THE ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN MONITORING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT IN MZIMBA NORTH DISTRICT PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS

BY

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Declaration

I, Temwa Mkandawire, declare that the master's degree thesis entitled: The Role of School Management Committees in Monitoring School Improvement Grant in Mzimba North District Public Schools, contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis remains my original effort. Any information read from other people's works has been acknowledged through appropriate citations and references.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research project to my parents, whose unwavering support has been my anchor.

Abstract

Primary schools acknowledge how the School Improvement Grant has improved their schools, but little attention is placed on tracking the fund's best usage. Assessing School Management Committees' monitoring roles will demonstrate whether the program is improving their education and the competence of SMCs in carrying out their roles. Therefore, this study assessed the roles of school management committees in monitoring the implementation of school improvement grant in 4 public primary schools of Mzimba North Education District. A qualitative approach and a case study design were used in this study. Ten participants from each school in total 40, which comprised of one head teacher, 7 school management committee members, and two teachers were part of the sample, nonetheless, the actual sample size was determined by reaching a saturation point. Respondents were selected from four public primary schools of Mzimba North Education Office in the Ministry of Education in Malawi.

In this study, data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, and observation. Data analysis was done thematically. The findings of this study have revealed that SMCs are not effectively carrying out SIG monitoring as required. Most of them do not have the capacity to track expenditures as required. Some committee members struggle to comprehend the training content, thus relying heavily on headteachers for assistance, which affects the monitoring process. Additionally, the training programs do not adequately emphasize the importance of monitoring SIG usage. Instead, they focus on showcasing items to stakeholders, neglecting crucial aspects such as tracking expenditures, providing evidence of item distribution to students, and evaluating the impact of SIG funds on student performance. The research also highlights internal conflicts within SMCs, often initiated by close collaboration between headteachers and selected few members. These results will guide the Ministry of Education, policymakers, and administrators to revise school grant policies that can promote effectiveness in the implementation of the programme.

Glossary of Acronyms/ Abbreviations

SIG: School Improvement Grant

PSIP: Primary School Improvement Programme

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

MG : Malawi Government

MoE: Ministry of Education

SBM: School-Based Management

TDC: Teachers Development Centre

PEA: Primary School Education Advisor

SMC: School Management Committee

LEA: Local Education Authority

MDGs: Millenium Development Goals

MOEST: Ministry of Education Science and Technology

EFA: Education for All

DHT: Deputy Head Teacher

H/T: Head Teacher

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter overview

Since 1994, the Malawi Government has undertaken various initiatives to address the challenges arising from the introduction of free primary education. Among these initiatives was the establishment of a program aimed at providing direct financial assistance to schools, known as the Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP), which utilizes School Improvement Grant (SIG). The School Management Committees (SMCs) play a crucial role in overseeing the management of SIG funds. However, despite being entrusted with authority, there is widespread mismanagement of SIG resources in many Malawian primary schools. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of SMCs in monitoring the utilization of SIG funds for their intended purposes, prompting the need for this study. This chapter provides background information on the study, outlines the problem statement and study objectives emphasizes the significance of the study, and outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

1.1 Background information of the study

Globally, countries embarked on a major reform in educational management, especially beginning in the 1980s (Bray, 2003). As part of education and public sector reforms, many countries across the globe chose to decentralize the administration and financing of education services to regional, local and school levels (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). This education development, promotes a 'move from highly centralized, standardized, and command-driven forms of educational management to more decentralized and participatory decision-making, implementation and monitoring at lower levels of accountability (UNESCO, 2000). The aim of these changes was to put governing bodies and head teachers under the greater pressure of public accountability, for

better standards and to increase their freedom (Bruns et al., 2011). The reforms allowed state schools to operate on Local Education Authority (LEAs) and control grants from the national government being made directly to the schools. The reforms also formulated the responsibility of School Management Committee of allocating the resources according to the needs at school level (Caldwells & Spinks, 1998). Globally, the school managements play a great role in formulating all policies in schools and left the day-to-day administration of every school to the head-teacher. The general responsibilities of school governing structures include, the establishment of the educational needs and priorities of the school, allocation of funds, monitoring of impact of decision taken and evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs undertaken (Cave & Wilkinson, 1990).

In most African countries primary and secondary school educational management is done by the School Management Committees (Mugabe, 2019). Among others their functions are to manage funds, settling disputes in the school or making recommendations to the District Education Office, conducting tendering interviews/approvals for supplies and receiving school supplies. World Bank (2009) pointed out that, School Management Committees (SMC) are the most recent governance initiative to hit developing country education systems in the last two decades or so due to countries being signatories of some international conventions and to achieve the decentralized model of governance.

The international commitments to Education for All (EFA), and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 came up with significant efforts of Universal Primary Education, through reducing direct costs to parents, to increase primary school enrolment. Developing countries and their partners increased efforts to improve the efficient and proper use of public funds – reducing waste, mismanagement and leakage. The management of primary education in much of Africa

since then has been subject to structural changes intended to bring it closer to the 'user', and to give citizens at the local Level (particularly parents) a greater stake in management. The goal is to increase accountability, oversight and responsiveness (Kiprono, et al, 2015). The new administrative and fiscal arrangements, in line with the Dakar Framework for Action of Education for All (EFA), have placed more responsibilities on regional, district, communal and school level authorities to work together to reach the EFA targets. One of the reasons for promoting this decentralization is the hope that by bringing the resources and decision-making processes closer to parents and communities, it will strengthen governance, and the resources available for primary education will be better used (Antonowicz et al., 2010). This is accompanied by SMC's monitoring the way school resources are utilized. However, other scholars including Abadzi (2013) argued that community committees including school management committees in low-income countries which include African countries cannot monitor the functionality of schools they lack experience with features of good quality schools to accurately evaluate service delivery which includes financial expenditure of schools.

Like any African country, Malawi has experienced some major changes in education sector. Many of these changes were triggered by the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1994 which led to increase in school enrollment from 1.9 million in 1993/ 94 to 2.9 million in 1994/95, during which period, tuition fees in all public primary schools were abolished and there was inadequate funding. This brought a lot of challenges in the education system such as putting a lot of pressure in the distribution of teaching and learning materials, lack of class space and sanitary facilities among others. The school management also faced challenges such as, inadequate teachers, high teacher pupil ration, budget constraints, rigid bureaucracy which delayed school materials or funds from central office, irrelevant decisions by actors who are far from schools, who were less in touch with needs and priorities, and that funds were lost at different administrative

levels. The results of these challenges have been the low quality of education in primary schools MOEST-NESP (2008-2017). To address these challenges, the government formulated specific strategies to deal with problems in 3 priority areas which are access and equity, quality and relevance and also governance and management. To handle the issue of inadequate funding under the 3 priority areas, government developed guiding principles and strategies of providing direct school grants to schools and communities to enable school-based improvement planning and management thereby reinforcing decentralization MOEST-NESP (2008-2017).

Despite trickling down the powers to school management committees, the question is: 'can school management committee have the capacity or technical know-how and confidence to monitor funds expenditure at school including School Improvement Grant (SIG)?' Ginsburg et al. (2014) narrated that in 2010, Malawi initiated its Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP) to expand equitable access, increase quality and relevance, and strengthen governance and management. Parents and other community members developed and implemented school improvement plans (SIPs) with funds from school improvement grants (SIGs). The SIG funds caters for support to three categories at a school namely: school improvement plans (SIP); orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs); and HIV-positive children – referred to as care, treatment, and support (CTS). The school grants are transferred from the central government to schools. The program covers all schools in Malawi (Nampota et al., 2013). The management of these funds to a larger extent are done by the SMC committees to achieve the section 6 of the Malawi Decentralization Policy (MOEST, 2008). Although these community members are trained in management and monitoring of SIG, it is hitherto unclear whether or not they can be relied upon to conduct monitoring of SIG funds. Chances are that they might only be told by headteachers how they have spent the SIG funds rather than being actively involved in the entire management process of the funds. Therefore, this study sought to assess school management committee's roles in monitoring the

implementation of School Improvement Grant in 4 public primary schools of Mzimba North District Education.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The role of School Management Committees in SIG monitoring is very important as emphasized in the PSIP guidelines (MOEST-PSIP/MESIP, 2020). Since 1994, the Malawi government has embarked on a series of efforts to deal with the challenges brought by the introduction of free primary education. One of them was initiation of a program to directly support schools financially. The programme is referred to as the Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP), which is implemented using School Improvement Grant. Under this program, School Management Committee members have been entrusted with substantial responsibilities in resource management. They are required to take part in financial management, procurement of educational materials, monitoring, and ensuring efficient utilization of SIG funds (MOEST-PSIP/MESIP, 2020). Additionally, according to MOEST (2015) education standard 26, the SMCs/governing bodies are expected to actively monitor expenditure. Despite the powers given to SMCs, they appear to be incapable of carrying out this responsibility.

There are many complaints and cases of embezzlement in schools pertaining to SIG funds. For instance, most primary school committees are fond of quoting exorbitant prices to gain from funded projects Kiprino et al. (2015), Some SMCs and headteachers who are responsible for managing SIG steal the funds, diverting the funds to implement another project as opposed to SIG requirements CSEC (2017), and there are also other cases where headteachers run away with SIG money. These issues raise doubts and suspicions about the effectiveness of SMCs in monitoring SIG funds. Insufficient monitoring could compromise transparency and accountability in SIG administration. Consequently, this may result in resource mismanagement, eventually leading to inadequate provision of educational materials and low quality of education in the long run. Thereby

failing to achieve the government agenda of providing quality education to all children in Malawi. Also, studies from international literature have indicated that there are few evaluated school-based management programs in Sub-Saharan Africa Bruns et al (2011). This study, therefore, sought to assess school management committee's roles in monitoring the implementation of school improvement grant in 4 public schools of Mzimba North Education district.

1.3. Study Objectives

1.3.1 Aim of the study

To assess the extent to which SMCs are able to monitor the implementation of SIG funds in Mzimba north district public primary schools

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The study has the following specific objectives:

1. To assess how SMCs describe their roles in school management and in monitoring the implementation of SIG.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of school management committee members in monitoring the implementation of SIG funds.
3. To investigate the challenges of SMCs in monitoring and use of SIG funds

1.4 Significance of the Study

The outcome of this study is of significant value to policy makers and administrators at government level as it may enable them to revisit and revise the school grant policies which are not followed to promote effectiveness in implementation of the program. The study unveiled challenges that SMCs face in monitoring SIG and recommendations have been made to the ministry of education

and schools on how to resolve these challenges. This study will help SMCs to develop strategies to improve in monitoring SIG and enhance their management skills. Although a lot of studies have been done on school governance in many countries, the study will contribute to academic literature on how SMCs monitor the implementation of school improvement grant in Malawian schools. Most of the studies on SIG in Malawi are commissioned. This motivated the researcher to undertake this study.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The study will be guided by Site-based Management Theory. One of the most frequently used approaches to school reform since 1960's (Mohrman, 1994). The major objective behind the Site-based Management approach is to move decision-making control from the central office of a school system to the local school level. Critical to the implementation of Site-based Management is the participation of school stakeholders (i.e., teachers, parents, administrators, staff, and community) in the decision-making process. Cheng (2022) said that Site-based Management is intended to address the need to include those people closest to the problems, issues, and situations in decision- making at the local school level. The core idea of Site-based Management is participatory decision making at the school site. Rodriguez & Slate, (2005) stated that, Site-based Management operates under decentralization, which lead to the wide participation of school members in the decision-making process.

 The theory stresses that problems that surface in schools are never simply problems for the school to solve alone. School problems are mirrored in the community and society. Thus, solutions to these problems are not sufficient to only come from within the educational system, nor can solutions come from only those outside the schools. School problems should be of interest to both those persons within the educational system and to those persons who are not, because schools and

society do affect each other (Van Slyke, 1998). The theory points out that, procedures, roles, and expectations needed to be made clear to all parties involved including community committees for work efficiency. Lack of clarity will lead to lack of progress and confusion. Mohrman (1994) indicated that factors such as knowledge, skills, information, and leadership enhance proper implementation of curricular, finances and instructional initiatives by school and council representatives. These concepts should be obtained through trainings. (Myers & Stonehill, 1993) said that, providing training in the areas of planning, decision-making, finances, budgeting, group dynamics, problem solving for site-based decision-making committee members will increase efficiency and effectiveness at school.

This theory is relevant to the study of assessing SMCs roles in monitoring the implementation of SIG, since it provides relevant information that SMCs need to understand in order to effectively perform their roles in monitoring SIG funds in public primary schools. This includes capabilities which the SMCs should have to carry out their roles such as skills and knowledge on leadership, finances and curricular. It also suggests expected procedures or tools that school management should have to use to conduct monitoring, including a form of annual performance and planning report that encompasses the extent to which the school is meeting its goals, how money is being spent, and plans for the school. This will help the SMCs to adequately perform their management functions of monitoring. All these theory ideas will be used as a benchmark with how SMCs are implementing their roles and capabilities which they have to monitor SIG.

1.6 Chapter Summary

The Chapter highlighted that education reforms of decentralization resulted in the inclusion of SMCs in the management of funds in schools. The school management committee is also a major stakeholder in the implementation of primary school improvement grant. Despite SMCs being

delegated with authority, mismanagement of SIG resources is very common in most primary schools in Malawi. This raises eyebrows if the SMCs effectively monitor the implementation of SIG funds to perform their intended tasks. Therefore, this study assessed SMCs roles in monitoring the implementation of School Improvement Grant in Malawian school context. The chapter concludes with a theoretical framework which guided the study and was a point of reference for the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to roles of SMCs in monitoring the implementation of school improvement grant. It discusses some studies under the following sub-headings: Overview of school-based management; role of SMC in school management and SIG in Malawi; capacity of SMCs in monitoring the implementation of SIG; challenges of SMCs in monitoring and use of SIG funds.

