or even married (EDM).

Some female learners are tempted to get married to someone who catches fish because one is at least reassured of having one's daily food and cash for buying their basic necessities. In the perception of the learner, schools appear to be a long term way for attaining one's basic needs. As such, they are easily coaxed by men who have cash in hand (FAWEMA official).

4.2.3.8 LACK OF PARENTAL CARE/ CONTROL, GUIDANCE AND MOTIVATION

That parents have a bearing on high dropout rate of female learners in Nkhata bay was less thought about. However, the respondent revealed that they too played a dominant role. This is what they said;

Our parents turn our requests down when we ask for our daily provisions. Often they say, "ndiwe namwali" which literally means you are an adolescent now. We are told that we are now grownups. In this way, we are told to fend for ourselves. In this our parents indirectly encourage us to have lovers in order to have our needs met. This usually makes us to be victims of sexual abuse and we ended up dropping out of school (Sinya/ learners).

Some parents and more especially mothers do not care much about what their daughters are doing. They allow their daughter to explore what life is like in terms of relations with boys at a tender age of seven years. They rebuke any person who speaks badly about the social relations of their daughters with boys and men (Mr Manda)

In the same vein, the coordinator of the *Keep the Girl Child Project* related that;

Nkhata bay has rubber plantations, Vizala Estate and Kawaladzi Tea Estate where many families are employed .Some parents are too preoccupied with their work such that they do not mind what happens to their children. Very often, they do not care about their children's academic welfare. Frequent

absenteeism goes unnoticed and unattended to. Consequently, this culminates into learners dropping out.

Most single mothers are not exemplary to their daughter. It comes as no surprise that their daughter follow suit. They cannot be guided and controlled because their parents do exactly what they are doing. Just as mother go out with men in the night so too do daughters do with boys and men .Furthermore, single mothers are too busy with other things such that they pay little attention to the welfare of their children. More often than not the female learners are left to themselves unattended.

Furthermore, the DEM added that,

There are a lot of unreported cases of domestic violence done to female learners. Apart from name calling some suffer unreported rape cases. In certain respects, those people who are supposed to be custodians of female learners turn out to be perpetrators of such immoral acts.

To a certain degree, domestic chores become some form of domestic violence. Some learners complain that they are involved in heavy labour and that they hardly find time to rest. Such learners rarely do well at school. More often than not, they register a low performance at school and they end up dropping school out.

Again, some teachers make cutting remarks as regards the physical appearance or abilities of learners. Some will go to the extent of mentioning obscene words towards learners. This offends most female learners. Not only are the learners demoralized by this but also they develop a negative attitude towards those teachers. In a long run, this lowers their performance and results into dropout.

As regard this issue the DEM of Nkhata bay and the FAWEMA official had this to add;

One cannot give what one doesn't have. Having failed to attain education, it is increasingly difficult for uneducated parents to appreciate the value of education. One would least expect such parents to motivate their wards. If anything, what counts at that moment is what is considered to be of value. For the majority, fishing and going to South Africa or to Tanzania is what counts (DEM).

Some female learners are let down academically by their parents when they are prevented from attending classes or from going to school altogether (FAWEMA official).

The coordinator of Keep Girls in school project added another tone to this variable when he pointed out that the parents' lack of care may lead to the vicious circle of illiteracy. This is how he expressed it;

It is difficult for parents to appreciate the goodness and significance of education in circumstances where they are not learnt. If parents dropped out of school let us say in standard two, they usually feel their daughters have learnt much whenever they reach standard eight. Resultantly, they encourage them to get married early. Unfortunately, early marriage does increase fertility rate thereby making those girls mothers to have more children. Such girl mothers often fail to care for their children, talk less of educating them. Again, those girl mothers usually and obviously fail to pay school fees for their children. This does influence those children to dropout out school thereby creating a vicious circle of illiteracy.

4.2.3.9 MIGRANT WORKER EFFECT.

The issue that Malawian citizen have been migrating to foreign countries particularly South Africa is a phenomenon which has been there since the colonial era, serve for the fact that it is now happening at a small scale now. Nkhata bay and Mzimba are among the leading districts in the northern region of Malawi when it comes to the numbers of people who go out to work in

those above mentioned foreign nations. Some respondents were quick to point the effects migrant workers are having on female learners. Their contribution went as follows:

The female learners are willing to get married to migrant workers who had gone to work in South Africa and Tanzania. This is in the bid to dispel poverty in their homes. Migrant workers from South Africa come back with lot of gadgets to which girls get attracted. Girls feel like getting married to such boys and men and withdraw from school (The coordinator, Keep the Girl Child in School Organisation).

In support of this idea was the head teacher of location 'A' who had this to say;

It is common that young men leave this place to go and work either in South Africa or Tanzania. While in those places, they invite female learners to go there and stay with them either as marriage partners or simply as relatives. Thus, learners here do not take education seriously because they always live in the hope of going abroad one day. When those migrant workers come home, they bring with them a lot of goods. It is in view that some parents force their daughters to get married to such people who have come from South Africa.

4.2.4 SOCIAL FACTORS

The following categories emerged as social factors. Each one of them is described below as manifested in the study.

4.2.4.1 UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS AND THE VALUE OF SCHOOL

High unemployment levels were also noted to impact negatively on academic pursuits. The learners of location B said;

We wonder why one should continue to work hard at school when some of our friends who obtained good points at School Certificate level (MSCE) are just loitering around in their homes. Sometimes, these very same people who

excelled at school and are just staying at home do discourage us from going ahead with school. They question the value of school.

They say, “munthu ukhoza kuphunzira, kukhala ndi ma digiri ako ndikumangokhala”. Learners argue that one may attain degrees and yet be jobless. The economic value of school is undermined (Goli).

What learners of location B supported by what the EDM asserted. His statements were uttered as follows:

Some female learners lack interest in school because of the way they valued education. School in the rural areas is said to be regarded as a past time thing. Learners are reported to go to school just because everyone else goes. It doesn't matter to them whether one was doing well academically or not. Failure was not of any concern to them and thus didn't worry them. There was no one to encourage them. Thus, failure or passing was one and the same thing to them. The burning desire of most young people in Nkhata bay is to find a solution to their immediate challenges which includes poverty among others. For such people, school is considered as a long term process for combating poverty.

4.2.4.2 LACK OF INTEREST / SERIOUSNESS WITH SCHOOL

Universal as it is as a problem in Nkhata bay several reasons were attributed as being the causes. Some respondents had the following reasons for the lack of interest and seriousness in school;

Firstly, it is due to the promises of migrant workers. These people do promise their relatives who are learners to come and fetch them to South Africa or Tanzania. Most common is the habit of giving daughters in marriage to migrant workers for want of goods and money from those who are working there. Such female learners hardly concentrate in school for they have a feeling that that it will take them nowhere (Head1).

Secondly, some learners do not have any interest in school because of their low intellectual abilities. They fail to match up with the academic demands, as such they give up. Truly, some of our wards withdraw from school for lack of intellectual ability (Mr Manda).

Sharing the same sentiments was the village headman and learner of location D who had this to say;

Some learners do discriminate themselves from others. My ward once said, "Adada ine mahala nilije, sono kasi nichitenge mbu". This means I am intellectually handicapped. How else, can I do to continue with school? No matter how much interested in school the parents may be, there is nothing they can do to change the psychologically defeated ward. It is in this way that lack of intellectual abilities leads to loss of interest in school and drop out of school here in Nkhata bay (Mr Kamanga).

One learner echoed the above sentiments when she said:

Lack of interest is due to the fact that some learners are constantly having poor results. Such people get disappointed and discouraged with their friends' and teacher's cutting remarks as regards their poor results. The situation is worsened when other people question their insistence of being at school in the event that they have always been failing in class. In some instances, some female learners are told that they are too old to be at school (Goli).

Learners of location E distinguished lack of interest to be emanating from two sources. This is how the learners described it;

Lack of interest can be categorised into two depending on the sources; the one emanating from the learners and the one from parents. In first instance, some girls withdraw from school simply because they do not know why they are at school.

The situation is worse when parents are not interested in school. In this case, parents do not provide the teaching and learning materials such as books, uniform, etc. They even discourage the girl child from attending classes and encourage her to get married so as to improve their economic status. The whole enthusiasm and eagerness of the girl child to pursue her education is greatly undermined (Alemekezeke).

Furthermore they added that;

Other female learners lose interest in school due to intensive house chores. The learners fail to concentrate and they end up having low performance in class, get frustrated and drop out of school (Goli /Learner).

Some female learners lack interest in school because they take school as a long term process for attaining what one needs in life. They would rather settle for something which will give them quick money. Business seems to be the answer to that. Thus, school is relegated and they dropout (Sinya/ learner).

Other female learners lack interest in school due to preoccupation with other things such as sports activities or church activities. This happens where such female learners have such ambition as of joining big choir groups or national teams (Asimenye/ learner)

We are discouraged from pursuing our studies seriously whenever we look at those have successfully finished school but are without jobs. It is as if school is of no value at all (Tumpale/ learner)

Some homes do not have any members who is learnt/ educated. Learners from such homes tended to question the value of school. Such learners feel

like following their relations who are not educated. Thus, there is no interest in school.

4.2.4.3 LACK OF ROLE MODELS

Three different views were obtained from respondents as regards this issue. Some answered in the affirmative about the availability of role models. While some argued that the degree of their availability was a quite small others denied completely that such people did not exist and that this was a serious problem requiring an urgent attention. These are what the respondents said:

It is not a problem because some organizations do come to the school to talk about goodness of school i.e. World Vision. Some role models are brought from different departments of the government as well as the NGOs. Open days are also organized to sensitize females about the importance of education (Head-2).

There are enough role models around this place. Some are teachers, others are nurses. This is not a serious issue here as far as dropout is concerned (Head-5).

Agreeing with the heads were the learners of certain centres who had this to say;

We have plenty of role models around. Some are teachers, others are nurses and others belonging to other departments of the governments and some of these people are paraded to us during the open days (Nancy).

Some role models come to see and talk to us. They advise us on how to relate with boys and inform us about the goodness of school (Irene).

We have plenty of role models just around us. Some of them are very young and they do come to talk to our girls. I don't think this is a challenge in as far as dropout rate is concerned (Mr Kamanga).

