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**FIVE COLLEGE
DEPOSITORY**

ANALYSIS OF A COMPLEX POLICY DOMAIN: ACCESS TO SECONDARY
EDUCATION IN MALAWI

A Dissertation Presented

by

SAMSON L. W. MACJESSIE-MBEWE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2004

Policy and Leadership Program

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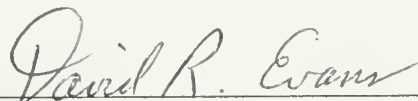
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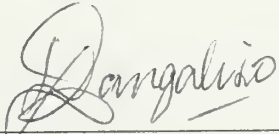
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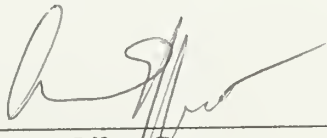
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DEDICATION

To my sister Ruth who predicted of my future before she died, and my sons: Nyasha who was born during my studies, and Emmanuel who learned to take care of his little brother during my studies.

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I would like to sincerely thank my advisor, Gretchen B. Rossman, for her thoughtful, patient guidance and support throughout my studies. I would also like to extend my heart-felt gratitude to the members of my committee, David R. Evans and Mzamo P. Mangaliso who, cordially with my advisor, offered helpful comments and suggestions on all stages of this project. Their friendship and selfless contribution to my professional development have been invaluable and will forever be appreciated.

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A special thanks to my wife Sophie, my sons Emmanuel and Nyasha for their patience and moral support when the going got tough.

ABSTRACT

ANALYSIS OF A COMPLEX POLICY DOMAIN: ACCESS TO SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MALAWI

MAY 2004

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As in other developing countries, students' access to secondary education in Malawi has been a growing problem. Yet secondary education is crucial for human resource development. That is, the way people are allocated into the educational ladder directly influences human capacity building. This study analyzed how policies constrain the transition of rural primary school students to secondary school. The study answered two major questions: what do standard eight (grade eight) repetition, selection, and community day secondary school policies mean to teachers, students and parents? And what is the relationship between standard eight repetition, knowledge of the policies, and students' aspirations for secondary education? These questions were explored through a concurrent mixed methods design. Using purposeful sampling, data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaire, and document review.

The results suggest that secondary school selection at standard eight is problematic and that participants showed ignorance of the policies guiding the selection process. Consequently, they behaved contrary to the policies' demands by encouraging students who are not selected to repeat, hence affecting their access to secondary education. Assessing repetition and selection policies, participants felt the policies are not beneficial because students' repetition does not necessarily result from the students' own problems. In addition, implementation of the policies was found to be negatively affected by failure to track repeaters in the education system. It was also found that policy communication to rural schools is not effective and there is lack of grassroots stakeholder participation in the policy formation process. As a result, participants felt powerless to influence policy change. Because of the many problems in rural areas, participants felt rural schools should have special policies to facilitate students' access to secondary education.

On the conversion of Distance Education Centers to Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs), participants felt the conversion did not solve pre-existing problems and has decreased students' access to secondary education. CDSSs still offer low quality education and the communities are not empowered to run them. Due to problems in CDSSs and rural areas, participants requested the government to help their children attend better conventional schools with boarding facilities, qualified teachers, and adequate resources. The study ends with policy recommendations.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

CDSS	Community Day Secondary School
DEC	Distance Education Center
DEM	District Education Manager
EDM	Education Division Manager
GABLE	Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education
GNP	Gross National Product
HSR	High Selection Rate
JCE	Junior Certificate Examination
LSR	Low Selection Rate
MANEB	Malawi National Examinations Board
MCDE	Malawi College of Distance Education
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
PEA	Primary Education Advisor
PPS	Pupils' Promotion Status
PSLCE	Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination
PTA	Parents' and Teachers' Association
US	United States

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of teachers, students and parents on the complexities of standard eight repetition, selection and community day secondary school (CDSS) policies and the impact of these policies on rural students' access to secondary education in Malawi. Therefore, this chapter presents the background, the overview and the conceptual framework of the study. The elements discussed in the conceptual framework are the research problem, purpose, significance and limitations of the study.

Background

As a background, this section briefly presents the geography and population of Malawi, socio-economic context and the education structure, mainly pertaining to the primary education sector.

Geography and Population of Malawi

Malawi is one of the developing countries, which is landlocked and lies to the south of the equator in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country is administratively divided into three regions: the Northern, Central and Southern regions. Each region is further divided into districts. There are twenty-seven districts in all. That is, six districts are in the Northern region, nine are in the Central region and twelve are in the Southern region. The Northern and Central regions have one major city each and the Southern region has one major city and one municipality. However, almost each district has some towns and every district headquarters is located to a town of some kind.

According to the National Statistical Office (2002, p. 3) survey, the population of Malawi is estimated at 12 .0 million. 10.9 million (91%) people are said to live in rural areas and only 1.1 million (9%) are said to live in main urban areas of Blantyre city, Lilongwe city, Mzuzu city and Zomba Municipality. In addition, the survey indicated that about 12%, 42% and 46% of the population live in the Northern, Central and Southern regions respectively. The sex distribution showed that there are 5.9 million (49%) males and 6.2 million (51%) females in Malawi.