2.2 Overview of school-based management

2.2.1 Brief history of school -based management

Education governance has undergone significant changes since the early 1980s. Many nations throughout the world choose to decentralize the management and financing of education services to regional, local, and school levels as part of education and public sector reforms (Opande, 2013). This education development, promotes a 'move from highly centralized, standardized, and command-driven forms of educational management to more decentralized and participatory decision-making, implementation and monitoring at lower levels of accountability' (UNESCO, 2000). The changes aimed to put governing bodies and head teachers under public accountability, flexibility in resources management and to improve school standards, (Kiprono et al., 2015). The reforms allowed state schools to operate on Local Education Authority (LEAs) and control grants from the national government being made directly to the schools. The reforms also formulated the

responsibility of School Management Committee of allocating the resources according to the needs at school level (Caldwells & Spinks, 1998).

In developed countries, it is acknowledged that school-based management, self-based management or site-based management (SBM) has the potential to bring improvement in the quality of education (Muttaqin, 2016). Many countries of the world have adopted the trend towards decentralizing powers down to the school level this is (known as school-based management reform). School-based management reform describes a shift in responsibility to the school level for decisions and resources that affect school improvement (Caldwell, 2005). Barrera-Osorio et al. (2009) emphasized that the individual school-based management is represented by any combination of principals, teachers, parents, students, and other members of the school community as the main decision-making authority. The aim is to strengthen parents' involvement in the management of the school by getting them involved in the school committee. However, in other schools there is low participation of communities due to many factors such as lack of interest, looking at the responsibility as a burden, among others (Ginsberg et al., 2013).

The decisions passed down to the school may be managerial, pedagogical, or financial in nature. Many models of SBM also incorporate some method of informing community people about the performance of a specific school (or school district) relative to other schools in order to encourage participation in decision-making and to increase accountability (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009).

In most African countries, including Malawi, the introduction of free primary education brought structural changes in education management. This led to adoption of SBM concept with the intention of bringing education management closer to the 'user', and to give citizens at the local Level (particularly parents) a greater stake in management. In Africa the SBM concept is carried out through SMCs.

2.2.2 Describing the School Based Management and its alternative terms

School improvement has become a main concern of educational policy makers, administrators and teachers seeking to reform existing education systems of schools that were persistently low-achieving (Muttaqin, 2016). It is acknowledged that self-based management, or site-based management, commonly referred to as school-based management (SBM), has the power to increase educational standards (Muttaqin, 2016). SBM has been explained in different ways in literature. According to Caldwell (2005) school-based management is the systematic decentralization to the school level of authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards, and accountability. On the other hand**,** Carr-Hill et al. (2017) defined School Management as transferring decision-making authority and responsibility for school operations from central government to local stakeholders to better reflect local priorities and improve student outcomes. Therefore, in this study, School-Based Management (SBM) will be defined as an approach to improve efficiency in education by transferring decision-making authority, resources from central and district offices to individual schools and communities.

 The SBM reform aims to transform schools into communities where the appropriate people participate constructively in major decisions that affect them (David, 1995). In several nations, the idea of site-based management or school-based management is practiced differently. David (1995) described the composition and decision-making procedures of the committee in various American states. The state of Kentucky mandates that every school is required to have a site-based council, made up of three teachers, two parents, and the principal, and this council is given extensive authority over finances and policy. In contrast to Kentucky, Maryland and Texas require schools to create school-based decision-making teams, but they do not specify their composition

or legally transfer authority from the district to the school. State law in Chicago mandates that local school councils consist of the principal, two teachers, two community leaders, and six parents.

Implementation of SBM was explained by Ali-alami (2014). Defining obligations, creating a constitution for the management committee of the school, outlining its membership, the term of the managers' offices, their duties, nomination and election, selection of the supervisor and office holders, and standing rules and procedures for stakeholder participation in policy-making. David (1995) explained that SBM concept mandate that, those who have the strongest personal stake in and the most immediate connection to the school are the ones who should tackle the issues. Furthermore, Muttaqin (2016) said that SBM gives principals, teachers, students, and parents more power over the educational process by putting them in charge of selecting the school's budget, staff, and curriculum. With the help of educators, parents, and other community members SBM may build environments for learning that are more productive for kids by including its members in these important choices.

Despite this trend towards decentralizing powers down to the school level (known as school-based management reform) and its supposed positive effect on educational outcomes, there is still limited evidence from low-income countries of this general relationship, in particular within the sub-Saharan African context (Carr-Hill et al., 2015). It is therefore important to conduct a research of education decentralization in Malawi to explore how the SBM concept is implemented and its impact to improve education. This study therefore seeks to make a contribution to academic literature or knowledge through an empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of SBM concept through SMCs in monitoring the implementation of school improvement grant. Since most of the research on school grants are commissioned.

2.2.3 Importance of school-based management in improving the quality of education,

The devolution of decision-making authority to the school level has also been widely accepted as the preferred model by many international donor agencies, including the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (Carr-Hill et al., 2015). These agencies have bought into the theory and data suggesting that locating decision-making authority within schools will increase accountability, efficiency and responsiveness to local needs (Bruns et al., 2011; Gertler et al., 2012; World Bank, 2018). Stronger accountability allows schools and teachers to have a greater say on school issues. This implies that they can be held accountable for their results towards parents and the close community directly. Such accountability is expected to act as a tool for greater effectiveness in education. Furthermore, devolving authority to schools enables international agencies to bypass often problematic national politics by channeling resources directly to schools. This speed up the implementation and he c clps to improve education (Barnet, 2018).

Nevertheless, the impact of SBM on education quality, including student outcomes, remains a contentious issue, with some researchers arguing that SBM leads to enhanced educational outcomes (Gertler et al., 2012), while others contend that SBM leads to the deterioration of educational quality especially among the weakest schools (Degrauwe, 2004). Nonetheless, some studies have found that SBM reforms are associated with improved education outcomes and processes. For example, a study by Khattri, et al. (2012) on the effects of school-based management on student performance in the Philippines observed that schools that practiced school-based management interventions (training in school-based management and direct funding for school-based reforms, based on school improvement plans) attained higher average test scores than those that did not receive such inputs. Similar study results were also conducted by Skoufias

& Shapiro (2006). However, the rigorous evidence base for the effectiveness of SBM in boosting student performance is thin.

Additionally, advocates for decentralization and community participation in school governance have based their proposed reforms on similar rationales as summarized by Barrera-Osorio et al. (2009) said that by giving a voice and decision-making power to local stakeholders who know more about the local education systems than do central policy makers, decentralization can improve educational outcomes. It is assumed that local communities will encourage schools to adopt more locally relevant curricula, which can have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and student opportunities to learn (Carr-Hill et al., 2015). At the same time, decentralized funding mechanisms and other reforms increases efficiency in schools, when combined with community engagement. This result in more resources being available to schools. Some evidence exists that site-based management is linked with better student attendance, lower suspension rates, and lower dropout rates. (Barnett, 2013). On the contrary, Bruns et al. (2011) commented that there are few rigorously evaluated school-based management programs compared with the number of such reforms being carried out, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, this study will fill this research gap by evaluating school-based management program to provide a benchmark of the impact of SBM programs in Malawi context. Furthermore, a growing body of empirical work on SBM is part of the broader effort focused on attempts to understand 'what works to improve learning outcomes. The majority of these studies use quantitative approaches to test combinations of inputs such as textbooks, class size, teacher incentives and suchlike, or variations in policy, for instance, decentralization and language of instruction to establish their causal relationship with changes in learning outcomes. Therefore, this study seeks to make a contribution of knowledge through an assessment on SMC roles to monitor the implementation of school grants, an SBM approach in Malawi context using qualitative methods that probe deeper into meanings, contrasting

perspectives and issues where purely quantitative methods are either impossible or inappropriate. Furthermore, the study will fill the research gap of lack of thoroughly evaluated school-based management programs, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa since most research studies are carried out to establish the most effective strategies for improving learning outcomes.

2.2.4 Critiques about school-based management in relation to the quality of education

Critiques of school-based management theory argue that, concern with educational quality has seldom been at the heart of this policy, the reason for its introduction being related more to financial and managerial arguments (Degrauwe, 2004). In line with this, Barrera-Osorio et al. (2009) and Bruns et al. (2011) posited that devolving decision-making to the level of the school through school-based management reform does not lead directly to improved outcomes. But instead, it is likely to impact on the increase of accountability and responsiveness to local needs which are assumed to lead to positive stakeholder engagement in educational provision. This, in turn, is expected to increase enrolment, attendance and retention and to reduce corruption within schools (Beasley & Huillery, 2016; Gertler et al. 2012). Furthermore, according to a study conducted by Abadzi's (2013), citizen committees in low-income nations may lack the knowledge and expertise necessary to make wise recommendations due to their low levels of education hence they can hardly participate in education improvements. In agreement with this, Rose (2003) reported that direct involvement of school management committees in school affairs was rare in practice concerning decisions about the need for school development projects, for instance, constructing classrooms, latrines, and teachers' houses. These decisions were most often made by teachers, and communicated to the school committee by the head teacher. Generally, SBM policy in other countries operates through the creation of a school-based committee or council at the school and in most African countries the main school-based committee is referred to as School

Management Committee (SMC). Therefore, this study will help to clarify the above contradictions to give the right perspective of SBM in Malawi setting by assessing the SMCs roles in the implementation of SIG.

2.3 The Level of Participation of SMCs in School Management and School Improvement

Schools with active participation of the local communities are able to implement successfully school development programs because the local communities are able to mobilize financial as well as human resources necessary for provision of better education services. The community formulate a school-based committee known as SMC to represent them in school affairs. Ganapathi (2018) defined School Management Committee (SMC) as a governing body that supports both academic and administrative work and ensures continuity and stability in the school's shared vision and goals in relation to the school children, infrastructure of the school, teacher related aspects, utilisation of grants, resource utilization, planning and community participation. Thus, in Malawi context SBM is implemented through SMCs. Cheng and Mok (2007) stated that in both developed and developing countries, SBM has proved to be the best policy that has registered an improvement in management of schools. This has resulted into creating conducive environment and increase in pupils' performance and accomplishments. Xaba (2011) claimed that SBM policy make the talents of many different interest groups within the governing body to be combined to promote the best interests and take the best decisions for the school. However, there are conflicting effects of SBM through SMC on the effective implementation of school improvement. While some studies have found a positive effect of SMC in the delivery of education services (Duflo, et al 2011). Other researchers have found minimal effect of SMC on the delivery of education services (Banerjee et al., 2016).

In relation to critiques of SMC participation, Malawi Government NSCPPSM (2004) argued that School Management Committees are largely dormant. There is very little participation from communities and parents in other contentious school management issues, such as monitoring of teacher's performance. One key reason for this is the lack of training for School Management Committees and for school staff. Additionally, there is poor relations that exist in many situations between staff and communities. Communities often lack confidence to deal with better educated teachers, while at the same time, teachers often fear and resent School Management Committees as they see them as a potential mechanism to exercise power and control over them. Similarly, Rose (2003) research reported that, direct involvement of committees in school affairs were rare in practice. Decisions about the need for school development projects were most often made by teachers, and communicated to the school committee by the head teacher. Community members were expected to provide monetary and non-monetary contributions. In line with this Ginsburg et al. (2014) observed that, decisions about the forms of participation were made in a top-down fashion resulting in poor ownership and accountability opposing to education act requirements and other policy documents.

Additionally, in other African countries the functions of SMC on management of school finances have been summarized as maintaining and improving the school's property, purchase textbooks and other educational materials and equipment, pay for services. However, Mestry (2006) argued that many principals and school governing body members are placed under pressure to manage their schools' finances because they are unable to work out practical solutions to financial problems, on account of their lack of financial knowledge, skills and expertise. In many instances it has been reported that principals and school governing bodies have been subjected to the mismanagement of funds through misappropriation, fraud, pilfering of cash, theft and improper control of finances. Interestingly the cases of mismanagement of funds under SMCs supervision

in Kenya, South Africa and Malawi are similar (Kiprono et al. 2015). Also, SMCs in Malawi are entrusted with management of SIG. The question is if the same SMCs are failing to manage funds in other countries, can they be exceptional in Malawi? This is why the study sets to assess the SMCs roles in monitoring the implementation of SIG to fill this research gap.

2.3.1 The Role of SMCs in school management and school improvement grant in Malawi

According to the Education Act of Malawi (1962), every school should have a School Management Committee (SMC). The 1998 Education Act of Malawi also re-established school management committees. School Management Committees are composed of members of the community served by the primary school. The overall role of the SMC is to oversee the management of school resources and those working at the primary school in close collaboration with school staff, and the community as a whole. SMCs are a legal requirement for all schools, and it is comprised of nine members as stipulated in the Education Act (1962). The School Management Committee, is required to meet regularly, to address school issues among others are; infrastructure, teacher performance, teacher discipline, quality of teaching, absenteeism, finances as they affect the day to-day running of the school. In addition, it is recommended by the Ministry that every school should have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) made up of parents and teachers together with community leaders. These would meet, three or four times, a year to mobilize communities and hold the School Management Committee to account Malawi Government (2004) National Strategy for Community Participation in Primary School Management.

Chimombo (1999) stated that, the role of school committees has received prominence in education policy in the 1990s, aiming to improve schools through the active participation of communities. Chimombo (1999) pointed out that most school committees had an understanding of their expected roles and responsibilities, which broadly corresponded with their statutory roles. At a general level,

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they regarded their role as providing a bridge between the school and the community. More specifically, a number of the committees reported that their role included disciplining pupils or teachers, and mediating to resolve conflicts between teachers and parents, or teachers and pupils. However, direct involvement of committees in school affairs was rare in practice. In all cases, committees perceived their role primarily in relation to organizing school development work (Kadzamira & Ndalama, 1997). In line with this other scholars observed that, most of the times SMC's fail to implement their roles Ayeni & Ibukun (2013) stated that many SMC members have limited knowledge regarding how daily activities of the school are run and coordinated, how personnel administration issues are dealt with, how conflict resolution is handled and regarding other statutory matters in which they are expected to offer professional and technical inputs in decision-making to ensure sustainable improvement in the performance of schools. Similarly, Opande (2013) observed that most of the SMC members are ignorant of their roles as far as academic matters are concerned since the majority of them are either semi- literate or illiterate and are unable to make appropriate decisions which can translate into better school improvements.