The FAWEMA official agreed with previous speakers as regards the availability of role models. However, just like some female learners, she was not very positive about them. This is what they said,

In certain social settings, teachers are the only role models in close proximity to the learners. Again, those teachers are not even admirable to the learners (FAWEMA official).

There are few role models available and those who approach us are not really interested in us. They do not have our welfare at heart since they do not make any follow ups. We wonder why such role models fail to come up with clubs to encourage us. Moreover, we cannot match up to what they demand of us (Zione).

On the other end of the pendulum was the voice of the civil society (i.e. Camfed and *Keep the Girl child in school project*). Having toured the whole district which is within their jurisdiction, they denied the availability of role models most especially in rural areas. Their stance was as follows:

In the typical rural areas such as Mazamba, Changatole, Usisya, Chisangawe and Bunga, there are simply no role models. For instance, there is only one female teacher in the whole northern part of Nkhata bay and this teacher is at the northern tip; Khondowe to be precise.

Furthermore, it is a pity that these grass root structures i.e. VDC and mother groups are headed by single mothers whose morality is quite questionable. Most of the single mothers are just sleeping around with men in the village. These women are chosen to occupy those positions as mother groups simply because they are looked at as hardworking by others and not otherwise.

Similarly, Camfed official had to say;

Single mothers who are chosen as members of mother group do act as role models. Such people are morally bankrupt. As such, they have but very little

if any to offer to young ones in terms of education. At worst, there is danger of promoting immorality among young ones.

The regional school manager (EDM) also admitted that there was a problem of lack of role models in rural area. These were his views;

Most areas which are quite remote in Nkhata bay do not have role models whom young females can follow. Some female learners who are in typical rural setting even hardly see any vehicle from the beginning of a day to the end. In such settings, there are no role models who can be admired by female learners. Male teachers are the only role models they come across.

4.2.4.4 HARSH TREATMENT OF PARENTS

They way female learners are treated at home also determines as to whether those learners will continue with school or withdraw. This is confirmed by what some leaders of civil societies related. This is what they said:

Some parents are cruel to their wards. Some of them do not allow female learners to go to school. Orphans are sometimes are sometimes victims of such ill-treatment. Some guardians do this in revenge to what their parents had done to them. In certain respects, some girls are abused by their own grandparents. (FAWEMA official).

In the same vein, this in agreement with the assertions of Camfed official who related that;

There are some unreported cases of violence among female learners taking place in homes. This makes the female learners to pull out of school.

4.2.4.5 TEACHERS NEGATIVE ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR

That a teacher's attitude and behaviour has a bearing on the retention of a female child in school cannot be overemphasized. Observation has shown that there was difference

in which learners responded to the remarks of teacher especially where they are negative. This is what learners had to say;

We girls are put off easily whenever offended by teachers. We switch off our mind completely from attending to a teacher who mishandle them. We not only develop a negative attitude towards that teacher but also the subject offered by that teacher. Eventually, we ended up failing and then dropping out (Zione).

Some teachers disgrace and embarrass us in public by calling us names. Such acts make us to develop a negative attitude toward such teachers and then we withdraw (Alemekezeke).

Some teachers make ill remarks as regards our physique. For instance, they say, “chiwoneni mabele” which means “look at how big her breasts are”. Such remarks do damage our sense of importance and dignity. Equally bad is the act of correcting our mistakes in public such as in a classroom or a hall. Such corrections damage their pride and leave us embarrassed (Tumpale).

Some teachers coax us into establishing relationship with them. For those who proposed love to us sometimes they even impregnate us. Other teachers beat us up and yet others give us punishment arbitrarily (Sinya).

This find resonance in what the head teacher from location E said. He reported that;

Some learners are coaxed by male teachers thereby undermining the learner’s academic pursuits. Apart from distracting girls from their study such behaviour also makes them to withdraw from school (Head 5).

Some teachers also tend to discourage female learners when they choose only boys when it comes to answering questions in class as lessons progresses (FAWEMA official).

4.2.4.6 LEARNERS RUDENESS AND DISOBEDIENCE

Some parents lamented that some female learners were rude and disobedient. Chances of survival in school for such learners are narrow. This is what local leaders said;

The female learners are rude both to their parents and teachers. Whenever, they are advised to go to school, they retorted to that by saying that it was their right either to go and stay away from school. Whenever lady teachers advise the girls not to wear miniskirts, female learner's reply by saying that they were better dressed than some city girls and women who walk in some streets (Mr. Manda).

Some female learners say that it is their right to dress in any fashion and style they wish. I feel this is a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of human rights. In order to promote decency among girls, I wish the government could bar girls from dressing casually in school. It is a pity that such ill behaviour are sometimes encouraged by their mothers who argue that it is time their daughters explored the world and knew what it takes to be girls. Sometimes such behaviours are done in the name of human rights (Mr Kamanga).

4.2.4.7 CHURCH ACTIVITIES

As the Camfed official puts it Nkhata bay was witnessing the booming of religious functions. Apart from promoting spiritual development among the female learners it also contributes to a certain extent, to high dropout rate. Respondents had this to say;

Most common are overnight prayers and church conferences often known as "Mitsonkhano wa chitsitsimutso". Much as these are good in themselves, not all people who patronize them go there with pure motives. Some go there simply in search of members of the opposite sex which usually lead to

immorality and that account for their dropout. This is particularly true for overnight prayers.

However, the greatest problem faced in the “Mitsonkhano wa chitsitsimutso” (Revival Ministries), is that it deprives the learners of their study time. Instead of concentrating with their studies they are busy doing church work. This accounts for female learners’ low performance in class and eventual dropout (Camfed official).

Occasions when “Ungano wa Chitsitsimutso” (Revival Ministries) are held are dangerous times. They last for a week during which period some girls participate in the choir. Their school activities stagnate. Girls also fall prey to young men whose sole aim for patronizing such places is to entice them (Selina- learner).

There is a common practice of singing throughout the night whenever and wherever a funeral has occurred. Female learners happen to be among the main participants. They sing till the morning hours. Not only does this make the learners tired, but it also gives room to young ones to misbehave immorally during the night. A few girls are found pregnant as a result of such phenomenon (Head 1).

Agreeing, female learners at location B pointed out that;

Some church leaders and pastors in particular are in the forefront making advances towards female learners. Such acts do not only distract learners but also make them to underperform in class (Linda).

4.2.4.8 SPORTS ACTIVITIES

Good as they are in themselves, they cannot be a source of challenge. However, sports activities were said to contribute to increase in dropout rate, to a certain extent. The views of the learners and head teachers were as follows;

Boys and girls who belong to football and netball clubs leave their homes to go to distant places. While there, they behave immorally (Head 1).

When football games are held over the weekends, a lot of boys and girls assemble. These sports activities are carried out until late in the evening giving the youth an opportunity to conduct themselves immorally. Girls who patronize these games are coaxed to have sexual relationship with boys and men (Head2).

Also agreeing with this is the head of location C related that;

During sporting activities girls engage themselves in sexual relationship with boys. Among other things, these acts distract female learners from concentrating with their studies (Head 1).

However, female learners of location B, D and E refuted this assertion saying that;

Sports do not affect us in any negative way. If anything, it does promote our good health which in a long run helps us academically (Sinya).

4.2.4.9 LACK OF INTELLECTUAL ABILITY AND LACK OF SELF CONFIDENCE

Whatever may be the case, there is some measure of intellectual ability in each one of us. What differ are the amount and the way it is nurtured. This was true for some female learners in Nkhata bay. Perhaps due to their background, some learners were

reported to find themselves to be misfits academically. They eventually decided to withdraw on their own. Two community leaders confessed that;

Our wards have vehemently refused to go to school. One said this to me: “Ada, ine nilije zeru, sono kusukulu ine namuchitanje? (Dad I am intellectually handicapped. What is it that I will do at school”)? Such learners do not respond positively to whatever intervention that comes their way. They feel they are out of place while at school (Mr Manda).

Some female learners fail to measure up to school requirements academically. For instance, the school may demand a particular grade for one to proceed to another class. Those who fail to meet the minimum standard of performance do decide to withdraw on their own (Mr Kamanga).

Inferiority complex also exerts its toll on the female learners. It was in the wake of this that one female learner said;

Sometimes we feel that we cannot measure up to ideal of the role models. The role model is considered as special. Thus, she said, “kanandi tikuwa wakujikayikila m’mtima” which literally means “we often underrate ourselves and feel we cannot measure up to the ideals of role model(Mwaona).”

4.2.4.10 LACK OF GOOD HOBBIES

An idle mind is the devils workshop. An inquiry as regards what preoccupies them from both learners and heads yielded the results that the majority do not have any specific hobbies. They are just carried away by events. This is what respondents had to say;

Some female learners will be found hanging at trading centre until eight in the evening with boys just lingering about on Saturdays which is usually a market day at Manasseh (Head 1).

Similarly, the DEM Nkhata bay added that;

Girls do pair with boys along the roads between Dwangwa and Nkhata bay late in the evening hours. There is absolutely nothing that they do apart from just moving about.

In confirmation to this female learners agreed that indeed the case on the ground was as stated.

This is how they expressed it:

Most female learners do not have anything special to do during their free times. Thus, they indulge in love affairs (Lucy).

Girls are usually asked to participate in Topup parties during weekends. During these moments, some girls dance in such a way that they draw the attention of boys who later molest them.

Additionally, some female learners go up for a swim during weekends. The ways girls dress at the beach entice some men to sleep with them. Others even get raped (Sinya).

Sharing the same sentiments were the head teachers. They put their views in this way:

Some female learners just move around during free days while others go to the lake. During this period some involve themselves in boy – girl relationship which usually ends up in having teenage pregnancies (Head 1)..

Female learners involve themselves in a dance at the night known as Chimamatela which tempt them to have sexual activities. As words Chimamatela suggest, it means sticking of two people together. More precisely it means two people tightly holding each other. This dance promotes immorality which seriously derails learners from their academic goal (Head 2).

4.2.4.11 DIFFERENT FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT

Participants were asked as to whether the different forms of entertainment had any impact on female dropout rate. Findings denoted that it does and the respondents had this to say:

Some female learners go out for disco at night in search of male counterparts. Consequently, some learners do come late to school and others simply do not show up to school (Maria- learner).

Disco is the common form of entertainment. Disco starts around 6 o'clock at in the evening. It is our moment of fun. Some girls even take some alcohol and get raped in the process of their enjoyment. Since it is usually done on Sundays' most female learners do not report for school on Mondays. Disco does not only rob us of study time but also encourages female prostitution (Pherire-learner).

Disco and other dances do take place at night while they are at home. These dances affect students quite a lot in that they easily lead learners to indulging in sexual immorality apart from loss of time for study. Failure and teenage pregnancies are some of the results of such activities (Tinyade-learner).

Some learners do participate in chilimika from Monday until Wednesday. During this period these learners fail to report to school. This dance makes the female learners too tired to concentrate in academic activities. Some decide to drop so as to settle for chilimika (Eunice- learner).

Some head teachers were in support of the views of learners. They had observed the adverse effects some form of entertainment did have on learners. Their views were as follows:

Some forms of entertainments do impact quite a lot on dropout rate. chimamatela is the type of dance which usually conducted at night. Girls

meet both boys and men during this time. Girls are coaxed into having sexual relationship leading to pregnancy and then they do drop out (Head 2).

The general trend is that many female learners spent most of their time performing Chilimika. Fortunately, a bye law has been passed prohibiting girls from patronizing Chilimika when it is school time (Head 4).

On the contrary, the local leader of location C denied that entertainment was having any negative impact on the learners. This is what he said;

There was no disco, no Chilimika and no any dance performed in the night in which the female learners were involved. This is as a result of a bye-law which was passed prohibiting such behaviours (Mr Kamanga).

4.2.4.12 LACK OF CIVIC EDUCATION

Lack of civic education is one of the categories that had negative impact on dropout rate. This took the form of misunderstandings of human rights and premature introduction of Life Skills subject. As regards this, the respondents lay the whole blame on the government. It is argued that the government was not vigilant enough to inform citizens about them. This is how they put it;

Much as young learners appreciate the human rights, most of them do not fully understand what is entailed into them. Most of them assume that human rights are without responsibilities. As such girls dress in mini-skirts and the so forth. This infringes on the right of others

Female learners are adamant whenever they advised to dress properly. They usually argue that it is their right to dress any way they want. Such dressings draw men and boys unnecessarily to them (Mr Manda).

In the name of human rights, some female learners are disobedient and speak rudely to their parents. Eventually, many end up being victims of their self-made mode of being (Mr. Kamanga).

Equally controversial was issue of institution of Life Skills subject in Junior Primary school which local leader considered as premature. This is what he said:

The government has introduced Life Skills subject to be taught at a very tender age when one is in standard 3. The subject exposes the children to some 'obscene' ideas which may corrupt their mind and mislead them (Mr Kamanga).

4.2.5 ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Several categories were identified as falling under the environmental factors. Some of them were as follows:

4.2.5.1 LONG DISTANCE

This is one of the greatest challenges which every head of institution, learners and local leaders did agree that it impacted negatively on female learners in as far as dropout rate was concerned. This is what the respondents had to say;

Where schools are some distance apart walking to school is a very big challenge especially to female learners who easily fall prey to boys and men who dangle some cash to them. Intimacy tends to develop on how close you are to someone. The long distance covered affords boys and men opportunity to develop intimacy with female learners.

Additionally, most Community Day Secondary Schools are very far apart. Hence some female learners operate as self-boarders. Self-boarding system has often resulted in some forms of marriage (DEM).

A certain girl at Maula CDSS in the South of Nkhatabay, travels 10 kilometers from home to school. Her parents are such that they cannot afford to pay rent so that she can be operating as self – border. She does encounter a lot

of challenges as she treks long distance, apart from getting very tired. she is in danger of being abused on the way (Camfed official).

Also sharing these sentiments were the female learners who had this to say;

Some learners travel a distance of about 7km. This makes them to report late for school. Chances of being harassed as are quite high as they pass through the bushes and forest (Bertha).

In certain respects, we are teased by boys and men as we trek to and from school. Furthermore, we feel very tired after walking along distances and just doze off in class. At times, we start off without taking anything from our homes and just keep on feeling the hunger as the lessons progress. Sometimes we are given punishments when we arrive late, and this deprives us from learning all subjects in day. Sometimes, only two subjects out of nine are learned in a day as a result of reporting late and consequent punishments (Asimenye).

Long distances make us to report late for school. Some of us walk from as far as Chipaika which is very far from the school (Beatrice).

Some female learners come from such distant places as Chikale, Pundu, Bwerero and Malemba. Being exhausted with such daily long journeys, some just decide to stop schooling. As a result of walking long distance, we are at risk of been sexually harassed and raped. When we have started off late for school, we often get discouraged and fail to go to school altogether. We do that for fear of being punished by teachers (Tumpale).

The local leaders echoed this when they said,

Men and boys take advantage of the fact that female learners walk long distance as they travel with them. As they move together girls are enticed to do immoral things. The situation is at its worst with the open secondary

school where students knock off quite late in the evening. It is quite risky for them (Mr. kamanga).

Some female learners come very far as far as Kajilirwe, Chendasi and Mchezi. Walking up and down is quite tiresome and some learners tend to dropout (Mr Longwe).

Also in support of these views, was the head teacher of location E who had this to say:

Some students are selected from as far as Chombe. Girls walk long distance to come to school. Due to fatigue, they fail to concentrate in class. This discourages them and some simply decide to quit. Furthermore, some female learners meet boys and men on the way to and from school. Such boys and men make them to behave immorally and this often leads to their dropout (The Head 5).

In the same vein, the EDM described the way the terrain of Nkhata bay compounded the challenge of long distances. This is what he said;

The terrain of Nkhata bay is quite a difficult one .It is hilly and has a lot of escarpments. Obviously, this worsens the situation of long distances learners do cover as move to and from school (EDM).

Surprisingly, this was refuted by learners of location B and D who said;

The terrain of our land is not affecting us academically. It doesn't have any impact on dropout rate. We were born here and are used to these features(Beatrice).

4.2.5.2 PHYSICAL FEATURES AND WEATHER

In almost all locations participants relate that rivers do contribute to increase in dropout rate. Apparently, its effect is not great. This is what the head teachers, local leader and learners said;

River Lifutazi which is close to this institution floods during rainy season rendering the road impassable. To that effect, the students fail to report to school as long as the rain persists (Beatrice).

Hills do not affect us since we are used to them. Only rivers do affect us during rain seasons. We have the challenge of crossing flooded rivers. Not only does this endangers our life but also discourages us from attending classes for some days (Goli).

It takes long to reach school from their homes. Sometimes we feel hungry after walking along distance. In this case, boys offer for money to be used for buying foodstuffs is not rejected. Trekking long distance with boys often leads us into temptations which see some of us becoming pregnant. Heavy rains compound the problem. Thus, some of us decide to stay home for almost a week during which we do not attend classes due to rains (Sinya).

Also sharing these sentiments were a few head teachers who had this to say;

During rainy season, rivers have a great impact on female dropout rate. For instance, students at location D who come from Lichenga have to cross Lymphasa before coming to school. There being no bridge, female learners risk crossing the floods of Lymphasa River. Learners are in danger not only of drowning but also of being attacked by crocodiles. Some learners do not go to school as long as it rains. In this way, learners miss a lot of classes and thus lag behind academically. Eventually, this accounts for the increase in dropout rate (Head 4).

The terrain of Nkhata bay is difficult. Again, the weather is such that it can change any time. Whenever it rains some learners fail to report to school. Frequent absenteeism makes them fail in examination. In frustration, they tend to drop out (Head 5).

Flooded rivers prevent female learners from coming to school causing absenteeism which often leads to dropout. Furthermore, learners who are soaked in the rain tend to go back home aggravating the problem of absenteeism. Experience has shown that absenteeism does affect academic performance negatively. It is this low performance that lead to increased dropouts (Head 3).

Agreeing with the head teachers were the EDM and the local leader. They stated their views in this way;

Nkhata bay experiences the heaviest of rains because it has forests. Most young learners get discouraged to go to school particularly on rainy days where schools are some good distance away. This tends to reduce their interest in school with time. As they proceed into higher classes, these students start doubting saying, "Look, what are we doing, the distance is long, the terrain is difficult and we experience heavy rains during wet seasons. All these things discourage learners from continuing with school and they opt to drop out (EDM).

Rains greatly affect dropout rate. Rains pour for a week during which learners fail to report for school. During this time, teachers will continue with their lessons and some learners do miss them. Eventually, they fail their examinations and decide to drop out (Mr Manda).

4.2.5.3 LACK OF SPACE AND TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS

Limitation of secondary school space, infrastructure and lack of teaching and learning materials were some of the challenges described by respondents to be encountered in the study area. Indirectly, the participants seem to suggest that these are the areas where the government ought to exert more effort. Apart from being environmental factors they also fit in as economic factors. This is what the respondents said,

Most female learners resort to open schools after two abortive attempts to qualify for entry into public secondary schools. This problem is worsened by the fact that there is an ever increasing demand for secondary school.

The absorption rate into secondary school is only at 40% in Malawi. This means that 60% are left behind, the majority being girls. These girls often go to open schools where the service rendered is not as good as that offered by conventional school. This does paralyse the performance of female learners who after being frustrated simply decide to withdraw.

More precisely, learners in open schools are not provided opportunities as is the case in conventional educational institutions. Among other things, they are not given a bursary.

If we take a holistic view of what is happening to female learners in terms of retention, one would question if at all we are making any head way. Whatever support the intervention groups and government are offering does target only the 40% who are in conventional institutions at the expense of 60% who are in open schools (EDM).

As regards limitation of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, respondents had this to say;

Limitation of infrastructure has negative impact on academic activities in general. We need hostels to offshoot the problems of long distance. There is also need for laboratories and good sanitary toilets. Lack of laboratories in the school makes us to have low performance in some science subjects (Alemekezeke).

We also fail because we lack text books. There is need for enough text books. Lack of textbooks leads to failure and resultant dropout. In certain respects, this makes some of us to repeat classes. For those whose age is far beyond

the rest of the learners in a particular class, dropping out appear to be a better option (Asimenye).

Lack of good sanitary toilets makes us miss classes for a period of a week to manage the demands of our menstrual cycles. We need of an incinerator

We lack Physical Sciences and Biology laboratories. There are no laboratory equipments also. Additionally, we also do not have a reliable library. Lack of these made them to underperform in class (Beatrice).