Furthermore, since SMCs are mandated to participate in school financial management, they are also entrusted with facilitating school grants. According to MOEST-PSIP/MESIP (2020) guidelines the roles of SMC in the implementation of SIG among others are as follows: Obtain two copies of the bank statement – one to be submitted to the DEYS's or CEO and the other to be kept at the schools, Prepare School Improvement Plan (SIP) for the grant, maintain all records and receipts for auditing purposes, hire Auxiliary teachers for the schools when necessary, procure schools bags, badges, other scholastic materials, football and other sports materials to motivate learners to perform better, procure exercise books and pencils for all Std 1-4 learners to be used for homework only, Procure printed progress-books for all Std 1-4 classes to maintain records of continuous assessment, Procure notebooks, chalk and flipcharts for remedial classes, meet once a

term with members of SMC, PTA, and Mother Group to address the issue of teacher and learner absenteeism and provide counseling where necessary. The question is with these financial and procurement functions do the SMCs manage to perform their expected work? Do they have abilities to handle the technical aspect of finances? Nampota, et. al (2014) study responded to some of these questions, the findings said in most of the schools there was no common understanding of the roles of the SMC. Furthermore, the study revealed that the challenge with the committee is lack of education which makes them not to appreciate school issues, less members who are active and the committees do not regularly meet.

All in all, while the literature mentions that SMCs are mandated to participate in school financial management and are entrusted with various procurement responsibilities related to the SIG, there is limited exploration into the actual performance of SMCs in executing these financial tasks. The literature review hints at issues such as a lack of education, infrequent meetings, and a general misunderstanding of roles among SMC members, but there is a need for more in-depth investigation into how SMCs handle the technical aspects of finances and procurement. Therefore, the study will enlighten how the SMCs perform their roles in monitoring SIG in schools with reference to their roles on MOEST PSIP guidelines and education act. There is scanty academic literature in Malawi which explains the role of SMCs in monitoring school finances and school grants. Hence the study will assess their roles, understanding, and capabilities in monitoring the SIG funds to unveil their potential on their work and fill the gap to contribute to academic literature.

2.4 Capacity of school management committees to monitor the implementation of SIG funds

School-Based Management (SBM) policy gave a mandate to SMCs to participate and monitor all the activities that make a school operational. For the community to play that role, four requirements should be present for legitimate involvement, which include: knowledge, skill, power and information (Degrauwe, 2004). This is hardly the case in many communities. Mugabe's (2019) study suggested that SMCs experience a number of challenges in their monitoring roles which include lack of knowledge and skills to do their monitoring work in schools, they also lack expertise in financial management yet they are involved in financial budgeting, expenditures as well as financial controls. In the same line, Bah-Lalya (2003) asserted that implementation depends on the capacities, abilities, nature and degree of willingness of all the actors to respond to the challenges and expectations of their work. Overall effective management require capacities to deal with corruption and promote accountability.

Fullan (2000) also pointed out that improvements depend on the development of local capacity to manage multiple innovations simultaneously. This implies that the Implementation and monitoring of devolved funds in schools will only be possible by developing the capacity of the SMCs. Various scholars such as Mestry (2006) and Abadzi (2015) have argued that SMCs face challenges of lack of skills to perform their roles. This hinders the implementation of monitoring funds and grants in schools. A research study by Maile (2002) in South Africa found that school governing bodies have the challenge of illiteracy among members, which contributes to inefficiency in decision making, budgeting, expenditure, planning and infrastructure development planning. Similarly, Abadzi (2015) said this lack of education results in wrong decisions being made in the governance of schools and elite capture, where by better-educated people impose their decisions

that favor their own subgroup, this excludes parents from decision-making. Generally, SMCs low levels of education have made educators to blame the school governing bodies for failure to execute their roles and responsibilities in schools.

Furthermore, lack of education leads to lack of interest in monitoring financial management at a school despite being trained. Possibly they do not understand the concepts or they are not confident enough to carry out the work in presence of educated people. A study by Obonyo (2012) in Kenya established that lack of managerial and budgetary development skills has affected the SMCs' role in the management of schools. SMCs find it difficult to advise on how the school resources should be used. In relation to this, Kiprino et al. (2015) observed that when SMC were asked what was essential for them to manage finances effectively, 97.7% of the SMCs in the study were of the opinion that they needed the capacity to manage and use devolved funds, they must attend a course on financial management, must have accounting skills, have experience in financial management, knowledge on financial and they must be trained continually. This is an indication that majority of the SMCs have not been developed enough to manage FPE finances effectively. This agrees with the findings of a study by Antonowicz et al. (2010) which revealed that members of these bodies are given limited financial management training and support, which raises serious questions about their ability to fulfill their role of planning and monitoring school resources. This is an indication that most workshops and seminars attended by SMCs do not achieve the intended purpose of equipping participants with skills and knowledge in the implementation of FPE funds.

Furthermore, Mestry (2006) said that lack of financial knowledge or skills to enable them to understand the implementation and use of FPE funds have resulted to cases where school heads are reported to have mismanaged school funds. This scenario is the same in Malawi where SIG funds are being misused. This is largely attributed to the incapacity of the SMCs to manage SIG

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funds adequately. It was also stated that treasurers in some schools lack the necessary financial expertise and merely sign cheques presented to them by the principal or the chairperson of the SGB. Some have very little knowledge of financial accounting. (Rangongo et al. 2008)

It is well known that SMC has great potential to run a school very effectively. Hence, there is a need to increase the potential of the SMC members toward their roles and responsibilities and to encourage active participation and contribution among them. Scholars have agreed that training of SMC members is one way which can promote capacities among parents. A number of studies such as those carried out by Pradhan et al. (2011) and Rajbongsh (2021) have focused on the importance of training committees for their oversight role. Such activities have been carried out extensively in some countries, including Honduras, Nepal, and Indonesia. Training ought to provide committee members with some of the knowledge they need to evaluate school finances and make appropriate decisions. Similarly, Kiprino and Kanyiri (2015) pointed out that financial management training has a positive influence irrespective of the original level of education of the SMC.

In the studies conducted there was a greater reduction in malpractice as a result of financial management training in countries like, Ghana, Morocco and Niger. This is also applicable in Kenya since this study has shown that the level of education of the SMCs is not a guarantee to effective financial management, (82.6%) of the SMCs have O' level certificate and they are not very effective, what is therefore required is the financial management training. SMC members who are not trained in financial management limit the quality of oversight over school finances, open the door to financial mismanagement and undermine the ability of management to detect corruption. However, this has often been a complex exercise given that committee members in remote areas must also work hard to make a living where few committee members attend trainings and others do not grasp the content easily. In line with this Deffous et al. (20ll) said that trainings

are not always efficient because training sessions are rarely provided to every person in charge of funds management. Secondly, when provided, such training is usually given once or very few times in a school actor's career. Training should thus be more continuous, as oftentimes school actors' deal with financial management. The skills of trainers and their knowledge of the programs declined as the trainings are cascaded down from level to level. As a consequence, the trainings are least efficient at the school level, where there is a need for a clear understanding of the program. In addition, Malawi government trained all stakeholders including SMCs which are involved in SIG prior to the release of money. After the training they were given guidelines on how to manage the SIG grant. MOEST-PSIP/MESIP (2020) guidelines. All in all, the literature review of this section provides relevant debates surrounding the question whether or not financial trainings can improve the capacities of illiterate SMC committees. Therefore, this study will help to clarify these contradictions.

2.5 Challenges of SMCs in Monitoring and Use of SIG Funds

Nampota et al. (2014) study in Malawi reported that the disbursement of SIG funds poses a challenge on the implementation of SIG. There is delay in releasing school funds hence, the school become heavily indebted. This puts the SMCs in a challenging situation and slows down the process of school reform. Similarly, the survey findings done in Uganda and Ghana showed that payments to schools are often late or less than expected (Kiprono et al. 2014). Similar delays are reported in Madagascar, even with capitation formulae. This makes planning a frustration than an opportunity. Similarly, to this study the findings indicated that 45.3% of the SMCs strongly agreed that delays in disbursement of FPE funds is a challenge they face and 43.0% agreed to the same. (Antonowicz, 2010).

Another challenge is, inadequate funding and fluctuating of prices. The study findings in Malawi schools reported that the SMC and headteachers said the amount of the grant was insufficient. They stressed that there were some OVCs and HIV-positive learners who were entitled to this support but they did not benefit. This brings frustrations and conflicts amongst committee members to select the beneficiaries (Ginsburg, 2014; Nampota et al., 2013). Also, the prices of commodities are always increasing on the market which makes it difficult to procure all materials on the budget.

SMC members also experience a challenge of lack of monitoring for the grant. Nampota et al. (2014) observed that there was no systematic way of monitoring funds in schools as most schools relied on showing the materials bought to different stakeholders. These materials are 'checked' by the parents when they come to witness the distribution of materials to their children. As for the SIG grant, no records were kept as to how the funds were being used and not much explanation was given as to how monitoring was conducted in most schools. This poses many questions on the capabilities, confidence, expertise of SMCs in managing school grants and finances. Hence these issues prompted the research to assess SMCs roles in monitoring the implementation of school grants.

Mestry (2004) observed that there is insufficient teamwork between head teachers and school governing bodies since the head teacher is not interested in sharing the responsibility for school management for fear of losing power and authority in their school. Abigail et al. (2012) highlighted that it is only through collective action by all those concerned with the monitoring exercise that monitoring activities can be undertaken for improved school performance. Where there is absence of collective action, some of the decisions taken are only in the interest of a few members of the committee

Furthermore, challenge of influential members of the SMCs, in most rural areas. This implies that the duties and functions of the SMCs are undertaken by influential members who command respect and regard themselves as superior and/or the vocal members of the committee (Mbena, 2005). This situation instils low self-esteem in those members who are not influential and thus renders them unable to contribute to the decisions affecting the school since they only remain observers when decisions are taken (Mbena, 2005). In support of this assertion, Wyk (2004) observes that some members of school governing body lack confidence regarding their roles and duties, which makes them inferior to other members. In relation to this, Ginsburg (2014) study in Malawi pointed out that head teachers were reported of being more involved in SIG activities than the community members (SMC chairs and 'involved' parents) in 2010 and 2012. This challenge is common and it might be experienced in the study of assessing SMC roles in monitoring the implementation of SIG

Ginsburg (2014), in his study in Malawi, pointed out that challenges which SMCs face in the implementation of SIG are due to insufficient community commitment. This is done because communities involved in school-based decentralization initiatives in Malawi viewed responsibilities placed upon them as an increased burden in the face of government financial constraints (Rose, 2003). The other challenge was length of the SIP process the processes are long to reach the point of obtaining funds and also insufficient training. Therefore, this study will help to analyze the problems which SMCs face in implementing their financial roles in Malawi. This will provide clarifications on the SMC effectiveness in monitoring SIG grants which will help to fill the gap of inadequate academic literature on monitoring school grants which is in the country. Since most of the research on school grants are commissioned.

2.6 Summary of Primary School Improvement Programme in Malawi

The Primary School Improvement Program (PSIP), framed along with development partners in May 2010 in the context of a sector-wide approach (SWAp), was initially funded internationally by a World Bank loan of USD 69 million and fast-track initiative financing. The program funding is known as School Improvement Grant (SIG), it officially begun in the 2010-2011 school year. It was carried out in phases, starting with selected schools in six districts across the three regions of Malawi and now covers all primary schools in Malawi. Ginsburg et al. (2014). This program is aligned with the education goals of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy, Government of Malawi (2007), the National Education Sector Plan (NESP), Government of Malawi (2008) and the Educational Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP), Government of Malawi (2009). The PSIP also follows international agreements for Education for All (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Ginsburg et al (2014) described how PSIP is helping the NESP specific strategies to deal with education problems in 3 priority areas of equitable access to education, Improve quality and relevance of education and governance and management. Nampota et al (2013) said that, there are three categories of PSIP funds which make up the SIGs allocated to schools: (i) support to school improvement plans (SIP); (ii) support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs); (iii) and support to children infected by HIV – care, treatment, and support (CTS).

At an operational level the key PSIP activities focus on: a) improving quality of teaching and learning, b) increasing participation by local communities in the governance and management of primary schools, c) building planning and management capacity of teachers, parents and school management committees, and d) engaging district personnel to support schools in developing, implementing and monitoring/ reporting on school improvement plans. The objectives of the PSIP are to improve internal efficiency within primary education across Malawi by improving promotion rates and reducing dropout rates, especially for girls and improve governance and

management in primary schools, MOEST-PSIP/MESIP (2020) guidelines. In relation to this Nampota (2013) et al. pointed out that the overall goal of the PSIP is to deepen education decentralization in the primary sub-sector so as to improve basic education service delivery. To promote these elements PSIP uses three types of grants:

1. School Improvement Grants (SIGs) provide funds to implement activities to achieve the NESP and ESIP goals: 50% for quality and relevance, at this goal schools are supposed to perform the following PSIP activities among others; education to reduce dropout and repetition and promote effective learning. 40% for access and equity, here the PSIP priorities emphasize supplying teaching and learning materials, constructing and rehabilitating school infrastructure and fostering the motivation of vulnerable children to remain in school. Also, 10% for governance and management, on this goal the PSIP focuses on enhancing participation of local communities in the provision of education, decentralizing governance and management functions, capacity building, and monitoring. Schools are directly responsible for fund management and procurement towards implementing their district-approved school improvement plans. Ginsberg, et al (2014)

 2. Zonal Improvement Grants (ZIGs) provide funds for fuel and mobile telephone air time for primary education advisors to monitor and support the implementation of the SIGs. Ginsburg et al (2014).