In support of what learners had reported, the head teachers had this to say;

There is no laboratory for learning science. This leads to poor performance on science subjects during examination which often contributes to the increase in learners' dropout rate (Head 2).

We do not have a computer room. This reduces learners and teachers motivation in school. Lack of teaching and learning materials is also greatly contributes to dropout rate

Furthermore, lack of toilets also does have an impact on dropout rate. More precisely, we do not have enough suitable and appropriate toilets. The ones we have are ordinary ones. There is need for current toilets to enhance general hygiene of the female learner (Head 5).

Female learners sometimes decide to quit due to congestion. School is not looked as a favourable environment for normal and comfortable living. In the long run, such conditions bring forth low performance on female learners which eventually make them think of dropping out of school (Head 3).

Concurring with this was the local leader of location D who had this to say:

Female learners find it hard to settle in a class where there are no desks. Apart from the discomfort that follows this, they soil them. Similarly, the lack of text books impairs the whole learning process among students. The school turns to be one of the undesirable places to be (Kamanga).

4.2.6 EFFORTS TO MITIGATE THE HIGH DROPOUT RATE PROBLEM

According to the demands of the study two ways of mitigating dropout rate are considered. Firstly, preventive mechanisms that would lead to lowering of dropout rate are presented. Secondly, tangible measures that would arrest dropout rate are given out. These issues are explained from four main perspective; that of school managers, the civil society, learners, and local leaders.

4.2.6.1 INTERVENTION GROUPS

The EDM reported that they have various intervention groups by NGO's i.e. Camfed and *Keep Girls in School*. This is what he said:

Intervention groups ensure that girls complete their primary school cycles and enter into secondary school. They offer cash transfer and some resources such as uniform, shoes, and sanitary facilities (EDM).

Agreeing with the EDM was the DEM who had this to say:

The government does uphold and support the project of NGOs who are promoting the educational welfare of the girl child i.e. Camfed and keep the girl child in school of Synod of Livingstonia. Female learners are supported with bursaries .The situation is such that almost no girl fails to go to school because of school fees this time.

4.2.6.2 SANITATION

The EDM maintained that the government promotes sanitation in primary schools with the support from well-wishers to build pit latrines, so that girls find their life easier while at school.

The EDM reported that:

The government through the help of other organization builds pit latrines both in primary and secondary schools and it provides sanitary facilities. This improves sanitation in primary school and some secondary schools with support from well wishers to build pit latrine so that girls find their lives easier while they are at school. This is done for them so that they do not fail to come to school during certain periods during the month.

4.2.6.3 CIVIC EDUCATION/ GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Admittedly, the problem of high dropout rate requires a change in mind set. This is what the DEM meant when he lamented that behaviour change intervention and the cultural ones remained a bigger challenge in Nkhata bay. However, there was move towards a positive direction. Thus, the need for civic education cannot be overemphasized. This is why several stakeholders acknowledged its importance and related how it was administered. As regard this issue the EDM had this to say:

A lot of sensitization meetings are undertaken through local leaders i.e. T.A's, community workers to provide security to girls. The government empowers the school communities by forming mother groups who talk to girls so that they work hard and do not drop out. In case a learner has dropped out, the mother groups talk to the parent of the concerned child. The mother groups withdraw female learners from marriage so that they can continue with education. They do that in the bid to promote and implement the government policy of readmission. The government encourages the formation of various supporting structures in communities that surround the schools with the aim of seeing to it that girls finish up school. Teachers are

part and parcel of these sensitization meetings to make the life of the girl child more comfortable and safer.

The community is sensitized to join hands to make the life of female learners in Nkhata bay a safe one from all possible sources of danger as they move to and from school. At primary school level, the community is asked to support female with resources.

In confirmation to this the DEM had this to say:

Civic education is conducted whereby parents are sensitized through the PTA to encourage girls to stay in school until they finish up. Guidance and counselling is done by teachers and hospital personal at times. Schools have some mentors who call a concerned parent before counselling a learner

On the same issue this is what the Camfed official said:

As regards Chilimika dance, local leaders are told that the dance is to be programmed in such a way that it does not interfere with the academic welfare of students. Again, the local leaders are advised that there should be a proper supervision of learners at the dance. Additionally, we have tried to summon religious leaders and chiefs to inform them about the negative effects of such religious functions. More precisely, the concerned parties are informed how religious functions adversely affects young ones. For instance, we inform them that such functions bring about fatigue on students and propagate illicit sexual activity.

The FAWEMA official did take civic education as a preventive measure and this was what she related:

Civic education i.e. sensitization need to be done in order to motivate the female child. It should be done to students so that they know what they

want to become in life. Among other things, they are to learn to be self assertive.

In support of these views was the local leader of location E who added that:

There is need for civic education. The female child needs to be sensitized and motivated to be actively involved in academic activities.

On their part, one learner had the following to say:

As regards sexual and reproductive issues, guidance and counselling is offered to us where we are advised to dress properly apart from controlling ourselves. We are also asked to observe abstinence. Apart from this, we are calling upon parents and teachers to constantly encourage us to consider school as important. Furthermore, we are calling upon our parents to respond rapidly to our quest for daily basic needs. In fact they should prioritize our needs (Alemekezeke).

As part of economic empowerment, teachers also took part in admonishing their female learners on how best to go about it. This is done particularly by those charged with such responsibilities of counselling. As part of guidance and counselling the head of location E related that;

We encourage female learners to do business i.e. to sell tomatoes in order to find money for paying school fees. Economic empowerment among young ones is done in this way (Head 5).

4.2.6.4 ROLE MODELING IN SCHOOLS

The government is also reported to bring various role models in schools. The role models talk to female learners encouraging them to continue with school.

Agreeing with EDM, the DEM of Nkhata bay had this to say:

The government does set role models in different school to hold motivational talks.

While agreeing with the DEM about the availability of role models in the study areas one head teacher emphasised on the quality of role models who should be invited. This is what he said;

The type of role models summoned before girls ought to be those who are well known to country.

Also confirming about the presence of some role models was the Camfed officials. However, he argued that there were no roles modeling sessions taking place in typically rural areas. Plans were underway that some role models be sent there. This is what he had to say:

Since it was discovered that there are no role models in typical rural communities we committed ourselves to be conducting role modelling sessions every month. During this period role models are to be paraded from different departments of the governments in districts combined with sexual and reproductive health personnel from the District Health Office (DHO) and go to different schools. Among other things these role models are to give motivation talks to girls. The officials from the DHO are trained not only to give sex reproductive health orientation but also to direct girls as to where they can access items related to their sexual and reproductive health issues.

4.2.6.5 A CHANGE IN THE WAY LIFE SKILLS SUBJECT IS TAUGHT

The DEM of Nkhata bay was of the view that Life Skills Subject be interpreted into action. He was of the belief that Life Skills should bring forth behavioural change of young ones and thereby reducing dropout rate among girls. This is how he puts it:

Life Skills has to bring forth a behavioural change. The subject must be taught in such a way that it is not only purely academic but that it should bring forth behavioural change intervention. It should be taught in such way as religious study was taught in the olden days (.i.e. it was taught it as an academic and as a converter.)

However, the local leader of location E offered contrary views as regards the subject. In his opinion, it was seen as eroding the morals among the minors. His contention went like this:

The government has introduced Life Skills subject to be taught at a very tender age when one is in standard 3. The subject exposes the child to some 'obscene' ideas which may poison the mind and mislead the little children.

4.2.6.6 BYE-LAWS

Both DEM of Nkhata bay and school heads talked about bye-laws. While some said that they are implemented, others said they are waiting approval of the District Commissioner. This is what some parties said;

Bye-laws do promote the welfare of the female child. Therefore, all schools must have bye-laws. The implantation of these bye-laws should be intensified by the Community Development Committees (Head 1)

Also sharing the same sentiments the local leader from location C stated that;

Bye-laws have been made that punish parents whose children do not attend school. They are supposed to pay a goat worth of money. Bye-laws target parents and not children. Parents are asked to sweep around the surrounding of the school premise for as long as their children are at school on a particular day (Mr Manda).

4.2.6.7 READMISSION POLICY

Implementation of the admission policy is one of the government strategies for retaining female learners at school. This is what the EDM related about it:

The readmission policy has also been implemented to retain girls in school. Those girls who delivered have been encouraged to go back to school

While agreeing with the EDM that readmission was indeed taking place the FAWEMA official did not sound all that positive about it. This was how she put:

Most of the readmitted learners do not persist due to stigmatization. Whatever mistake they make at school is usually attributed as being a reason why they were impregnated. If, for instance one is too kind or offers to assist a male learner or teacher do something, more often than not, such actions are misinterpreted to have been the cause for the initial act of being impregnated.

4.2.6.8 AVAILABILITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING MATERIALS

A lot more is to be done if effective and efficient learning is to take place in Nkhata bay. Provision of teaching and learning materials by parents and most especially the government may go a long way in promoting this objective. In line with these views respondents had this to say;

There should be enough teaching and learning materials in schools i.e. desks, text books and laboratories. This enables students to perform better and continue with school. Lack of teaching and learning materials is usually associated with poor performance which often leads to increase in dropout rate (Head 3).

The local leader of the same location had this to add,

Nchakwenerera chala kuti mwana musungwana wakhallenge pasi pala wageza na kuvwala makora. kukhala pasi kukuwaso kwakusuzgikila kopa kuti wangakhala bweka. Mwantheura wanyake wakukhala waka kukaya kwawo. (It is not proper for a female who is well groomed to sit down in an unfurnished room. Not only is it discomfoting to her but may also expose her body. As such some female learners opt to stay away from school (Mr Longwe).

4.2.6.9 INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

This is the measure which some government officials, civil society members, head teachers, local leaders and learners approached strongly believed that it would arrest high dropout rate among female learners. The views of the EDM on this were as follows:

More of boarding facilities are required to mitigate the problem of female learners. These hostels will help to keep girls in school in that they offer a safe environment as opposed to operating from their homes as is done in community day secondary schools where they are exposed to so many challenges. Among other things, the girl child faces a lot of temptations as they move to and from school. Such challenges are also encountered in homes where grandparents are guardians. The child finds herself in a very insecure environment.

The only hiccup is that lack of finances poses a big challenge where boarding facilities are accessible. In most respects, boarding facilities are a rare privilege for those who can afford them.