3. District Improvement Grants (DIGs) provide funds for PSIP monitoring (fuel/transportation, airtime) and stationery/administrative items. MOEST-PSIP/MESIP (2020) guidelines

On procedures for distributing funds. All schools in Malawi receive School Improvement Grants (SIG), with the amount determined by the size and needs of each school. This is verified by the Director of Education Youth and Sports (DEYs). During 2010 SIG was distributed according to

enrolment (approximately MWK 100 per student). However, Degrauwe (2014) in his study of analyzing school grants in Africa observed that this system can create more room for headteachers to inflate the school enrollments perhaps improved criteria should be formulated to avoid this malpractice. This section provided an overview of SIG which is implemented in Malawi primary schools as it is one of the interventions to achieve NESP goals. It is also a point of reference to find out how community committees especially SMCs implement their roles to achieve the objectives of school grant as scholars have mixed reactions on the capabilities of SMC's who are illiterate and poor to manage SIG funds. They claim that their incompetence leads to mismanagement of funds in schools. Therefore, this study will help to fill the gap of inadequate academic literature on monitoring school grants which is in the country. Since most of the research on school grants are commissioned.

2.7 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, chapter 2 provided a background information on SBM policies which resulted in achieving decentralization activities in schools. This led to transferring of management authority from central office to school management committees, hence empowering them and improving performance of low achieving schools. Basically, SBM policies were reintroduced in African countries including Malawi due to education challenges which were brought by the introduction of free primary education. SMC is used to carry out SBM policies in the majority of African nations. Development partners, government-sponsored School Improvement Grants (SIG), and SMCs are crucial players in the execution of SBM policy for its effectiveness. The literature reviewed their roles and capacities in monitoring the implementation of SIG. Scholars have mixed reactions in involving community members who mostly are illiterate and poor to manage school grants and funds. They attribute to mismanagement of school grants and funds due to failure of

SMCs to perform their tasks. Others argue that capacity building has equipped SMCs with capabilities and they successfully carryout their work. Therefore, this research is going to clarify these contradictions and to find out in Malawian setting if the cause of SIG mismanagement is a result of the failure of SMCs to perform their task or not. The literature review has also highlighted some challenges which the SMCs face when implementing their roles and lastly it provided an overview of SIG which is implemented in Malawi primary schools, as it will be a point of reference to find out how community committees especially SMCs implement their roles to achieve the objectives of SIG. This will help to make comparisons on what the guidelines say and how SMCs are implementing their monitoring roles on the ground.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed in the study, encompassing the research approach, design, paradigm, site selection, population characteristics, sampling size and sampling methods, data collection methods and instruments, data analysis method, and ethical considerations. This comprehensive approach facilitated an in-depth investigation of the subject matter.

3.1 Study design and approach

The study used a qualitative research approach and was guided by a case study design. Qualitative research gives a comprehensive data about human observations, thoughts and feelings; it tries to understand how participants perceive and interpret their experiences, to gain deeper insights into the subject matter, Creswell & Poth, (2018). Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social cultural contexts within which they live. According to Creswell (2014), a research design provides a framework for data collection and analysis. Hatch (2002) argued that case studies are a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized contemporary phenomenon within specified boundaries. As informed by Yin, (2014), the research adopted a case study design to gain a comprehensive and detailed understanding into the participant's lived experiences, thoughts, and emotions related to a specific situation within their natural setting. According to Kamanga (2012), qualitative methods are convenient in the sense that they allow the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses, thus, to ask why or how. Therefore, the use of qualitative approach in this present

research cannot be over emphasized as the researcher attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of SMC roles in monitoring the implementation of SIG and how they contribute to financial management in schools

3.1.2 Research paradigm

This research will follow an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivists claim that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one's perspective. According to Cohen et al. (2007) this paradigm central idea is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This approach makes an effort to understand the viewpoint of the subject being observed. One of the advantages of this approach is the close collaboration between the researcher and the participant, while enabling participants to tell their stories or their views of reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Interpretivists believe that researcher's experiences, beliefs, opinions and attitudes have a role to play in the research and that common sense guide people in everyday life (Denscombe, 2010). This paradigm therefore is considered appropriate as the study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the SMC roles and how they monitor the implementation of SIG funds to promote financial efficiency and decentralization in schools. The qualitative data that will be obtained will involve researcher's experiences, beliefs and opinions in its analysis.

3.2 Study site

The study was carried out in four primary schools in Mzimba North District Education of Malawi. All the 4 schools are found in Mzimba district. The district lies in the Northern region of Malawi. The district was selected due to the following reasons: Firstly, a survey report of Public Expenditure Tracking by CSEC (2017), highlighted discrepancies in the management of School Improvement Grant funds in primary schools across Mzimba district. This led the researcher to investigate how SIG funds are monitored in Mzimba district, particularly by School Management

Committees (SMCs), who play a key role in overseeing SIG. Secondly, the district represented both rural and urban settings of primary schools where the SMC's have different capacities including their education qualifications. As such, the site provided an in-depth understanding of the topic under study from different perspectives in different settings. Lastly, the district was chosen because of its easy accessibility by road from Mzuzu where the researcher was operating from.

3.3 Study Population

The study population comprised of 1 headteacher,7 school management committee members and 2 teachers from each school. The study involved 10 participants from each school in total 40. The Headteacher was selected based on their knowledge and expertise on SMC's monitoring roles and can assess their implementation. SMC committee members, they were selected based on being a member of SMC committee, who can provide relevant information on how they perform their roles on monitoring SIG funds and school experiences in management. SMC's characteristics may include varying levels of education, leadership experience, and community engagement and 2 teachers were selected based on being a member of management at school who are competent with SMC roles at a school and can assess their functionality.

3.4 Sample size and Sampling Methods

3.4.1 Sampling methods

Sampling is a process of selecting individuals for study. Fraenkel &Wallam (2009), defined Sample as any group on which information is obtained.

The researcher got a sample from the ten targeted primary schools in Mzimba North District Education. To avoid bias, the study employed simple random sampling method to choose four

schools for the study and purposive sampling to choose SMC members, headteachers, and teachers based on relevance and subject-matter expertise Denscombe (2010).

3.4.2 Sample size

A sample of forty (40) participants was obtained from a target population in 4 public primary schools in the Northern Education Office. The study involved 10 participants from each school in total 40, which comprised of 1 Headteacher, 7 SMC committee members, they were selected based on being a member of SMC committee, and school experiences in management and 2 teachers were selected based on being a member of management at school and the longest serving members who can narrate SMC roles at a school and assess the performance. They were told what the research is all about and those interested will participate in the study. Nonetheless saturation point determined the actual sample size.

3.5 Data collection Methods and Instruments

3.5.1 Data collection methods

To obtain valid data on assessing SMC monitoring roles on SIG, the researcher considered using interviews, administering of open-ended questionnaires and focus group discussions. Consequently, this study used interviews, open ended questionnaires and focus group discussions in order to ensure the quality, reliability and validity of the information collected.

3.5.1.2 Interviews

An interview can be defined as a conversation usually between two people (Kamanga, 2012). Teachers and Headteachers were interviewed in this research study. The interviews that were used in this study were characterized as being "semi-structured" because they were open ended or flexible. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer generally starts with some defined questioning plan, but pursue a more conversational style that may see questions answered in an

order merely natural to the flow of conversation. The interviewee on the other hand has the freedom to say whatever comes to mind (Patton, 2015). The interviews used an interview guide or an open-ended questionnaire which I developed. Their purpose was to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives, experiences, and opinions. "Refer to Appendix I" for the questions that were answered during the interviews. The researcher recorded information from interviews by making handwritten notes and audiotaping using the phone recorder.

3.5.1.3 Focus group discussions

The study also adopted focus group discussions for SMC members over one-to- one interviews. This decision was made to provide interviewees with greater freedom to share their thoughts, particularly considering the sensitive nature of financial matters. The researcher believed that some members might not feel comfortable expressing themselves openly in one-on-one interviews.

Kamanga (2012) defined focus group discussion as a group of people gathered from similar settings to discuss a topic of interest to the researcher with the purpose of collecting in-depth information about a groups' perception of a given phenomenon. Some advantages of focus group discussions are that it brings about a collection of rich diverse views from many participants which could not be obtained from individual interviews. Stewart et al. (2014) noted that Focus group discussions enable researchers to understand deeply into participants' experiences and beliefs of the topic under investigation. The discussions were guided by an interview guide. See "Appendix II" for research questions which were answered on focus group discussion. The researcher tried to engage every participant in the discussions in order to get diverse opinions on the research topic. Each session was scheduled for an hour and data collected through the FGD sessions were recorded through audio-recordings and field notes.

3.5.2 Data collection instruments

For the purposes of this research, interview guide for SMC members and open-ended questionnaire for teachers and Headteachers, were used as research instruments.

3.5.2.1 Interview guide

Merriam et al, (2015) defined an interview guide as a structured set of questions designed to obtain specific information from interviewees during research. It serves as a roadmap for the interviewer, ensuring that relevant topics are covered consistently across interviews. Interview guide was used for SMC members during a focus group discussion, where a structured set of questions were asked during a focus group discussion to obtain relevant and specific information from SMC members. The researcher used an interview guide because it enhances the reliability and validity of the data collected, as it helps maintain consistency and focus throughout the interviewing process. The instruments for data collection were tried out during the pilot study to assess whether they would be able to give the intended data. The instruments that gave the wrong data were modified. The language used mainly was local language, Chitumbuka to allow SMC members to express themselves freely so that language should not be a barrier.

3.5.2.2 Open ended questionnaire

Babbie, E., & Mouton, J. (2018) defined an open-ended questionnaire as a research tool that consists of questions that prompt respondents to provide detailed, qualitative responses in their own words rather than selecting from predefined options. It allows respondents the freedom to express their thoughts, opinions, and experiences without being constrained by predefined answer choices. An English questionnaire was used to collect data from teachers and headteachers since they are professionals

3.6 Data analysis method

Data was analyzed through thematic analysis, this involved organizing and explaining the data; in short, making sense of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situations, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Cohen et al., 2007). The recorded interviews were initially transcribed in the original language and verified for accuracy and completeness after that they were translated to English by the researcher. After transcription, the coding process was done. Similar codes were grouped together and these formed categories. Similar categories were grouped to themes. Themes were presented as my findings of the study.

3.7 Credibility

Qualitative studies are generally criticized by positivist researchers due to lack of rigorous measure of validity and reliability. Denscombe (2010) proposed that, to address the matters of accuracy and appropriateness of data, qualitative researchers can use triangulation, the researcher can use contrasting data sources to boost confidence that the data is 'on the right lines. The researcher used several methods to increase credibility such as focus group discussions and interviews. All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Member-checking techniques were continuously used during and after the interviews. Member-checking involves the researcher restating, summarizing or paraphrasing the information received from participants and making sure that what was heard or written is, in fact, correct.

3.8 Ethical consideration

The researcher firstly got a permission from MZUNIREC, then Mzimba North Education Office, PEAs and head teachers of selected schools where the study was conducted before starting the research. Consent was obtained from respondents before conducting the interviews. The respondents were informed about the aim of the study and on the need for their participation. They

were also told not to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview/ if they feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes them uncomfortable. The participants were assured that the information provided by them was treated with confidentiality. In respect of their privacy pseudonyms were used and each participant signed a consent form for acceptance. Participants and their schools were not named in the subsequent research report. The identities of respondents were not known to the researcher as they were not asked to indicate their names or position in the school. Participation will be on voluntary basis.

3.9 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the methodology employed in the research study. A qualitative approach, guided by a case study design, was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the roles of school management committees (SMCs) in monitoring the implementation of School Improvement Grants (SIG) and their contributions to management in schools. The study was conducted in four primary schools in Mzimba North District Education of Malawi, with a sample size of 40 participants comprising headteachers, SMC members, and teachers. Data collection methods included interviews, open-ended questionnaires, focus group discussions, and observation. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, and ethical considerations were carefully addressed to ensure participant confidentiality and consent. Overall, the methodology outlined in this chapter contributes to the credibility of its findings, shedding light on the critical role of SMCs in the monitoring of SIG funds.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the data that were collected for this study on the role of school management committees in monitoring school improvement grant in Mzimba north district public primary school. Based on the data generated during interviews and focus group discussions, a number of categories were generated which were further put into three major themes that explain role of SMC in monitoring SIG. The findings directly address the following objectives which the study was set to achieve; to assess how SMCs describe their roles in school management and in monitoring the implementation of SIG, to evaluate the effectiveness of school management committee members in monitoring the implementation of SIG funds and to investigate the challenges of SMCs in monitoring and use of SIG funds

This chapters also includes a detailed discussion about the data analysis, results, and interpretation of the qualitative data for each of the three objectives of this study.

The themes, categories and sub categories that were found have been presented in the table below:

TABLE 1: SHOWING THEMES, CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES

Theme	Category	Subcategory
Roles of school management committees in primary school	SMC Awareness about how SIG funds have Improved	Showcasing materials and receipts purchased using SIG money during a meeting

SMCs Understanding of their Roles in Monitoring SIG	Education in their Communities	Asking learners if they have received exercise books purchased by SIG Monitoring construction projects
Ability in monitoring SIG funds and providing feed back	Relationship between SMCs qualifications and participation in monitoring SIG funds. Assessing SMCs Members knowledge on monitoring SIG	
Challenges of SMCs in monitoring SIG	School leadership related challenges on SMC monitoring SIG	

	Government related challenges on monitoring SIG	
	SMC members related challenges on monitoring SIG and	

4.1 Roles of School Management Committees in Management and in monitoring the implementation of SIG

The first objective aimed at finding out the role of SMCs in management and in monitoring the implementation of SIG in primary schools under study. Results of this objective indicate that most of the SMC committees lack a comprehensive understanding of their roles in monitoring SIG. Instead, they primarily follow SIG implementation guidelines. They tend to believe that their primary duties involve displaying purchased items and overseeing construction project. Neglecting important aspects like tracking fund expenditures, providing evidence of item distribution to students, monitoring the usage of SIG-funded items and assessing and documenting the impacts of SIG funds on student performance. Nevertheless, most of them understand their roles in school management. Two themes and one subcategory category were established under this objective. These are SMCs Understanding of their Roles in Monitoring SIG, SMC Roles in School Management and a subcategory of SMC Awareness about how SIG funds have Improved Education in their Communities.