Similarly, the DEM of Nkhata bay also disclosed that;

Construction of female hostels is already taking place at Mzenga, Kapanda, and Luwazi Community Day Secondary Schools. More than that, that there is an expansion of Bandawe Girls boarding school.

Some local leaders and learners from several locations suggested constructions of hostels and good toilets if retention of female learners in school was to be promoted. This is what they had to say;

There is need to construct hostels for girls. Accommodating the female child will make it easy to supervise them. In that set up, the female child is

encouraged to read and study since she does see others doing the same (Mr Manda).

Good toilets should be constructed for us apart from advising us on how best to take care of ourselves during our menses. Members of mother groups also instruct us on how best to manage ourselves our menses immediately upon attainment of adolescence (Alemekezeke).

4.2.6.10 IMPROVING THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT OF THE ADOLESCENT GIRL

In order to mitigate the problem of high dropout rate, Camfed had lined a number of objectives, one of which was to improve the school environment of the adolescent girl. The following is what the Camfed official said;

It is our objective to improve the school experience and environment of the adolescent girl. To achieve that, several activities are undertaken. Among others, we offer cash transfer to female learners plus some basics. We establish mother groups to provide psycho – social support to learners i.e. counselling them to adapt to school life. Mkondezi is one of the locations in central Nkhata bay which has a vibrant mother group. Camfed also takes it as its role to provide the much needed training and refresher courses to mother groups. The mother groups are provided with monitoring mechanisms which assist them to offer the much needed supports to girls. We also motivate more girls to stay in school by empowering all female teachers to be role models. We promise to provide female teachers with all the necessary support. All female teachers in the 188 primary schools in Nkhata bay and 24 Community Day Secondary Schools are going to be trained to be role models. Thus, we will empower and provide female teachers with the necessary support so as to inspire and support the school going girls.

The Camfed official further narrated that;

Camfed organisation will also reduce violence against girls in the school environment by raising awareness on the danger and impact of violence. We will be having campaigns to raise awareness on issues of violence and on danger and impact of violence. We also intends to document and improve evidenced based lessons for programme and advocacy related to girls' education, for up scaling what needs to be done right from where we are now. We will also unearth other issues besides what may have been learnt during baseline survey done during inception.

4.2.6.11 MALE – CHAMPIONING

Keep the Girl child in school project coordinator announced their intention to introduce male-championing as a measure against female dropout rate. This is what he said,

We intend to introduce the concept of male – championing related to father – groups which were pioneered by Camfed. These are groups parallel to mother groups. Male champion will include males of integrity considered as role models in the community. It is the community which will identify these people. The chosen males will have to champion girl's rights and raise awareness on issues of violence. They will be provided with space to talk to the community and boys in schools about what role each individual has to play to uphold the retention of girls in school.

Inclusion of males to advocate this cause was advanced after having seen that violence was at times perpetrated by boys and by male adults.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Whereas chapter four was presenting the findings of the study, this chapter examines the findings of the study and explains how the theories of attribution and resilience have been affected by the findings. Examining factor that contribute to high dropout rate among female learners of Nkhata bay district was the purpose of this study. The specific objectives of the study were:

- i. To investigate the cultural, economic, and environmental factors which are contributing to high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata-bay district.
- ii. To uncover factors that may determine girls to stay in school until completion of their educational cycle i.e. tertiary education in Nkhata-bay district.
- iii. To find out measures or mechanism that can be put in place to reduce high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata-bay district. To find out what can be done to ameliorate this problem. To find mechanism that can be put in place to mitigate the problem of high dropout rate among female learners.

This chapter also includes a brief review of the theoretical framework used. More than that, how the paradigm has been used to inform this study has been portrayed.

5.2 MANAGEMENT OF CATEGORIES

It should be noted that as many as fifty-one variables were postulated as possible factors that contribute to dropout rate irrespective of the degree of impact. Initially, there were forty-three variables (i.e. categories). The number swelled up as the interviews progressed. Of these, only sixteen factors have stood out to be quite influential and such factors cannot be ignored without leaving some serious implications on the findings.

5.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN PUT IN USE

The qualitative research design which has been used has enabled the researcher to have in depth examination of the causative factors from the perspective of learners, school managers, civil society and local leaders. Furthermore, this study has stressed an understanding of setting,

holistic approach and inductive data analysis. The qualitative research design used has proved very relevant and useful in that it facilitated for an in depth, more open and detailed study of selected issues (Mason, 1996). Thus, probing of behaviour, feelings, and thoughts and lived experience of female learners, school managers, civil society and local leaders as regards female dropout rate was sped up. According to interpretive paradigm there are multiple realities. This is confirmed by what the researcher witnessed from the research findings that was carried out. Indeed, there are different ways of looking at an issue depending upon the nature of people i.e. the different perspective. It is in view of this that the interpretive has proved to be the most appropriate in handling this issue of dropout.

Furthermore, it afforded the researcher an opportunity to have an in depth interaction with participants. As Ndengu (2012:14) puts it, the lives of participants were captured in order to understand and interpret the meaning they attach to social issues. More than that, great efforts have been made to construct meaning and understand dropout rate from the participant perspective. As it is required, judgments have been based upon consensus of participants and researcher. At the same time, the values of the researcher have been acknowledged, made explicit and adopted. Most importantly this study is fully dependent on the researcher to interpret the meaning of the results.

5.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Essentially, the attribution theory has assisted the researcher in probing the outstanding problem at stake namely the high dropout rate among female learners of Nkhata bay district. As Fritz Heider (1958) puts it, the term attribution to refer to an explanation people give for their own or another person's action or beliefs (Sprinthall, 1990). The theory seeks to explain the cognitive processes whereby individuals make explanatory inferences regarding the causes of events. He distinguished two types of attribution; the dispositional and situational one. The two general categories of explanation are also referred to as internal and external .When the attribution is based on an internal factor, it is called a dispositional attribution and when it is based on external factors it is called a situational attribution. In a more general and broad way, it has been observed in a distinct way that all categories that fall under cultural factors and could as well be referred to as internal factors. Alternatively, all categories that are part and parcel of economic, social and environmental factors constitute the situational attribution and are thus external factors. From

this study it follows therefore high dropout rate has been extensively and intensively explained with extrinsic factors rather than the intrinsic ones according to the theoretical framework that was employed.

In analyzing the research findings, the researcher subscribes so much to the views of Rumberger et al (2008) as highlighted in the literature review. It is contended that a review of twenty-five years of research conducted by them has enable them identify two types of factors that predict whether students will drop out or graduate from high school. These are factors associated with individual characteristics of students, and factors associated with the institutional characteristics of their families, schools, and communities. Educational performance and behaviour are among individual characteristics which have been among those variables that impact negatively on female learners in Nkhata bay. Furthermore, Rumberger et al (2008) argue that academic achievement in both middle and elementary school with grades is a more consistent predictor of dropout rate than test scores. This is what has been found in some locations of Nkhata bay that a good number of students, female learners inclusive withdraw from school for lack of intellectual ability.

More than that, it is argued that dropping out is more of a process than an event; for many students, the process begins in early elementary school (ibid). A number of long-term studies that tracked groups of students from preschool or early elementary school through the end of high school were able to identify early indicators that could significantly predict whether students were likely to drop out or finish high school. The two most consistent indicators were early academic performance and academic and social behaviours. This is quite related to finding where some local leaders bemoaned the fact that their wards were unable to continue with school because they could not match up to its demand. The more they tried the more they failed. Feelings of frustration generated thoughts of dropping out. What Rumberger is saying does suggest that some the female learners who are underperforming and dropout in Nkhata bay may be finding themselves in such situation due to poor educational background. It could be that one did not go through a pre-school or attended one which was not all that good. Their intellectual capability cannot be ignored either. Continuation of school also depends on how gifted one is intellectually.

Rumberger et al (2008) relate that research has consistently found out that high absenteeism—one specific indicator of engagement is associated with higher dropout rates. In the same vein, drug or alcohol use during high school is associated with higher dropout rates. This is in line with the findings in location C and D. It was noted that heavy rains and long distances make some female students to fail to report to school. Eventually, they end up dropping out. Again, there are instances where girl were involved in beer drinking before patronizing night dances. Those girls, as the report carries it ended up been raped and impregnated in due course. This too accounted for the withdrawal. More than that, participants in location C and E said some female learners were rude and disobedient and this facilitated their way out of school because they could not comply with school rules and policies.

The study has uncovered that cultural and economic factors has led most female learners to fail to continue with school. This finds support in Rumberger et al (2008) who maintain teenage parenting and childbearing increase the odds of dropping out. Research on dropouts has identified a number of factors within students' families, schools, and communities that predict dropping out and graduating (Rumberger et al, 2008). As regards families, three aspects of families are said to predict whether students drop out or graduate: (1) family structure, (2) family resources, and (3) family practices. The research findings in Nkhata bay confirms what Rumberger et al (2008) assertions that students living with both parents have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates, compared to students living in other family arrangements. Yes, research finding yielded that female learners coming from single mother families in Nkhata bay had great likelihood of dropping out.

Again Rumberger et al (2008) relate that students in homes with more family resources—as measured by parental education, parents' occupational status, and family income—are less likely to drop out of school. This is in agreement with research findings which indicate that female learners fail to continue with school due to poverty. Furthermore, the research has revealed educated parents and those who are well off economically have a great chance of retaining their learners in school. Rumberger et al (2008) refer to a number of parenting practices as social resources or social capital. These include having high educational aspirations for their children; monitoring their children's school progress; communicating with the school; and, knowing the parents of their children's friend. It is maintained that these variables reduce the odds of

dropping out. The undertaken study agrees with this. Findings are such that most parents pay less attention to the educational pursuits of their female learners. Most of them are too busy doing their own things (.i.e. either too preoccupied with their business undertakings or with their daily career in estates as tea pickers or otherwise). Consequently, their wards tend to suffer educationally.

It is also argued that students are more likely to drop out if they have a sibling who dropped out (Rumberger et al 2008). Chidalengwa et al (2008) also intimate that it is during adolescence that young people often explore new things that they previously had no interest in. Many adolescents develop a desire to emulate what their friends are doing. More often than not, they are victims of peer pressure. Peer pressure also accounts for high dropout rate among girls. These ideas tally with research finding which does indicate that peer pressure is one category that does impact negatively on female learners of Nkhata bay. According to their perception, grass looks greener on the other side of the fence. They have a misconception that all will be well when they get married. Marriage appears a lesser evil than grappling with poverty at their homes or with school activities.