4.1.1 SMCs understanding of their roles in monitoring SIG

The results of the study indicates that SMC members have different understanding of their roles in monitoring SIG. The majority of SMC understand their role in monitoring SIG as showcasing goods and receipts purchased using SIG money during a meeting. One of the SMC committee members said,

"We monitor SIG funds by inviting parents and chiefs to a meeting and show them the receipts and goods which have been purchased using SIG funds."

Other members responded that their monitoring roles are knowing the amount of SIG fund allocated to a school, developing the budget with H/T and DHT, make sure there is a receipt book with the DHT, checking receipts of purchased goods and getting quotations from shops. For instance, during the interview, One of the SMC treasures said that, *"after developing a budget 2 SMC members which are the treasurer or chairman and the Deputy head teacher, they go to collect 3quotations of items in 3 different shops.*

Almost all SMC members pointed out that, one of their monitoring roles is monitoring construction projects funded by SIG money, SMC chair of a certain school said*:*

 "We have a stock book which has inventory of all purchased materials and when the builders need materials, we record the quantity and make them sign, to make sure that SIG funds are well used according to their 3 categories of purchasing teaching and learning materials, helping the vulnerable children and maintenance."

Some members also mentioned that their roles are being signatories for the school bank account and making withdrawals alongside the headteacher or deputy headteacher. They also mentioned

responsibilities like inspecting the quality of purchased materials, handling the procurement of materials, which is typically managed by the SMC chairperson, the treasurer, and the deputy headteacher. Their tasks involve monitoring the available SIG funds in the school accounts and ensuring that they are used to acquire teaching and learning materials for students. Additionally, they assist underprivileged students in purchasing uniforms, ensure that materials are procured within the budget, and maintain a record of all purchased items and their respective amounts in a book, as per reports from a few schools.

Only one SMC committee in a semi urban school said one of their monitoring roles is observing if teachers are teaching by using the purchased books funded by SIG, looking at the usage of text books. They also said, their monitoring role is asking learners at home if they have received the exercise book purchased using SIG funds. SMC treasurer at a certain school said:

"We monitor SIG funds by asking our children, if they have received exercise books at school since we know SIG purchased them, if learners deny, we just wonder why they have not received, if yes and we see them, we know that materials have been used for the intended purpose. Also, we ask guardians of vulnerable children if they have received the purchased uniform".

The response of participants showed that other roles were ensuring that headteachers have pasted SIG expenditures on notice board, hiring and paying local artisan. An SMC treasurer of School A said:

"The money is kept at the head teacher's office when the artisan has finished his job, we witness the payment and the local artisan and witnesses' signs in the secretary book. The deputy head teacher also records the payment in his book" (SMC treasure of School A. Interviewed on 16 August, 2023)"

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4.1.2 School Managers' Understanding of the Monitoring role of SMC Members

School managers described that the monitoring roles of School Management Committees (SMCs) encompass several responsibilities. These include ensuring the proper utilization of budgeted funds. A head teacher from School B highlighted that:

"SMCs oversee the expenditure of School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds in various projects, this involves tracking financial transactions related to SIG funds (interviewed on 5 August 2023)".

Other administrators pointed out that SMCs are involved in monitoring SIG maintenance projects. Also ensuring that funds are used in accordance with the SIG program's design. Additionally, some school administrators mentioned that SMCs play a role in procuring school materials, recruiting assistant teachers using SIG funds, verifying receipts for purchased items, reviewing quotations and other school documents, hiring local artisans and disbursing payments to them. They also supervise the procurement of materials, as emphasized by one head teacher who stated that:

"SMCs review quotations and the procurement of materials within the school (interviewed on 6 August 2023)."

Furthermore, SMCs engage in checking receipts for the purchased goods and showcasing them to parents and also participating in the development of the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

According to the findings of the first objective theme, regarding the SMCs monitoring roles in the implementation of SIG. Results revealed that, most of the SMC committees lack a comprehensive understanding of their roles in monitoring SIG. Instead, they perceive their monitoring roles as mainly showcasing purchased items to school stakeholders, supervising construction projects and adhering to SIG implementation guidelines. Neglecting important aspects like tracking fund

expenditures, checking evidence of items distributed to students, monitoring the usage of SIG-funded items and assessing and documenting the impacts of SIG funds on student performance.

These results partially support the arguments put forth by Nampota et al. (2014) that there was no systematic way of monitoring funds in schools as most schools relied on showing the materials bought to different stakeholders. These materials are 'checked' by the parents when they come to witness the distribution of materials to their children. However, the study noted that, SMCs perform well their monitoring role of monitoring construction projects. Also in semi-urban areas, School Management Committees (SMCs) play a significant role in instilling financial discipline by consistently seeking explanations from schools regarding the utilization of School Improvement Grants (SIG), as compared to rural areas. Possibly more SMCs do not know some of the monitoring roles due to insufficient content in the manual or it might happen the manual is too theoretical for the community members to grasp the content. Therefore, there is a need to modify the SIG manual content by developing and training SMCs in practical monitoring tools which will provide information in generating expenditure report, progress and impact of SIG funds.

4.1.3 SMC awareness of how SIG funds have improved education in their communities

Almost all SMCs responded that SIG has reduced absenteeism of learners in schools. One of the SMCs said previously other students who did not have uniform and teaching and learning materials were not frequently going to school but with the help of SIG most vulnerable learners are attending school. SMCs also said SIG has improved the pass rate of learners. One of the chairpersons of SMC committees said: "the school did not have textbooks in STD8 but after purchasing them more learners were selected to CDSS from 11 to 22 during primary school leaving certificate in 2022".

Most school administrators also mentioned that SIG has had a positive impact on education by reducing school drop outs and absenteeism among learners. This improvement is attributed to the school's provision of exercise books, pens, and uniforms to underprivileged students. Additionally, the construction of changing rooms for girls using SIG funds has contributed to a decrease in absenteeism. In relation to this, other school managers have observed that SIG has raised the promotion rate and lowered repetition rate among students. Furthermore, school administrators have noted that SIG has enhanced students' pass rates, as most schools have used SIG funds to acquire teaching and learning materials and install solar lights. This, in turn, has facilitated students' learning and enabled them to engage in evening studies. One of the headteachers said,

"SIG has increased pass rate due to the provision of teaching and learning materials however we buy few text books in a year sometimes only 2-3 books for the whole year due to little amount of SIG money. They give us K800,000 for the whole year according to the enrollment of students at a school". Other respondents said SIG has assisted a lot on renovating school blocks and teachers houses.

These research results partly disagree with the observation made by Gertler et al. (2012), and Beasley & Huillery (2016) which noted that devolving decision-making to the level of the school through school-based management reform does not lead directly to improved learning performance outcomes, but in turn, is expected to increase enrolment, attendance and retention and to reduce corruption within schools. The findings clearly show an aspect of relationship between the aspect of SBM through SIG and an improvement in learning outcomes. In this context, Bruns et al. (2011) argued that school-based management reform may not directly lead to improved learning outcomes but is likely to enhance accountability and responsiveness to local needs, fostering positive stakeholder engagement in educational provision. The current research findings somehow align

with the latter perspective which indicates that SMCs lead to reduced absenteeism and dropout rate among others. This implies that mostly the SMCs work as a watchdog in SIG implementation and perhaps SIG funds needs proper monitoring tools to measure its impact.

4.1.4 SMC and school managers awareness of the SMC roles in school management

All participants are aware of the roles of SMC in school management. Table 2 below presents what SMC members and School Managers said as the role of SMCs in school Management.

SMC members Understanding of the role of SMCs in School Management	School Mangers Understanding of the roles of SMCS in School Management
- Observing attendance of teachers at school - ensuring that teachers are punctual and teaching, - encouraging parents to send learners to school - Solving disputes between teachers and parents, - Making sure teachers have good houses and learners have classroom blocks and toilets at school, - making sure learners should be in uniform	- To initiate and facilitate development works at school, - to check how funds are being used at school, to monitor all the school activities, - to fundraise for school projects, - helping in monitoring school projects, - disseminating information to the community about school activities, - monitoring teaching and learning at school, - check punctuality of both teachers and learners, managing school funds

Table 1 highlights the comments made by respondents demonstrating their awareness of the role of SMC members on school management. In particular, one of the SMC members in school C has this to say: "our role is to organize sensitization meetings and encourage parents to send their learners to school. Solving disputes between teachers and parents, to make sure teachers have good houses and learners have classroom blocks and toilets at school, make sure learners should be in uniform". In addition, A certain SMC member in school D said:

"Our role is to motivate well performing learners by giving them gifts, collecting development funds for the school and teachers house maintenance fees from teachers, to check the dressing of teachers at school, to monitor the head teacher on finances at school, to make sure learners do not dropout from school".

The SMC members further said that *"we make sure mother group members are rescuing children from marriages".* To take part in development activities at school i.e. molding bricks, ferrying sand and monitoring construction.

On the other hand, one of the school managers narrated that, SMC roles in school management includes:

"*Initiating and facilitating development works at school, to check how funds are being used at school, to monitor all the school activities."*

Furthermore, another head teacher at school C said their roles are:

"*To fundraise for school projects, helping in monitoring school projects, disseminating information to the community about school activities, monitoring teaching and learning at school, check punctuality of both teachers and learners, managing school funds.*

According to the findings in the SMC roles on school management, this study has established that SMCs clearly understand their roles in school management. These findings contradict with Opande (2013) study, which observed that most of the SMC members are ignorant of their roles as far as academic matters are concerned and are unable to make appropriate decisions which can translate into better school improvements. In the Malawi context, the results differ, parents are capable of fulfilling their roles. Perhaps the committees receive thorough orientation on their responsibilities, which primarily involve adherence to guidelines rather than complex decision-making. These findings concur with a research study by Chimombo (1999) which indicated that most school committees had an understanding of their expected roles and responsibilities, which broadly corresponded with their statutory roles.

In summary, results of the first objective indicate that most of the SMC committees lack a comprehensive understanding of their roles in monitoring SIG. Instead, they primarily follow SIG implementation guidelines. They tend to believe that their primary duties involve displaying purchased items and overseeing construction project. Neglecting important aspects like tracking fund expenditures, providing evidence of item distribution to students, monitoring the usage of SIG-funded items and assessing and documenting the impacts of SIG funds on student performance. Never the less most of them understand their roles in school management.

4.2 Effectiveness of SMC in Monitoring SIG

The second objective was to evaluate the effectiveness of SMCs in monitoring SIG in primary schools under study. Results of this objective indicate that the SMC's are not functioning effectively as expected, their performance is done partially. Most of them do not have the ability or capacity to track expenditures as required, and their monitoring feedback is often disregarded by the headteachers. Some committee members struggle to comprehend the training content, thus

relying heavily on headteachers for assistance of their work, which affects the monitoring process. This is attributed to lack of education among SMC committee members, causing them to simply follow headteachers' instructions without independent functioning. Furthermore, the findings reveal that training programs at Teachers Development Centre's (TDCs) focuses on implementation of SIG funds and adhering to program guidelines. However, they do not adequately emphasize monitoring SIG fund utilization; instead, they primarily focus on showcasing items to people. Neglecting aspects such as tracking funds, its usage and impact of the funds on the ground. Nevertheless, other school managers revealed that the SMC committees help a lot in monitoring SIG funded construction projects. One theme was established under this objective, which is ability in monitoring SIG funds and providing feedback and the category of the relationship between SMCs qualifications and participation in monitoring SIG funds.

4.2.1. Ability to monitor SIG funds and Provide feedback

The majority of participants understand their ability in monitoring SIG funds and providing feedback as follows: escorting head teachers and deputy headteachers to withdraw money and to confirm the balance at the bank. Other SMC members said they monitor the expenditure of SIG if they employ a local artisan, they pay the artisan in front of committee members and document the payment. One of the SMC chairs said:

 "After the school has purchased the materials, some members of the committee check the quality of purchased goods". One SMC treasure said "*the SMC chair and treasure sometimes they check the receipt book which is under the custody of the deputy head teacher if the receipts are tallying with the expenditure.*'

Almost 4 out of 10 SMC committees said they make sure the deputy head teacher has receipt book, but they do not monitor it since they do not know how to read in English. They also check the payment vouchers and quotations if they are tallying. However, they said sometimes they differ because of inflation rate at the market and quality of the materials. In almost 5 schools others said, they just follow what the head teacher is communicating to them without checking documents. All SMC members in this study said on monitoring they just show the purchased items during the meeting they do not follow how they are distributed at school. Also, during this meeting, they explain to parents how the money was used. One of the SMC members said:

"*We achieve transparency and accountability by organizing a meeting with chiefs, other school structures committees and some parents to show them the items we have purchased and their receipts.*"

Others said they monitor SIG funds during the construction works by having an inventory book and being able to know the materials used. SMC treasurer in one of the schools said they monitor SIG by assigning some SMC members to hire a local artisan, and the few selected individuals monitor the construction works, thereafter, they brief their fellow members and pay the artisan in front of the committee members.

School managers also described the ability of SMC in monitoring SIG funds. Almost all of the school leaders said that their work is clearly seen in monitoring construction projects funded by SIG by hiring a local artisan to do the work, supervising the work and monitoring usage of construction materials. Some headteachers in semi urban schools mentioned that they check records to see if funds have really been utilized, for example, by asking if the school have distributed exercise books to learners. Other school leaders said SMCs monitoring is done partially mostly they focus on the procurement of materials, leaving out other important components such

as usage of the materials. Other head teachers said SMCs are able to monitor procured materials by checking if they have procured what they agreed in the budget and also requesting for receipts to check on funds used and issued. Some managers pointed out that SMCs have records of all materials that have been bought and names of shops where materials were purchased, though most of the times they do not record as a committee, rather, they just rely on the deputy head teacher's documents. All head teachers responded that SMCs are involved in purchasing items. Other school leaders said very few SMCs documents show how the funds are being utilized.

The findings of the theme under second objective, have unveiled that a large number of SMCs do not have the ability in monitoring SIG funds. The majority of SMCs lack proper records detailing of how funds are utilized, with limited clarification on the monitoring processes employed in most schools. These findings mirror those of the CSEC report (2017), which highlighted the absence of budget performance reports written by SMC committees and headteachers in schools. This is similar to MOE (2023) MERP facilitation notes, which uncovered the practices which lead to mismanagement of SIG in schools such as not keeping receipts and other relevant documents, poor records management, saving cash in an individual bank account, not sourcing a minimum of 3 quotations before procuring goods and services, inflating prices of goods and prices among others. Probably these issues can be handled through establishing specific timelines for conducting monitoring, such as twice per term or once per term, and developing a report on issues discovered to improve the effectiveness of SMC and SIG.

Additionally, the study outcome claim of lack of a systematic monitoring approach supports the research findings of Nampota et al. (2014) as some schools reported that their committees lack SIG records and rely on records maintained by the deputy head teacher .Contrary to these practices, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) has established guidelines, such as

the (2011) PSIP Financial guidelines, which provide schools with a matrix of SIG authorization forms and a list of records that SMCs should have to ensure transparency and accountability. Notably, all schools were instructed to establish two SMC subcommittees, namely the SMC finance subcommittee and the SMC procurement subcommittee, to facilitate effective monitoring of school funds.

According to the (2020) MOEST PSIP guidelines, the finance committee is expected to cross-check procured items against quotations and receipts. However, the study revealed that all schools under study do not have SMC subcommittees. Instead, designated officers are responsible for purchasing properties, and in most schools, this crucial monitoring role is left unfulfilled.

Furthermore, most of them do not have the ability or capacity to track expenditures as required. Some committee members struggle to comprehend the training content, thus relying heavily on headteachers for assistance of their work, which affects the monitoring process. This is attributed to lack of education among SMC committee members, causing them to simply follow headteachers' instructions without independent functioning. These study results are contradicting with the theoretical framework of the study which emphasize on choosing SMCs based on qualities of competence, skills and knowledge but from the results schools are picking everyone. This is in line with Abadzi's (2013) research, which said citizen committees in low-income nations may lack the knowledge and expertise necessary to make wise recommendations due to their low levels of education; hence, they can hardly participate in education improvements. Possibly these issues can be addressed through intensifying capacity building in record keeping, budgeting and expenditure reporting. When choosing SMC members, communities should select individuals with at least an M.S.C.E for better understanding of the content. Also simplifying the monitoring manual content for illiterate individuals, focusing solely on key issues and training them how to

fill the forms among others. Also, training them in a simplified version of auditing financial expenditures

Findings of the study on providing feedback to school leaders are that all members of the School Management Committee (SMC) mentioned that they offer feedback to the headteachers. However, the response from the Headteachers varies, ranging from positive to negative, and occasionally they simply yell at the SMC members and dismiss it. Other SMC members indicated that, in other circumstances, the headteachers do not agree with their feedback, sometimes they do not agree on priority of doing other development work. Sometimes the headteacher just dictates which development should start first, one of the SMC members said in one case, most of the SMC committee wanted to utilize funds to help students with exercise books, pens and uniform for vulnerable students, but the headteacher said SIG funds should be used to install electricity in the headteacher's and deputy head teacher's houses. Other members lamented that some headteachers do not heed the advice provided through SMC feedback on the basis that SMC members are not educated. One of the SMC treasurers said:

 "When SIG funds have been deposited in the account the money is withdrawn and the Headteacher keeps the money for a long time almost 4-6 months without purchasing materials when SMC members asks, the headteacher shouts at us and we become afraid."

One SMC member also lamented that when they are providing feedback on the attendance and punctuality of teachers, the teachers shout at the members, insulting them that they are not educated, and hence, they cannot get technical advice from illiterate people.

On providing feedback after monitoring, most school leaders said if something is wrong the SMCs provide feedback to school leaders and sometimes school leaders follow the feedback and if the

issue is difficult, they discuss it with them for their understanding. Almost all school leaders indicated that usually feedback comes after a specific activity has been done it is not a routine thing for SMCs to conduct SIG monitoring. Other school leaders said sometimes they do not agree with their feedback and the leaders explain to them how it was done. One headteacher lamented that:

"The SMCs were asking reasons why the shop of a teacher is having exercise books just like those who were bought for the children and their children have not received the books even thou the books were not enough for the entire school and few classes received them".

Other head-teachers said the SMC members do not want to participate in any school work as a result there is no feedback from them. He said:

"If I want a chairman to sign anything, I follow the chairman to his home otherwise the whole committee is dormant".

Probably, to enhance the effectiveness of School Management Committees (SMCs) monitoring feedback, it is advisable for them to adopt a standard practice of regularly participating in (SIG) monitoring, perhaps establishing routine monitoring timelines is important such as a termly basis. This involves presenting a comprehensive progress report that highlights successes, challenges, and recommendations regarding SIG funds. This recommendation aims to address the study's findings, which indicate that, in many instances, headteachers tend to disregard monitoring feedback from SMCs. Sometimes they dismiss their feedback, attributing it to lack of education, while others simply ignore their input.

4.2.2. Relationship between SMC's qualifications and participation in monitoring SIG funds

SMC members were asked their level of education. The study revealed that most of the committees comprised few people who possessed Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE). But most of the members are either J.C.E drop outs or primary school drop outs. One of the chairpersons said:

I attended school up to J.C.E level". Almost 3 treasurers of certain schools said, they dropped out school at primary level and one of them said:

"*after purchasing school items the headteacher is the one who write a summary on how funds have been spent and paste it on noticeboard since all of us here we don't know how to read and write in English.*"

Table 3 below shows a summary of education qualifications for SMC members in 8 primary schools

School	PLSE	J.C.E	M.S.C.E	Professional Certificates	Total
A	8	4	2	0	14
B	3	7	4	(1)Agriculture certificate	14
C	11	3	0	0	14
D	4	7	1	0	14

E	3	5	6	(1)Teachers training college	14
F	7	4	3	0	14
G	6	5	0	0	14
H	8	3	3	0	14

On the relationship between education levels and participation in SIG monitoring, results revealed that most SMCs who dropped out of school at primary and J.C.E level did not participate actively in monitoring SIG. One PSLE drop out committee member said,

"I often find myself attending meetings without actively contributing ideas given that other members are more competent than me".

Another one narrated that most of the decisions are made by our friends who understand English as they are the ones who comprehend and read english they also often attend meetings with the headteachers at TDC.

Another member shared their experience, noting that many decisions are influenced by their peers who were proficient in English, attended meetings with headteachers at Teacher Development Centers (TDC), and possessed a good understanding of English. A certain SMC committee chairperson expressed concern that some members do not share their ideas during meetings, and do not participate in checking records of the SMC possibly due to their limited education levels, which occasionally leads to their non-attendance at meetings. Additionally, other members suggested that educational qualifications are not the sole factor influencing active participation;

personal interest and time availability also play a significant role. Sometimes, individuals with lower educational backgrounds participate more actively than their better-educated counterparts. Nearly all headteachers agreed that most dropouts, particularly those who left after J.C.E and P.S.L.E, tend to remain silent during meetings but actively engage in construction work. They also observed that individuals with Malawi School Certificate of Education (M.S.C.E) qualifications quickly grasp training content and are more effective at instructing other committee members compared to those without such qualifications.

The study results on the relationship between SMCs qualifications and participation in monitoring SIG highlighted that, most SMCs who dropped out of school at primary and J.C.E level do not participate actively in monitoring SIG which includes making decisions. These individuals often experience intimidation from a few members proficient in English, leading them to attend most meetings with Headteachers at Teacher Development Centers. This aligns with Mbena (2005) which said duties and functions of the SMCs are undertaken by influential members who command respect and regard themselves as superior and/or the vocal members of the committee. This situation instils low self-esteem in those members who are not influential and thus renders them unable to contribute to the decisions affecting the school since they only remain observers when decisions are taken.

Mbena's argument resonates with Abadzi's (2015) viewpoint which stated that lack of education results in wrong decisions being made in the governance of schools and elite capture, where by better-educated people impose their decisions that favor their own subgroup, this excludes parents from decision-making. However, to a small extent, the study findings contradict the later findings. The results indicate that, some educated members are not committed to their work they are busy with their personal businesses leaving most of their work to illiterate people.

The study also indicates a contrast between SMC effectiveness in urban and rural areas. SMCs in urban areas are more effective than those in rural areas. In Urban areas, SMC are able to follow and analyze financial expenditures compared to rural areas as some members are a bit educated in urban areas. And if other educated members are absent on the next meeting, the low educated members are able to ask questions; hence, SIG resources are traced thereby ensuring financial discipline in these schools. These findings contrast with the earlier argument that education level directly determines SMC effectiveness. This suggests, therefore, that contextual factors such as location also play a role.

4.2.3. Assessing SMCs members knowledge on monitoring SIG

On knowledge of SIG, most chairpersons and treasurers of SMCs said that they understood the concept of SIG and its contents during training. However other committee members said they were not very sure since they just follow what the 2 members were told during trainings at TDC. One of the SMC committee members said:

"We have never been to TDC for trainings, most of the trainings targets the chairman or treasurer so we just listen to what they have been told and it is not often may be twice a year."

On knowledge of monitoring SIG funds one of the SMC treasures said:

"When we go to TDC the Primary Education Advisor (PEA) communicates to us amount of SIG which we will receive, some expenditures from SIG money for example we should not forget to include in the budget payment of examinations, hardship allowance which should be paid to teachers, if there is no female teacher SMCs should employ a volunteer teacher and also the PEA said it is the responsibility of SMC members to explain how SIG money has been used. In addition, if there is a problem at school of misuse of SIG funds SMCs are free to report to the PEA".

Other SMC committees said only the headteacher, deputy headteacher and the chairperson were trained on SIG. Other members were just oriented on how SIG money is divided and how it is used. Other SMC members said only 2 members have been trained not the whole committee.

Almost all school managers pointed out that, few of the SMC members have the knowledge of SIG and follow the content during monitoring. The rest struggle to follow due to low individual capabilities even though the trainings are done in vernacular. One of the head teachers said:

"For example, at my school only one member has an M.S.C.E certificate; the rest are dropouts from J.C.E or below".

Another school manager pointed out that SMCs have partial knowledge of SIG because sometimes they struggle to grasp the content since the information is just disseminated by a person who just attended the training but not very familiar with the content, one need to be fully trained at TDC. Other school managers said some of the content was followed while the other part was not, depending upon the level of difficulty of the content of the training.

On financial skills, all SMC members that were interviewed in this study said they did not have financial skills and that they had never been trained in financial management. They had only learnt the job of handling money through SIG as they were selected to be part of the SMC committee.

Regarding SMC knowledge on monitoring SIG, the study outcome shows that very few committee members have the knowledge of SIG and follow the content during training. This agrees with the findings by Antonowicz et al. (2010) which asserted that members of these bodies are given limited financial management training and support, which raises serious questions about their ability to fulfill their role of planning and monitoring school resources. This is an indication that most

workshops and seminars attended by SMCs do not achieve the intended purpose of equipping skills and knowledge in the implementation of SIG funds.

Furthermore, regarding knowledge of monitoring SIG funds, the study discovered that SMCs are trained on how to use the SIG funds and to abide to SIG guidelines. These findings show that most of the members do not know their monitoring roles. Probably the trainings do not emphasize on the monitoring concept. There is a need to simplify the content for less educated members and train them on records keeping and monitoring tools such as performance forms which will provide information in developing expenditure report, progress report, and impact of SIG report. Also, training them in a simplified version of auditing financial expenditures and establishing routine monitoring timelines is important.

In summary, the findings of the second objective and its themes and categories have unveiled the extent of effectiveness of school management committee members in monitoring the implementation of SIG. The study has established that the SMC's are not functioning effectively as expected, as their performance is below expectation. SMCs perform well their roles in monitoring construction projects as compared to tracking record expenditures and monitoring the impact of SIG on the ground. Also, their monitoring feedback is often disregarded by the headteachers. The study's results revealed that some headteachers dismiss their feedback, attributing it to a lack of education, while others simply ignore their input. Possibly these issues can be addressed through intensifying capacity building in transparency, accountability, budgeting and expenditure reporting. When choosing SMC members, communities should select individuals with at least an M.S.C.E for better understanding of the content. Also simplifying the monitoring manual content for illiterate individuals, focusing solely on key issues and training them how to fill the forms among others

4.3 Challenges of SMCs in monitoring SIG

This objective is finding out the challenges of SMCs in monitoring SIG in primary schools under study. The study unveiled different challenges which SMCs face on monitoring SIG. Three themes were established in this objective which are School leadership related challenges on SMC monitoring SIG, Government related challenges on monitoring SIG, SMC members related challenges on monitoring SIG.

4.3.1 School Leadership Related Challenges on SMC monitoring of SIG

SMCs were asked on challenges which they face on monitoring SIG. Some of them said the challenges sometimes come from the headteachers who are said to be   rude and they shout at members when they enquire about utilization of the project funds.   In the light of this, members are intimidated and they just keep quiet. One of the chairmen said:

"*The headteacher shouts at us when we ask him when are we going to collect SIG money since it has lasted almost 3 months in your account without spending it*". Other SMC members said when the representatives have gone to attend SIG meetings, they take long time to orient others as a result other members forget some of the content from TDC.