Although student and family characteristics account for most of the variability in dropout rates, about 20 percent can be attributed to four characteristics of schools (Rumberger et al 2008). Among the cited characteristics of school are the composition of the student body, resources, structural features, and policies and practices (ibid). This study has equally found out that lack of teaching and learning materials such as laboratories and books have made learners to fair badly in their examination giving them an exit from academic arena. Again, most stake holders in Nkhata bay have bemoaned the lack of girls' hostels (.i.e. boarding facilities) to be highly contributing to high dropout rate girls.

As regards communities, Rumberger et al (2008) maintains that population characteristics of communities are associated with dropping out, but not in a straightforward manner: living in a high poverty neighbourhood is not necessarily detrimental to completing high school, but rather living in an affluent neighbourhood is beneficial to school success. This suggests that affluent neighbourhoods provide more access to community resources and positive role models from affluent neighbours. This too does agree with the research findings. While the issue of lack of role models was not noted as a serious one in most of the locations under study observation by

the civil society and the regional school manager has yielded that it is quite terrible in the remotest areas of Nkhata bay. The main reason for this is because most of those areas are close to trading centres which are also close to the road. Most of them are provided with a lot of social amenities and are frequently patronized by role models. The issue is so serious that the challenge needs immediate interventions as reported by Camfed official and the coordinator of *The Keep the Girl Child in School* project.

According to Rumberger et al (2008) the research literature has identified a number of factors within families, schools, and communities that affect whether students are likely to drop out or graduate from high school. They include access not only to fiscal and material resources, but also social resources in the form of supportive relationships in families, schools, and communities. While the researcher does appreciate the social resources offered by schools and some communities, the findings indicate that most families do not offer that necessary supportive relationship.

Following the interviews that the researcher had with above mentioned stakeholders, four factors emerged as outstanding leading causes of dropout of female learners in some secondary schools in Nkhata bay district. These are poverty, long distance covered to and from school, household chores, and lack of interest in school. Citing the Ministry of Education (EMIS), the coordinator of *Keep the Girl Child in School project* said that research has shown that 44% from poor household fail to complete primary education the worst hit being girls. A few are said to fail to meet some related high cost of education much as it free. All costs towards education are not met hence some learners do dropout.

Also subscribing to this is Chimombo et al (2000) who describes how long distance badly affects the girl child as she moves to and from educational institutions. Age Africa (2013) calls this problem this long school commutes. These problems are said to be compounded by the physical features such as hill, mountains and rivers which are between homes and the educational institutions. This accounts for absenteeism and high rate of dropout. Surprisingly, there was a vehement denial by both learners and local leader that the terrain of Nkhata bay had an impact in academic pursuits giving reason that the people were used to such an environment.

Results of the research also display the following variables to be having some significant impact on high female dropout rate. These are early marriage and forced marriage, teenage and unwanted pregnancy, peer pressure, some forms of entertainment i.e. Chilimika and disco, some cultural influences, lack of role models, lack of infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials, lack of good hobbies and menstrual hygiene factors.

That Early marriage is a challenge to female learners has a lot been noted by the Girl up United Nations Foundation (2013) who observe that nearly half of all girls in Malawi are married by the age of 18 and one in four teen girls have a child. Most of them tend to settle for marriage rather than continue with their education. Valentini (2004) explains that cultural practices are the ones promoting early pregnancies, early marriages, and transmission of STIs'and HIV/AIDs. From the study it is clear that early marriage is basically a cultural practice emanating as a result of poverty and peer pressure.

Chimombo et al (2000) maintains that the school environment plays a great role in the increase of school dropout of a female child. Among other things, the school environment includes lack of infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials, and menstrual hygiene factors and the quality and quantity of sanitary facilities may discourage a female learner from pursuing her academic goals. This finds resonance in the findings which has elucidated that lack of infrastructure such as hostels, laboratories, libraries and computer rooms has impaired the academic performance of female learners. Most of them tend to underperform due to lack of them. This is also true for those institutions with poor sanitary facilities which have a bearing menstrual hygiene factors. Fortunately, most of the locations under study had good toilets. Two of the five locations had excellent toilets. The only challenges were the quantity and how appropriate those toilets were. Thus, a need was felt and expressed in certain circles that there was need for more and appropriate toilets. Also in agreement is UNESCO (2013) which admonishes that school manager should make sure the school environment is safe. Among other things, it suggests that some good facilities be provided and those in poor shape be improved. It also advocates separate latrines for girls and boys which was the case in the entire locations understudy.

From the findings it is clear that the female learners in Nkhata bay do not have clear hobbies. In the event that an idle mind is a devil workshop this gives opportunity to these female learners to be involved in a kind of behaviour which would jeopardize their academic pursuits. This is line with what Age-Africa (2013) did find out. It was discovered that post-secondary opportunity knowledge gaps was one of the factors that contribute to high dropout rate among the female learners. Among other things, this refers to the act of giving guidance and counselling as regards potential future jobs that learners would wish to embrace in relation to their interest and ability. Most of the times, the learners are not told what they are to become after finishing their secondary school education. This makes them just to loiter around whenever they are out of school activities. It is usually after writing their Education Certificate examinations that our youth and most especially the female learners are often laid off so to say. Having nothing to do, most of them feel getting married is the only option to be embraced.

In a general the researcher has observed that social, cultural and economic factors have emerged as greatly contributing to high dropout rate among the female learners. Interestingly, these suit with the objective of this research which is to find out the social, cultural and economic factors that contribute to high dropout rate among female learners in secondary school in Nkhata bay district.

Findings reveal that the cultural and economic factors contribute tremendously to the drop out of female learners. Also very influential but with less impact are the social factors followed by the environmental factors. For instance, feelings of embarrassment and shyness which are social factors were said to be experienced as female learners interacted with their classmate who were many years younger than they were. The situation was exacerbated when teacher corrected their mistakes in public. These experiences are supported by Betemani (2000) who outlines shyness as one of the feelings one experiences as one attains puberty. He adds that such feelings are usually more pronounced among girls than boys partly due to cultural demands. In certain respects female children found themselves in situations where they were forced to put on tight clothes which expose sensitive parts of the body such as breasts and wearing torn up clothes. It is argued that such situations are enough to scare the female learners away from school since culturally girls are known to be naturally shy.

It is a pity to note that lack of parental care, guidance; control and motivation are contributing massively towards female dropout rate in Nkhata bay. What one makes of this is that parents shun their responsibility. This is in tandem with what Chimombo et al (2000) relates. They observe that lack of parental guidance is another contributing factor to high dropout rate.

Lack of professionalism is also part of the challenges that is encountered by females they try to climb their educational ladder. Just as Mkandawire (2002) found out that there were reported cases of battering which made some female learners to withdraw from school at Ekwendeni the researcher also unearthed the fact that some girls pulled out of simply because they had been battered at certain locations. Furthermore, some teachers psychologically abused some female learners either by calling them names or by correcting them in public whenever they had made mistake. This was quite unfortunate.

However, the most unfortunate are the situation where some teacher are said to be coaxing girl so that they should be in a relationship. Amazingly, the code and conduct are quite clear as to how teacher ought to interact with female learners. It is only befitting that such teachers need to be seriously warned or withdrawn altogether from their jobs depending upon the nature and gravity of the offence, if we are register any meaningful change that will see our girls and women prosper educationally. The most recent report has it that the government has withdrawn more than fifty teachers for sexually abusing the female learner between 2013 and 2015 (Lyonike, 2016). This is commendable because among other things it deters would be offenders. However, the government should step up its efforts.

A probe into sexual and reproductive health issues indicate that most female have insufficient knowledge of such issues. This is in agreement with what Age Africa (2013) asserts when it outlines lack of knowledge and resources around sexual and reproductive health issues as a cause of dropout among female learners in Africa. Culturally, such issues are not supposed to be public consumption. Perhaps, it is this mindset which ought to be changed in the first place. Secondly, as the DEM suggests learners need to be taught these issues in detail in the Life Skills subject. For instance, it is not enough to teach to tell students to control themselves whenever they experience sexual feelings. Rather, the learner ought to be taught what exactly to do when they are gripped with sexual feelings. One may for example, suggest sublimation where they are

encouraged to channel their emotions into productive and acceptable behaviours of let us say chopping firewood or involving oneself into sporting activities.

Of the five protective factors of resilience postulated by Powell (2014), it is the supportive relationships, family, community and school factors which were found to be relevant to this research study. Describing supportive relationships, Powell, (2014) considers them as parental support/concern and school involvement. He takes community factors to be such things as community youth programs (e.g., sports, clubs, hobbies). The researcher observed supportive relationships were in existence in Nkhata bay. What was lacking was that they were completely ignored in certain circles such as in families and in community set up. Parents need to be more interested in the academic development of their wards. Among other things, it requires checking and monitoring every single step wards are making academically.

Furthermore, Powell (2014) regards as school factors encouragement from school personnel and other adults including academic and pro-social skills training. By and large, school factors have been promoted according to the findings of this research study. To a great extent, it is the school factors which are being advanced. For instance, schools are said to offer learners with lessons, sports, and clubs. In certain respects, learners were encouraged by female teachers to stay in school and at times were counselled on how best to cope up with the demands of their adolescence. Much as that is the case, there is very little that the parents and community are doing to promote the educational welfare of the girl child from these findings. Of the two institutions the situation on the ground is such that the communities are better off. The worst are the families where most female learners do lack encouragement, motivation and support.

Looked at from another perspective, the researcher does appreciate what the schools and communities are doing to mitigate the problem of dropout rate. However, a lot more ought to be done by communities to sensitize its members about the importance of the education of the girl child. Most families in Nkhata bay seem to be deficient in terms of management, particularly the single mother families. The researcher feels such parents ought to learn how indispensable the education of the female learners is since every individual is subjected to the school of one's mother. It is in this event, that Camfed believes that to educate a mother is to educate a nation since women are custodians of children and homes. Truly, from babyhood to adolescence, children are mostly mentored by mothers. In the light of this, mothers and indeed all the parents

have a vital role to provide all the necessary care required by all school going children and the female learners in particular. They ought to provide female the entire necessary assistance that is within their means.