On school leadership challenges, most of the headteachers noted that disagreements between the committees and the school leadership lead to SMC members not fulfilling their responsibilities in various school activities, including monitoring SIG funds. The headteacher said:

 "*At my school I only know three SMC members out of 14; none of them comes when I call for a meeting to discuss utilization of the project funds. Even the chairperson, I have to go to his house every time I need something from him regarding the management of the funds*".

Regarding school leadership challenges, other SMCs said sometimes the headteachers do not distribute teaching and learning materials which are procured through SIG to learners. An SMC treasurer in one of the schools said

"Last year we purchased exercise books, pencils and pens for learners but the head did not distribute them, they are just being damaged by termites in the store room. We are afraid to ask him because when we ask about SIG, he becomes very angry and sometimes he says the problem is that we are not educated so it is difficult to question him".

Some school leaders admitted that they do not welcome the SMC's monitoring reports because they look down upon them due to their levels of education.

4.3.2 SMC Members related challenges on monitoring SIG

In nearly every interview, SMC members mentioned that one of the challenges they face on monitoring SIG is the frequent absenteeism of most members during monitoring activities or meetings. Committee members attributed this absenteeism to members' desire for financial incentives when attending meetings. However, since most of the meetings are not compensated, they opt not to attend, resulting in some members eventually leaving the committee. In addition, some members are not willing to leave their personal businesses to attend SMC meetings. During all the interviews, SMCs consistently mentioned that some members are missing from SIG monitoring activities because they suspect that the chairman, treasurer, and headteachers are misappropriating SIG funds. Consequently, these suspicions lead them to refrain from actively participating in the monitoring of SIG. One member stated that:

"Often the headteacher sends invitations to the SMC chairman and treasurer for discussions regarding SIG matters, but some of us are not included in these meetings". This exclusion has led *us to suspect that the three individuals in these key positions may be mishandling the SIG funds*".

Other SMCs said the community at large thinks SMC members misappropriate SIG money to the extent that most of the times they are insulted by other villagers, and this sometimes leads to bad relationships with other community members.

Almost all school leaders responded that some of the challenges SMCs face on monitoring SIG funds are high rate of absenteeism of SMCs. School administrators expressed their concerns, noting that this problem persists because many SMC members only attend meetings when they believe there are financial incentives involved. They clarified that this absenteeism results in lack of consistency in their record-keeping and monitoring efforts. Additionally, other headteachers said SMCs face the challenge of lacking monitoring skills and knowledge. They sometimes keep records but they do not have knowledge and skills to analyze all school documents and ask information from relevant position holders. They attributed this challenge to inadequate trainings in monitoring SIG funds. They said most of the times the trainings focus on guidelines of implementing SIG funds not monitoring.

Many headteachers admitted that there are conflicts among SMC members due to mistrust amongst each other. Because most of SIG activities involves the treasure and the chairman. In relation to this, they pointed out that another challenge is lack of trust by the community on SIG funds usage. The community feels that the SMCs with the Headteacher always misuse funds. There is a misunderstanding of some community members on how SIG funds are used. They feel the money is used to solve all problems at school. In addition, some SMCs said another problem is low quality of products purchased by schools. This situation leads to conflicts within the committee and also

creates enmity with the supplier. These conflicts arise because some members perceive those responsible for the procurement as intentionally seeking personal gains from the purchases. These findings mirrored Mestry (2004) findings which observed that there is insufficient teamwork between headteachers and school governing bodies since the headteacher is not interested in sharing the responsibility regarding school management for fear of losing power and authority in their school. However, the reason for disagreements in this current research study is also   linked to members' suspicion of mismanagement of funds on the part of SMC members, particularly the leadership.

 Furthermore, school administrators noted poor participation of community members in monitoring SIG funds. Most of the committee members do not have interest to review financial records. Often, they remain inactive leaving out the job to the chairperson or the treasurer.   School managers attributed this problem to lack of accounting skills among the members. Nearly all school administrators said almost all SMCs do not know how to track expenditures or to make a follow up of records. Some headteachers suggested that the government should set up qualifications for membership of SMC committee.

4.3.3 Government related challenges on monitoring SIG

Concerning government-related issues, SMCs have expressed that delayed disbursement of SIG funds presents a significant challenge. Consequently, the allocated funding falls short, and schools struggle with the impact of rising market inflation. One of the committee members highlighted that this inflationary trend disrupts budget planning and procurement, as the prices of many items increase on the market, leading to discrepancies between the budget and the actual cost of purchased items. Another member said:

"This also led to differences of quotations and procured receipts which brings mistrust among people and other SMC committee members".

Other members lamented on low SIG budgetary allocation to solve problems at school level. They said the funds are not enough to address the problems at school. This is similar to observations made in separate studies carried out in Kenya and Malawi by Kiprono et al. (2014), Antonowicz (2010) and Nampota et al. (2014) which indicated that the late disbursement of SIG funds poses a challenge on the implementation of SIG. The delay in releasing school funds results in schools becoming heavily indebted.

Most of the school managers said SMCs face a challenge of lack of knowledge and skills in monitoring SIG since most of the government trainings concentrate on implementation of SIG funds. This concurs with findings of a study by Mugabe (2019) which indicated that SMCs experience a number of challenges in their monitoring roles which include lack of knowledge and skills to do their monitoring work in schools, and that they also lack expertise in financial management, yet they are involved in financial budgeting, expenditures as well as financial controls. In the same line, Bah-Lalya (2003) asserted that implementation depends on the capacities, abilities, nature and degree of willingness of all the actors to respond to the challenges and expectations of their work. Overall effective management require capacities to deal with corruption and promote accountability. Possibly, this issue can be addressed through intensifying capacity building in budgeting and expenditure reporting. When selecting members for the School Management Committee (SMC), communities should ensure that individuals with at least an M.S.C.E are chosen to facilitate a better understanding of the content. While the study revealed a lack of educated members in other catchment areas, these individuals can be assisted by providing

training on monitoring SIG. This training can involve a simplified version of the content, focusing solely on key issues.

The study also unearthed the challenge of less SIG budgetary allocation to solve problems at school level. All respondents in this study said SIG funds are not enough to address the problems at school. This concurs with CSEC (2017) report which highlights that the districts found it difficult to implement all planned activities due to the low SIG budgetary allocation. Harping on the same string, Nampota et al. (2013) and Ginsburg (2014) observed that, in Malawian schools, another challenge is inadequate funding, and fluctuation of prices. SMC and headteachers said the amount of the grant was insufficient. They stressed that there were some OVCs and HIV-positive learners who were entitled to this support but they did not benefit. This brings frustrations and conflicts amongst committee members to select the beneficiaries. On the contrary, these findings disagree with Govender (2004) who observed that it is not insufficient financial resources that are a problem in providing education services, but rather the lack of the capacity to plan, budget and control the available finances that has proved to be a serious challenge faced by SMCs in effecting their mandate. Therefore, there is need to increase budget allocation for SIG and to organize effective capacity building initiatives among members, particularly on matters relating to SIG budgeting and financial management, among other areas, to ensure greater impact.

Probably all these challenges can be resolved by enhancing transparency and accountability among all members. Schools and SMCs should ensure the use of monitoring tools such as reports, inventory book, and detailed minutes that explain the rationale behind material purchases from specific shops after obtaining quotations from three different shops. Furthermore, schools should provide evidence of materials distributed to the intended beneficiaries through distribution acknowledgment forms. Headteachers are urged to cultivate a practice of involving all members

in School Improvement Grant (SIG) activities, and deliberate efforts should be made to delegate other potential members to Teacher Development Centers (TDCs) for necessary training.

4.4 Chapter Summary

The results of this study indicate that SMCs are not effectively carrying out SIG monitoring as required. Most of them do not have the ability or capacity to track expenditures as required. Some committee members struggle to comprehend the training content, thus relying heavily on headteachers for assistance of their work, which affects the monitoring process. This is attributed to lack of education among SMC committee members, causing them to simply follow headteachers' instructions without independent functioning. Furthermore, the findings reveal that training programs do not adequately emphasize monitoring SIG fund utilization; instead, they primarily focus on showcasing items to people, neglecting aspects such as tracking fund expenditures, providing evidence of item distribution to students, and assessing and documenting the impacts of SIG funds on student performance. Additionally, the research highlights conflicts within SMCs, often initiated by headteachers working closely with few selected members, resulting in suspicion and mistrust among committee members and ultimately reducing overall SMC participation. Furthermore, the study observes that many SMC members expect financial benefits from their roles, leading to high absenteeism when monetary incentives are not provided. This situation fosters collaboration between a few individuals and headteachers, undermining the monitoring of SIG expenses and potentially facilitating fund misuse. This notwithstanding, the study revealed that almost all SMCs understand their roles in school management.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations. The findings will be discussed objective by objective. The chapter has further outlined summary of contribution made by this study, and has suggested areas for further research.

5.1 Summary of the findings

This study has established that SMCs clearly understand their roles in school management. They described their roles in school management as expected such as observing attendance of teachers at school ensuring that teachers are punctual and teaching among others.

However, regarding the SMCs monitoring roles in the implementation of SIG, the findings revealed that the SMC committees lack a comprehensive understanding of their roles in monitoring SIG. They perceive their monitoring roles as mainly showcasing purchased items to school stakeholders, supervising construction projects and adhering to SIG implementation guidelines. They neglect such important aspects as tracking fund expenditures, checking evidence if items have been distributed to students, monitoring the usage of SIG-funded items, assessing and documenting the impacts of SIG funds on student performance

The study has revealed that SMCs are not functioning effectively as expected, their performance is done partially. SMCs perform well their roles on monitoring construction projects as compared to tracking record expenditures, monitoring the impact of SIG and maintaining proper documentation of funds utilization, with limited clarification on the monitoring processes

employed in most schools. Their monitoring feedback is often disregarded by the headteachers. During discussions with SMCs, it was noted that some headteachers dismiss their feedback, attributing it to lack of education, while others simply ignore their input. The study's results indicate that most school leaders receive feedback after specific activities, and it is not a standard practice for SMCs to regularly engage in SIG monitoring.

Furthermore, most of the SMCs do not have the ability or capacity to track expenditures as required. Some committee members struggle to comprehend the training content, thus relying heavily on headteachers for assistance of their work, which affects the monitoring process. This is attributed to lack of education among SMC committee members, causing them to simply follow head-teachers' instructions without independent functioning. On knowledge of monitoring SIG funds, the study discovered that SMC members are trained on how to use the SIG funds and to abide to SIG guidelines.

Research findings established a number of challenges which SMCs face on monitoring SIG, including disagreement between the SMCs and the school leadership, which leads to SMC members not fulfilling their responsibilities in various school activities. The other challenge is frequent absenteeism of most members during monitoring activities. Committee members linked this absenteeism to members' desire for financial incentives when attending meetings and head-teachers rudeness and raising their voices when questioned about SIG. Furthermore, there was lack of monitoring skills, knowledge and accounting skills among the members. They sometimes keep records but they do not have knowledge and skills to analyze all school documents to track financial records and ask information from relevant position holders. Finally, delayed disbursement of SIG funds presented a significant challenge.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study shed light on assessing the role of SMC in monitoring SIG in Mzimba north public primary schools. The study successfully accomplished all its objectives, and the results were systematically recorded corresponding to each objective. Concerning the first objective of describing SMC roles in school management and monitoring SIG. The findings highlighted that SMCs are actively engaged in overseeing various aspects of school management, including teacher attendance, infrastructure and many more. In general, they demonstrate a clear understanding of their roles in school management. However, a significant gap was identified in their understanding of their roles in monitoring SIG implementation. The study revealed that SMCs generally lack a comprehensive understanding of their monitoring roles in SIG implementation. They often rely on showcasing purchased items, supervising construction SIG projects and following guidelines rather than actively tracking fund expenditures, ensuring proper distribution of items, and assessing the impact of SIG funds on student performance. There is need to develop practical monitoring tools to track the efficiency of SIG which will help them to write reports to enhance transparency and accountability in the utilization of SIG funds.

Furthermore, the study pointed out that the awareness of SMCs about the positive impacts of SIG funds on education in their communities was evident, with reported improvements in attendance, dropout rates, promotion rates, and overall student performance. However, monitoring needs to be done on utilization of SIG materials and this concept also clarifies the implementation of school-based management policy on the ground. This provides a clear picture that SMCs serve as watchdogs in SIG implementation.

In relation to the second objective of evaluation of SMC effectiveness in monitoring SIG funds, the study found that SMCs are not functioning effectively as expected, their performance is done

partially. SSSS Headteachers often disregard their feedback, and there is a lack of standard practices for regular SMC engagement in monitoring activities. The study also highlighted the lack of monitoring skills and knowledge which results in failure to track expenditures and documents as required, and poor participation in monitoring SIG funds. Some committee members struggle to comprehend the training content, thus relying heavily on headteachers for assistance of their work, which affects the monitoring process. This is attributed to lack of education among SMC committee members. The study, suggested a number of solutions to address these problems. These solutions include: the need for book keeping and budgeting capacity-building initiatives; simplifying the version of the content to focus solely on key issues for illiterate members; having monitoring tools such as budget expenditure reports, stores inventory book, and detailed minutes that explain the rationale behind material purchases; establishing a standard practice for SMCs to regularly engage in SIG monitoring such as once per term; and, developing monitoring tools such as performance forms.

The challenges faced by SMCs in monitoring SIG funds were multifaceted. Disagreements between SMCs and school leadership, frequent absenteeism, lack of monitoring skills, knowledge and lack of accounting skills were identified as significant problems. Additionally, delayed disbursement of SIG funds and insufficient budgetary allocations were reported as challenges affecting the implementation of planned activities. The study highlighted that these problems can be rectified by enhancing transparency and accountability among all members through development of monitoring tools such as budget expenditure reports, stores inventory book, and detailed minutes that explain the rationale behind material purchases. schools should provide evidence of materials distributed to the intended beneficiaries through distribution acknowledgment forms. Headteachers are urged to cultivate a practice of involving all members in School Improvement Grant (SIG) activities, and deliberate efforts should be made to delegate

other potential members to Teacher Development Centers (TDCs) for necessary training, timely disbursement of SIG funds and an increase in budgetary allocations to maximize the impact of SIG on school improvement

5.3 Contributions made by the study:

The outcome of this study is of significant value to education policy makers and administrators at government level as it provides information on gaps in monitoring SIG funds. This will enable them to revisit and revise the school grant policies which are not followed to promote effectiveness in the implementation of the SIG funds and PSIP program.