Related to what Powell postulates are developmental assets of resilience (Garcia et al, 2013). From our research finding, the external development assets are appear to be the most important in mitigating the problem of dropout rate of female learners. While Garcia et al, (2013) refer to external development assets as positive experiences from people and organizations in the environment Paine (2002) refers them as support and empowerment. However, Paine goes more precise by defining support as including positive family communication, caring neighbourhood, and family support, caring school climate and parent involvement in school.

Evidently, positive family communication as regards academic issues acts as an encouragement for a female learner to continue with school. Similarly, a caring school climate which provides infrastructural as well as moral and spiritual needs of female learners is what will ameliorate the situation. Additionally, parents in Nkhata bay need to be actively involved in school activities by among other things monitoring the behaviour and academic performance of their female wards and in their daily academic achievement if we a tangible change is to be registered. It is not enough for parents simply to go to school only when summoned to do development work (.i.e.chitukuko).

Also worth noting in mitigating the problem of high dropout rate are what Paine (2002) calls them factors that impact on resilience. Some of these factors include physical exercise, moral compass or spirituality and social support. Elaborating how important these are, Paine (2002) maintains that physical exercises are said to improve mood and health. You will recall that it was said that sports do help in coping up with some emotions; the sexual one being among them. It is interesting to note that almost in all locations except one in Nkhata bay female learners are encouraged to participate in sports activities. That was quite commendable.

Furthermore, moral compass or spirituality is said to enable one to develop and live by meaningful principles. It is also asserted that this enables one to put principles into action through altruism. Again, the study has yielded that most female learners participate in church activities. The researcher is aware that is but a step toward developing or adoption of a moral

compass or spirituality. However, it cannot be said with certainty whether or to what degree this is taking place. The researcher's view is that the mere presence and adherence to religious activities is a pointer in the right direction in spite of a few negative observations noted above as regards the issue. Social support is also one of the factors that impact on resilience. This is brought forth by developing and nurturing friendship, seeking resilient role models and learning from them. Clubs and societies, guidance and counseling offered by teachers, role modeling done by civil societies done in schools of Nkhata bay all have as an objective to provide social support.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study has examined factors that contribute to high drop rate among the female learners in some selected secondary schools in Nkhata bay district. Some junior and senior secondary female learners, head teachers, school managers at district and regional level, heads of civil society concerned with education of the girl child (i.e. FAWEMA, CAMFED, Keep the Girl child in school project) and some local leaders were interviewed. Targeted were community day secondary schools for this is where most female inhabitants of Nkhata bay attain their secondary education. The chapter does provide the conclusion to the findings of the study. The chapter also provides recommendations of the study and suggestion for further research.

6.2 A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Research findings reveal that the cultural and economic factors contribute tremendously to the drop out of female learners. Also very influential but with less impact are the social factors followed by the environmental factors.

The cultural factors had the following major categories: early marriage and forced marriages, unwanted and teenage pregnancies, household chores, local entertainment (i.e. chilimika), single mother effect and lack of parental care and guidance. Other categories on the same included promiscuity/ prostitution, cultural beliefs and practices, participation in marriage and funeral rites, sexual and reproductive health issues and menstrual hygiene factors. The first group of categories had worse impact on female dropout rate in Nkhata bay district. In this respect, the worst was early marriage where culturally a girl was expected to get married upon attainment of adolescence. With this cultural setup, the girl child automatically becomes a victim of circumstances. Among other things, she is considered as a resource for economic empowerment. Poverty, desire for immediate satisfaction of basic needs coupled with the lust for money, marrying off a daughter as economic empowerment, and migrant workers' effects are some of the major categories of the economic factor. The other categories are household, child labour, peer pressure, lack of parental care, guidance, control and motivation and abuse of funds. Of all these, poverty have been found as the fundamental barrier to attainment of education among female learners in Nkhata bay just as it is the case in most parts of the country. A close analysis of all other categories reveals that there are economic overtones underlying a good number of

them all. It is in this light we would like to register appreciation for those organizations that are assisting the female learners with bursaries. Those organizations respond to the worst challenge ever faced academically.

The following were the major categories of environmental factor: long distance, physical features, weather, limitation of infrastructure, lack of teaching and learning materials and limited secondary school space. Limitation of infrastructure and long distance are the worst in the way they affect dropout rate in this arena. One will note that these are much related issues. Long distances covered by female learners necessitate the construction of hostels which is part of infrastructure.

Also uncovered were the categories belonging to the social factor. Among them were unemployment levels, lack of interest/ serious in school, lack of role models, household chores, boy- girl relationship, church activities, lack of intellectual ability and unreported and unattended domestic violence and different forms of entertainment. Other categories unveiled were harsh treatment of parents, teachers' negative attitude and behavior, learners' rudeness and disobedience, lack of motivation among learners, sports activities, feelings of shyness and embarrassment, understaffing, and the vicious circle of illiteracy. Bullying and teasing, uncertainties of the future of intervention groups, lack of good hobbies, sexual and reproductive health issues, misunderstandings of human rights, and premature introduction of Life Skills as a subject in Junior primary school are yet other categories of the social factor which were unearthed. Lack of role models, different forms of entertainment, and household chores were found to impinge greatly high dropout rate of female learners.

Although there were many categories on the social factors than other, the impact it has according to the findings of this research are far less than the economic and cultural ones.

Essentially, it should be noted that there were two underlying causes of dropout rate. Either it was due to finances or to ignorance. In this light, we can rightly contend economic and the social cultural factors have been found to be the major cause of the challenge of high dropout rate among the female learners in Nkhata bay.

6.3 IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATION PRACTICES

There are a few areas in which this study has a bearing on academic activities. The first way is regards role models. The ministry needs to deploy female teachers who are to act as role models. In this case, role modelling particularly in rural area are a must if we are to register tangible results in Nkhata bay district.

Secondly, as the theoretical frame work of resilience does inform there is need to encourage the girl child on how best to overcome the adversities she does encounter as she tries to make her way through academic life. Such skills need to be inculcated through such subjects as Life Skills.

High Dropout rate has sometimes being as a result of lack professionalism as both the literature review and the presentation of findings does show. It is in view of this that the ministry of Education should be urged to step up efforts to punish such teachers who are involved in such malpractice. In the same vein, the researcher was please to learn from the media that the ministry had dismissed about fifty-two teachers who had behaved immorally with female learners. Perhaps what is required now is to intensify probing such cases since there seem to be more of such cases on the ground than there are reported.

As the theoretical framework does inform the researcher is of the view that parents need to be civic educated as for the need to encourage learners to stay at school. The same civic education may have to be extended to the entire community of schools in Nkhata bay for it appears little is done in that respect. The school management committees need to shoulder this responsibility assisted by the Parent Teachers Association (PTA).

According to the finding of this study, a lot of girls encounter problem on their way to and from school. This does suggest that having boarding facilities is one of the best ways in which a girl child is to be retained at school, thus both the community and the government should do all they can to have hostels constructed in community day secondary school. Interestingly, the government and some community are implementing this as reported in this study. However, the degree in which this is done is almost negligible. This is another area where efforts need to be stepped up both by the community and government as well.

Delay of some gratification is necessary skill people adopt as people make their way through life. In fact this skill is one of the step stone to success. It is those people who delay their gratification

who achieve big things in life. It would appear that this skill ought to be taught and encouraged more among the youth of Nkhata bay since the desire for immediate satisfaction of their desires has led most learners to stop schooling. Most girls fall prey to this through boys and men. Most boys and men would rather go to South Africa and Tanzania or go fishing than stay at school. These boys and men are the very people who distract girls from school with their acquired wealth as the study show. In this view, there is need for a change of mind set in the people of Nkhata Bay. Both community leaders and the government need to join hands to arrest this problem through civic education. As civic education is carried out, such cultural practices as early marriage as an economic empowerment should to be vehemently discouraged. It is the belief of the researcher that such action may promote the education of the girl child in Nkhata bay.

Resilience theory does inform very well on how best one can overcome adversities and challenges in life. Perhaps, it is time resilience as a topic was incorporated in Life Skills subject so as to help female learners in other districts who are battling out with a lot of untold challenges.

6.4 RECOMMENDATION

Rumberger et al (2008) argue that there are a variety of leverage points for addressing the problem of high dropout rates. Intervention in preschool and early elementary school is clearly warranted. Rigorous experimental evaluations of high quality preschool programs and small classes in early elementary school have proven to improve high school graduation. The researcher would therefore like to suggest that many pre-school be opened in Nkhata bay particularly the remotest area of the district.

6.4.1 INTERVENTION GROUPS

That there are various intervention groups by NGO's i.e. Camfed and keep Girls in School which ensures that girls complete their primary school cycles and enter into secondary school is quite commendable. What would quite desirable would be the situation where quite a good number of such organization came in to assist. As GABLE organization had done a lot of female learners particularly those in rural areas should be assisted.

6.4.2 BURSARIES

Offering of bursaries should be continued for the majority of female learners are denied the chance of continuing with school due poverty. Bursaries ought to target all who cannot afford to pay school fees and not everyone.

6.4.3 EMPOWERING THE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

As regards some negative cultural practices, the researcher recommends that a lot of sensitization meetings be undertaken with local leaders to provide security to girls. The government ought to be commended for empowering the school communities through formation of mother groups who talk to girls so that they work hard and do not drop out. These various supporting structures that the government encourages in communities that surround the schools ought to continue for they aim at seeing to it that girls finish up school.

6.4.4 ROLE MODELING IN SCHOOLS

A lot of female teachers need to be trained in Nkhata bay where possible. Most of these should be sent to remotest area. To attract most teachers there should be a big allowance attached to those lady teachers who are to teach in these areas. Again, the intervention groups should frequently conduct role modeling in the remotest area of Nkhata bay.

6.4.5 A CHANGE IN THE WAY LIFE SKILLS SUBJECT IS TAUGHT

There is need that Life Skills Subjects be interpreted into action. It should bring forth a behaviour change. It must be taught in such a way that it is not only purely academic but that which brings about behaviour change intervention. Also to be included within the subject should be some major tenets of the resilience theory. It is believed that adherence to those tenets would tremendously reduce dropout rate among the female learners.

6.4.6 BYE-LAWS

Bye-laws are required to engage parents, learners and community leaders to promote the welfare of the child. It was also the view of some school heads that all schools are to have bye-laws and that the implementation of these bye-laws by Community Development Committees (CDC) should be intensified. The DEM of Nkhata bay reported that behaviour change intervention and

the cultural ones remained a bigger challenge in Nkhata bay this time. Interestingly, report has that there was a move towards a positive direction.

6.4.7 CIVIC EDUCATION/ GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Civic education need to be conducted whereby parents are sensitized through the PTA to encourage girls to stay in school until they finish up. The parents are also supposed to be informed about the dangers of forcing their daughter to be involved in early marriage. Alternative ways of finding money need to be suggested rather than to sell off their daughter. Sometimes it helps it may help to inform the parent and the community about the impact of early marriage in the long run. Community members may need to be asked as for the reason why Nkhata bay suffers the highest number of single mothers. In the same vein, one may wish to compare maternal mortality rate of Nkhata bay with other district. Obviously, it should be among the highest in percentage in the region. This may send a message to community members that early marriage not only kills female learners academically but also physically.

Related to the same, guidance and counselling should be done by teachers and hospital personnel on how best to avoid unwanted pregnancies and early marriages. Schools mentors should either counsel learners on their own or summon parent's learners where possible. The researcher is of the conviction that cultural practices are best combated when they are addressed at grass root level involving parents and local traditional leaders. As part of guidance and counselling some teachers should encourage female learners to be aggressive in life and learn to do business such as selling tomatoes, bananas and potatoes in order to find money for paying school fees. Resilience theory does inform very well on how one can overcome adversities and challenges in life. Perhaps, it is time resilience as a theme was incorporated in Life Skills subject so as to help female learners who are battling out with a lot of untold challenges

6.4.8 INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The government coupled with the help of other organization should continue to build modern pit latrines both in primary and secondary schools. However, the number should be increased and many more schools should be beneficiaries. Among the sanitary facilities to be provided should be incinerators which help female learners when they are in their menses.

Related to the same the government should endeavor to come up with attractive infrastructure in remotest area such as school blocks, teachers' houses, and toilets. This may not only draw attention the attention of female learners but also the female teachers who may want to work there due to availability of these facilities. A significant and attractive allowance should be given to such willing teachers.

6.4.9 IMPROVE THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT OF THE ADOLESCENT GIRL

At all cost it is imperative to improve the school experience and environment of the adolescent girl. To achieve this, mother groups should provide psycho – social support to learners i.e. counseling them to adapt to school life. The training and refresher courses ought to be given frequently to mother groups.

Furthermore, the mother groups should be provided with monitoring mechanisms which would assist them to offer needed support to girls. As Camfed organization does, many other organizations should motivate girls to stay in school by empowering female teachers to be role models. They should do this by providing female teachers with the necessary support thereby empowering them. Many organizations should endeavor to reduce violence against girls in the school environment by raising awareness on the danger and impact of violence. This can be done by having campaigns in school and community to raise awareness on issues of violence.

6.4.10 MALE – CHAMPIONING

There is need to introduce the concept of male – championing which is parallel to mother groups. Male championing includes males of integrity considered as models by the community. It is the community which should select these people. These chosen males should champion girl's rights and raise awareness on issues of violence. They should be provided with space to talk to the community and boys in schools about what role each individual has to uphold in the retention of girls in school.

6.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

One of the areas which need further research is on the impact of early marriage on school dropout out rate. The study has unveiled that economic and cultural factors do contribute to this phenomenon. However, one needs to know to what extent it is impacting on them.

Secondly, sexual and reproductive issues were observed by the researcher to exert their toll on dropout rate. Most female learners were reserved no matter how hard the researcher tried to establish a rapport with them. In view of this, a female would do well to delve into this issue.

Thirdly, some learners were said to commute from very far. It would be interesting to find out from female learners what challenge they encounter as they move to and from school.

Single mother effect is a great one among female learners as regards the dropout rate. It would be exciting to learn from the mothers and the female learners how it affects academic circles. This may go a long way in reducing early marriages which worsens the problem of high dropout rate.

Also worth noting is what I call migrant worker effect. Some female looked forward to going either to South Africa or to Tanzania. Probing how this issue affects female learners academically would assist in arresting mitigating the challenge.

A comparative study of role models in rural, semi urban and urban areas is required. This would be quite interesting since results do suggest variations in their availability depending upon the locations. Related to the same, one may wish to know the frequency of role modelling sessions and the reasons that account for them.

6.6 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Ideally, the information about dropout rate would best have been obtained from female dropouts themselves. As envisaged, it proved too difficult to find female dropout learners. Some of these were said to have migrated to other places where their husbands stay.

Another danger encountered was negative social perception of the issue under study. It was an investigation about causes of high dropout rate. The problem was the tendency to give responses

which are deemed social desirable and not being objective. This is referred to as social desirability bias. This was indeed a challenge in most locations under study. For instance, learners and community leaders in some locations did not agree that Chilimika dance and household chores were contributing to high dropout rate. For some, sports and church activities were seen as having no negative effect at all. Related to the same, early marriages were seen in bad light by some community members when in actual fact most communities approve them culturally.

Another challenge was as regards issues about sex and menstruation. In Malawian context, such issues are treated as a taboo. They are normally not discussed in public forums. They are usually shared informally and in dark corners. Unfortunately, these are some of the serious issues which may stand on the way of a female's academic activities. Attempts to probe them were met with a lot of passive resistance. Some remained defiantly quiet. Others were reserved and yet others were too shy and embarrassed to say anything.

This study was not meant to be mere speculation. However, there was a temptation, in some locations for learners and some head teachers to tackle interviews as if they were mere deliberations. Efforts were made to bring discussion down to earth so that the researcher should be told what is happening on the ground. Reality as it was on the ground is what was sought by the researcher and not opinions or mere works of imagination.

In some locations, both the learners and authorities showed a detached attitude to the whole exercise much as they had been alerted about it and had consented to participate in the interview. As such their participation was not done whole heartedly.

It was encouraging to note how enthusiastic local leaders would participate in interview. Surprisingly, their enthusiasm waned with the passage of time. One would observe that they anticipated rewards at the end of the exercise despite been told that it was for free.

Unwillingness to participate in the interviews was also encountered in some locations. Some authorities declined to participate on the pretext that there were too busy for the exercise. Thus, they delegated it to their subordinates.

Lack of sincerity was another challenge faced in the encounter with some participants. They deliberately avoided telling the truth. They opted to give misleading information. For instance, some participants said that a lack of teaching and learning materials at their school had no impact on academic performance an issue too good to be true.

A focus group was employed for handling such sensitive issues as menstruation and sex since the researcher anticipated that most female learners would not be free to express themselves as individuals in view of cultural demands. Much as it is time saving, the dominant ones in the group stole the show. In the focus groups, it was very rare to see participants giving different views on the same issue.

Being basically a qualitative research study, the researcher has used a sample of about twenty-one people. As such, it is often argued that the results of such findings may not be subjected to generalization. Much as that may be the case, it is greatly hoped that the results of this research study has generated some universal truth which transcend all district borders and even national ones where possible. A mixed method study may be conducted therefore to witness the generalizability of findings

There were instances where the researcher felt some issues were blown out of proportion. Yes, certain issues were exaggerated in the way they were presented to me. Such issues were either ignored or verified with other evidence.

The other limitation was as regards native female learners who were learning in boarding secondary schools. This study did not capture them. It took aboard only those who operate from their homes. Such an action has deprived native female learners of Nkhata bay found in boarding schools the chance of voicing their concerns too.

High dropout rate does occur in all education levels namely primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary level. However, the researcher focused only on the secondary school level. More than that, community day secondary schools had been targeted because these are the institutions which basically accommodate most native Nkhata bay female learners compared to boarding schools. Lastly, only five of the many community day secondary schools had been sampled purposively for the purpose of our study. This was due to limitation of resources i.e. time and finances.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This study has been about dropout rate among female learners in selected secondary schools in Nkhata bay district. Both research and observation which others like Chimombo (2000) have undertaken has yielded that Nkhata bay is among those districts which suffers the highest dropout rate among girls in secondary schools. However, little was known as to why girls in this particular geographical location drop out of school at that high rate. Hence, there was need for this particular study so as to unearth factors contributing to such high dropout rate among girls. The purpose and objective of this study therefore, was to examine factors that contribute high dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Nkhata-bay district.

More precisely this study has had several objectives. Firstly, it did investigate the cultural, economic, social and environmental factors which are contributing to high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata-bay district. Secondly, it has uncovered factors that determine girls to stay in school until completion of their educational cycle i.e. tertiary education in Nkhata-bay district. Thirdly, it endeavoured to find measures or mechanism that can be put in place to reduce high dropout rate among female learners in Nkhata-bay district. In the same vein, an attempt has been made to find mechanism that can be put in place to mitigate the problem of high dropout rate among of high dropout rate among female learners.

The rationale of this study is to see to it that the dropout out rate among the female learners in Nkhata bay is tremendously reduced. It is hoped that this study will have a positive result of promoting human resource development so as to achieve meaningful development.

Basically, interviews were the researcher's main way of collecting data. Both the semi-structured and the unstructured interviews were used.

Since the researcher intention was to probe into the causes of high dropout rate among female learners in selected secondary schools a constructivist (interpretivist) paradigm was used. This paradigm was found to be the most appropriate because it allowed in-depth interaction between the researcher and the participants. Moreover, the unstructured interviews which were used assisted to source multiple constructed realities.

This study has employed two theories; the motivation theory of attribution and the resilience theory. The theory of motivation informs the first objective of our study while resilience addresses the last objective .i.e. ways of curbing high dropout rate among female learners.

From the finding of this research study, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that there is high dropout rate among female learners of Nkhata bay. The probe into the causes has yielded as results mainly the economic and cultural factors. Also impacting negatively are the social and environmental factors. However, these have less impact compared to the first two namely the cultural and economic ones.

Much as both the government as well as non-governmental organisations are committed and involved all they can to mitigate the problem of high dropout rate the results of this study indicate that it is the non-governmental organisations that have gone a long way to solve the problem of poverty which has been found to be the fundamental barrier to attainment of academic goals among female learners

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APPENDICES