The study unveiled challenges that SMCs face in monitoring SIG, and it has provided valuable recommendations to the Ministry of Education and schools at large on how to resolve these challenges. This will help them to make capacity-building efforts for more effective school governance.

This study will help SMCs to benchmark their understanding in SIG monitoring roles and to develop strategies to improve in monitoring SIG thereby enhancing their management skills at school.

The study highlights that, despite the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology providing guidelines for SIG implementation, there is a discrepancy in their application at the school level Many schools reported not having the recommended subcommittees in SMC body, which raises questions on the compliance of guidelines. Therefore, the study will provide a platform to the Ministry to evaluate compliance issues on SIG funds at school level.

It must be noted that other schools have dormant SMCs, to the extent that headteachers do not know committee members except the chairperson, which leaves room to headteachers and staff members to control the SIG funds. This will help school managers to devise proper strategies of implementing the SIG program at school level.

5.4 Recommendations

> **To Ministry of Education**

1. Government should develop practical monitoring tools to measure the progress and impact of SIG funds such as checklist, template for monitoring report and different observation forms such as annual performance forms and distribution forms.

2. Government should simplify the training content for easy grasping of content among members with low education levels.

3. The government should coordinate capacity-building initiatives, especially for committee members with lower education levels on SIG monitoring focusing on book keeping, financial management budget planning and monitoring of financial expenditures.

4. The study advocates for timely disbursement of SIG funds and an increase in budgetary allocations to maximize the impact of SIG on school improvement.

5. The government should put in place the minimum level of knowledge and skills with a bias in financial management for one to be elected a member of SMC. This helps in budgeting for the school resources, controlling expenditures, ensuring essential facilities are place and this promotes teaching and learning for better education outcome.

> **To Schools**

1. Schools should enhance transparency and accountability to all SMC members, school stakeholders and community, and ensure the use of monitoring tools such as budget

expenditure reports, minutes, inventory books, distribution acknowledgment and performance forms for efficiency of SIG expenditures.

2. Schools should engage all SMC members when implementing the SIG projects as prescribed in the guidelines, rather than involve few selected individuals. Management may consider delegating responsibilities to member wherever possible.

3. School management should consider empowering SMCs to effectively monitor SIG funds and to take corrective actions on issues raised during monitoring for the betterment of education in their communities.

➢ **To SMCs**

1. SMCs should enhance transparency and accountability among relevant stakeholders and the community members and ensure that monitoring tools such as budget expenditure reports, minutes, inventory books, distribution acknowledgment and performance forms are developed and put to use as recommended to bolster efficiency of the SIG procurement system.

2. It should be a standard practice for SMCs to regularly engage in SIG monitoring such as once per term.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

Further research could look at studying the following:

- Assessing the implementation of school grants in Malawi.

- Evaluating the effectiveness of school-based management policy in Malawi.

- This research can alternatively employ either quantitative or qualitative methodologies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Open Ended Questions for Headteachers and Teachers

Dear participant,

My name is **Temwa Mkandawire**, a student at Mzuzu University. I am carrying out research on **"Assessing the Role of School Management Committees in Monitoring School Improvement Grant in Mzimba North District Public Primary Schools***"*. This research study is a requirement for Masters of Education (Leadership and Management) and the findings will be used for academic purposes. I humbly request you to fill this questionnaire honestly. The information that will be gathered from you will be confidential and solely for academic purposes.

Instructions:

- Do not write your name on a questionnaire
- Provide your responses on the spaces provided
- Do not share your responses with anyone except the researcher

Part A: Personal Information

Sex: Male   [ ]   Female   [ ]

Age Range:

    a. Below 20
    b. 21 - 25   [ ]
    c. 26 - 30   [ ]
    d. 31 - 35   [ ]
    e. Above 36   [ ]

Qualifications

    - Certificate   [ ]
    - Grade   [ ]

PART B: MEMBERSHIP OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

As school managers/teachers you work with school management committees at this school, which among other things are involved in monitoring the implementation of SIG Funds.

1   What are some of the qualifications which are used when choosing SMC members?

-

_____

_____

2   What qualifications do SMC members at your school have?

_____

_____

3   Have the SMC members ever been trained on financial management of SIG? If yes, how many times?

_____

_____

4   What are the roles of SMCs in:

    a.   school management?

_____

_____

    b.   in monitoring the implementation of SIG?

_____

_____

PART C: ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SIG FUNDS

5   In your opinion do SMS members manage to implement their roles of monitoring SIG Funds as required? Explain your answer

_____

_____

6 Can you explain in detail, how SMC's monitor the implementation of SIG funds?

_____

_____

7 Do they provide any feedback after monitoring SIG expenditures? If yes, do you follow their recommendations?

_____

_____

8 Are they able to follow the content of the training and use it during financial monitoring?

_____

_____

9 What challenges do SMC's face in monitoring SIG funds?

_____

_____

10 What do you think should be done to deal with these challenges so that the SMC members effectively play their role of monitoring SIG funds?

_____

_____

11 How has SIG improved your education at this school?

_____

_____

12 Any other comment?

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE
THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

Appendix II: Semi-structured interview guide for school management committee members

Dear participant,

My name is **Temwa Mkandawire**, a student at Mzuzu University. I am carrying out research on **"Assessing the Role of School Management Committees in Monitoring School Improvement Grant in Mzimba North District Public Primary Schools"**. This research study is a requirement for Masters of Education (Leadership and Management) and the findings will be used for academic purposes. I humbly request you to respond honestly during this interview. The information that will be gathered from you will be confidential and solely for academic purposes.

Instructions:

- Do not mention your names
- Respect the views of any participant during the discussion
- Do not share your responses with anyone except the researcher

Part A: Personal Information

Sex: Male   [ ]   Female   [ ]

Age Range:

    f. Below 20
    g. 21 - 25   [ ]
    h. 26 - 30   [ ]
    i. 31 - 35   [ ]
    j. Above 36   [ ]

PART B: SMC ROLES IN MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SIG

1. What are your roles in school management and implementation of SIG?
2. In your opinion explain your monitoring roles?
3. How do you monitor SIG funds? (Expenditure and procurement process
4. Mention the monitoring tools which you use when monitoring SIG?

5. Do you provide any feedback after monitoring SIG expenditures? If yes does the headteacher and management team follow your recommendations?

6. Have you ever been trained in financial management? How many times?

7. Do you grasp the content of financial management during trainings? if not why?

8. After the training, do you use the skills and knowledge which you gained from training? If not why? If yes was there any improvement of work?

9. How far did you go with your education?

10. What are the challenges which you face when monitoring SIG funds

11. What do you wish should be done for you to effectively paly your role of monitoring the implementation of SIG?

12. How has SIG improved education at this school

13. Any other comment?

END OF INTERVIEWS

THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

Semi-structured interview guide for school management committee members tumbuka version

Wakutemweka wapapi,

Zina lane ndine **Temwa Mkandawire**, mwana wa sukulu wapa Mzuzu University nkhupanga kafukufuku "**na umo wa papapi wamu komiti ya SMC wakulondozgera ndalama za SIG**". Kafukufuku uwu watolengepo lwande kovwira pa masambilo ghane. Ivo nisangenge nigwiliskilenge ntchito pa masambiro ghane pera. Nkhumupemphani kuti muwe wakumasuka ndipo muzgolenge mwawunenesko pavakudumbirana vithu. Vyose ivo muyowoyenge viwenge vya chisisi ndipo vyamugwiliskika ntchito pakulemba waka vyamasambiro ghane.

Vyakulondezga pa vidumbilano vithu:

1. Kuzunura zina linu yayi
2. Tipereke ntchindi ku maganizo ya mnyithu
3. Kukadumbiskana namnyake cha. Nkhani yimalire penepano

Gawo lakwamba: Kumanya wapapi awo walipo

Wanakazi: [   ]   Wanalume [   ]

Vyaka vyawo

k. Vyakuchepera 20   [ ]

l. 21 - 25   [ ]

m. 26 - 30   [ ]

n. 31 - 35   [ ]

Vyakulutilira 36   [ ]

Gawo lachiwiri: Ntchito za komiti ya SMC pakayendeskero ka sukulu na ndalama za SIG

1. Ntchito yinu pakuyendeska school napakuyendeska ndalama za SIG nivichi?
2. Mumaghanoghano yinu, yowoyani naumo mukulondezgera ndalama za SIG?
3. Niphalireni vida ivo mukugwiriska ntchito pakayendeskero ka ndalama za SIG?
4. Mukugwiriska nthowa wuli pakayendeskero ka ndalama za SIG?
5. Mukupereka wupangiri winu kwa a head pala mwamala kalondolondo winu? Pala mwapereka a head wakulondezga panyake yayi?
6. Muli kupokelapo masambilo ya kayendeskero ka ndalama za SIG? Pala enya kalinga?
7. Mukupulikiska pala wakusambizga vya kayendeskero ka ndalama za SIG? Pala yayi chifukwa? Pala enya vikuwovwira uli pa ntchito yinu?
8. Mukuwona vichi mwa munthu kuti wasoleke mu komiti ya SMC
9. Sukulu muli kulekezga mphani?
10. Mukukumana namasuzgo wuli pala mukupanga kafukufuku wa SIG
11. Mungamazga wuli masuzgo agha
12. Kasi ndalama za SIG zamupindulilani wuli pa masambiro ya pa school pano?
13. Muna chakuyowoyapo chilichose?

Yewo chomene, nawonga pakutolapo lwande kunizgola mafumbo agha.

Appendix: III Informed Consent Form

Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC)

Informed Consent Form for Research in
Masters of Education in Leadership and Management

Introduction

I am **Temwa Mkandawire**, a Master of Education in Leadership and Management student from Mzuzu University**.** I am doing research titled *"Assessing the Role of School Management Committees in Monitoring School Improvement Grant in Mzimba North District Public Primary Schools"*. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them to me.

Purpose of the research

This research aims to assess SMCs roles in monitoring the implementation of SIG funds in 4 public primary schools of Mzimba North District Education

Type of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in answering a questionnaire/interview questions.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are one of the headteachers or SMC members or teachers in management team at Mzimba North Education Office.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate nothing will change. You may skip any question and move on to the next question.

Duration

The research may take a period of about 1 month from June 2023.

Risks

You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview/survey if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

Sharing the Results

The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared with you and your community before it is made widely available to the public. Following, we will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact: Ms. Temwa Mkandawire. Phone (+265) 881617880/ 991219721.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find about more about the Committee, contact Mr. Gift Mbwele, Mzuzu University Research Ethics (MZUNIREC) Administrator, Mzuzu University, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2, Phone: 0999404008/0888641486

Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in research about " "

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to *"Assessing the Role of School* **Management Committees in Monitoring School Improvement Grant in Mzimba North District Public Primary Schools** *"*. **me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study**

Print Name of Participant: ....
Signature of Participant ....
Date:
                              Day/month/year

If illiterate [1]

---

[1] A literate witness must sign (if possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team). Participants who are illiterate should include their thumb print as well.

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Print name of witness_____   **Thumb print of participant**

Signature of witness   _____

Date _____

        Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the research project. I confirm the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent

Date _____

        Day/month/year

Appendix IV: Letter of Introduction

Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
L u w i n g a
M z u z u   2
M A L A W I

Tel: (265) 01 320 575/722
Fax: (265) 01 320 568
mdolo.mm@mzuni,ac.mw

MZUZU UNIVERSITY

Department of Teaching, Learning and Curriculum Studies

8th May 2023

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION: MS TEMWA MKANDAWIRE

Ms Temwa Mkandawire is a registered Master of Education (Leadership and Management) Program student at Mzuzu University. She has been cleared by the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) to collect data for the research study she is conducting as a requirement for the program.

Kindly assist her accordingly.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Margaret M. Mdolo
Program Coordinator

Appendix V; Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee Letter of Approval

<table>
<tr><td>MZUZU UNIVERSITY
DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH</td><td>Mzuzu University
Private Bag 201
L u w i n g a
M z u z u   2
M A L A W I
TEL: 01 320 722
FAX: 01 320 648</td></tr>
</table>

MZUZU UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (MZUNIREC)

Ref No: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/44   **08/05/2023.**

Temwa Mkandawire,

Mzuzu University,

P/Bag 201, Luwinga,

Mzuzu 2.

temwamkandawire@gmail.com

Dear Temwa,

RESEARCH ETHICS AND REGULATORY APPROVAL AND PERMIT FOR PROTOCOL REF NO: MZUNIREC/DOR/23/44: ASSESSING THE ROLE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN MONITORING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT IN MZIMBA NORTH DISTRICT'S PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

Having satisfied all the relevant ethical and regulatory requirements, I am pleased to inform you that the above referred research protocol has officially been approved. You are now permitted to proceed with its implementation. Should there be any amendments to the approved protocol in the course of implementing it, you shall be required to seek approval of such amendments before implementation of the same.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of issuance of this approval. If the study goes beyond one year, an annual approval for continuation shall be required to be sought from the Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee (MZUNIREC) in a format that is available at the Secretariat. Once the study is finalised, you are required to furnish the Committee with a final report of the study. The Committee reserves the right to carry out compliance inspection of this approved protocol at any time as may be deemed by it. As such, you are expected to properly maintain all study documents including consent forms.

 Committee Address:

Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2; Email address: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw

Wishing you a successful implementation of your study.

Yours Sincerely,

Gift Mbwele

SENIOR RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATOR

For: CHAIRMAN OF MZUNIRECommittee Address: *Secretariat, Mzuzu University Research Ethics Committee, P/Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2; Email address: mzunirec@mzuni.ac.mw*