The population of Malawi is largely consisted of young people. According to the Malawi Education Report (n.d., p. 1), half of Malawi population are under 18 and therefore of school going age. In addition, the National Statistical Office (2002, p. 3) survey found that 45% of the population are children aged under 15 years, 51% are people aged between 15-64 years and 4% are aged 65 years and above. The National Statistical Office Survey further observed that the age structure of the population in rural areas is similar to that of Malawi as a whole but in urban areas, 41% of the population are aged under 15 years, 58% are aged between 15-64 years and 1.3% are aged 65 years and above. The survey also indicated that about a quarter of the households are female headed and the proportion of female-headed households is higher in rural areas (27%) than it is in urban areas (13%) (National Statistical Office, 2002, p. 3).

Socio-Economic Context

In Malawi as a whole, it was found that 59% of household heads are subsistence farmers and 15% are employed in a private sector doing formal or informal work. In addition, about 11% are self employed and 6% worked as public servants (National Statistical Office, 2002, p. 8). However, a big difference was observed between rural and

urban heads of households regarding the socioeconomic sectors they belong to. It was indicated that 20% of the heads of households in urban area work as public servants and only 5% of the rural counterparts are in public service. Furthermore, 12% of the rural household heads are employed in the private sector compared to 45% of the household heads in the urban area (National Statistical Office, 2002, p. 8). The pattern of employment therefore showed that about 38% of the population aged 5 years and above in the urban areas are employed while in the rural area, about 13% only are employed (National Statistical Office, 2002, p. 18). According to the Education Status Report (n.d., p. 1), the GNP per capita income for 1997/98 was US\$210 and the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2000) stated that 91.3% of the poor and 91.5% of the ultra poor live in rural areas. Therefore, rural areas in Malawi are poorer than urban areas.

The National Statistical Office (2002, p. 10) survey further indicated that adult literacy rate in Malawi stands at 61%. Adult literacy was defined as “the ability of the persons aged 15 years or more to read and write a simple statement in any language” (National Statistical Office, 2002, p. 10). The male adult literacy rate is about 74% and the rate for females is 49%. According to the survey, adult literacy levels are significantly higher in urban areas (91%) than they are in rural areas (59%).

Education Structure

Education in Malawi is now in a process of being decentralized. From the Ministry headquarters, the authority is devolved to division offices. There are five education divisions in Malawi. In the Southern region, there are three divisions: Southeast Education Division whose office is located at Zomba district headquarters; Southwest Education Division with an office in Blantyre city; and Shire Highlands

Education Division whose office is located at Mulanje district headquarters. In the Central region, there are two education divisions: Central West Education Division that has an office in Lilongwe city and Central East Education Division with an office at Kasungu district headquarters. Finally in the Northern region, there is one division called North Education Division whose central office is in Mzuzu city. An Education Division Manager (EDM) heads each division office. In addition, under each education division, there are a number of districts and in each district there is a district education office headed by a District Education Manager (DEM). In each district, education is further divided into zones. An education zone is composed of a number of primary schools and its central office is a teachers' development center (TDC), which is headed by a primary education advisor (PEA).

The system of education in Malawi is 8-4-4, that is, 8 years of primary, 4 years of secondary and at least 4 years of tertiary. For students to move from one level to another, for instance from primary level to secondary level, they have to write national examinations and be selected to the next level. Primary education is divided into infant section (standard 1 to 2), junior section (from standard 3 to 5), and senior section (from standard 6 to 8). At the end of primary cycle, when students reach standard eight, they take primary school leaving certificate examination (PSLCE) which when they pass they receive a primary school leaving certificate (PSLC) and, the few who pass very highly are selected to secondary schools. Public secondary schools are in three major categories. There are national secondary schools, which take students from all over the country, district secondary schools that are just for the children in that district, and community day

secondary schools (CDSSs) that cater for children who come from villages surrounding the school.

As is the case in other countries in Africa, Malawi has been trying to address issues of access, quality and equity in the education system especially at primary level. One of such attempts was made in 1994 when the government introduced free primary education to address the problems of access and equity. Consequently, the primary enrolment almost doubled. Nevertheless, because there were fewer places in secondary schools, only 23% of the students who were in standard eight were able to go to secondary school even though many more passed the PSLCE. While in the past those who failed to go to secondary school used to either repeat standard eight in order to have a second chance of being selected to secondary school or go to distance education centers (DECs) which provided alternative routes for secondary education, the Malawi government through the Ministry of Education later on introduced policies that were aimed to discourage students from repeating standard eight. And again, the government converted the DECs to CDSSs and introduced selection policy to CDSSs. These problems led to the need to conduct this study in order to understand rural students', teachers' and parents' perceptions of the policies and access of rural children to secondary education.

Study Overview

The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study was to better understand the complex problems of repetition, selection and community day secondary school (CDSS) policies and rural students' access to secondary education. The two broad research questions the study has attempted to answer are: (1) what do standard eight repetition,

selection and CDSS policies mean to rural primary school teachers, standard eight students and parents? (2) What is the relationship between standard eight repetition, knowledge of the policies, and students' aspiration for secondary school education?

This study is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, it may help policy makers to formulate policies that will increase rural children's participation in secondary education. Secondly, it may help the Malawi government to think of the type of alternative educational activities that will help rural primary school graduates who fail to be selected to secondary school. Thirdly, this study acted as a way of giving chance to students, teachers and parents at grassroots level to communicate their policy needs and reactions to the policy makers. Fourthly, this study acted as a policy learning to those rural students, teachers and parents who were not aware of policy issues studied in this investigation. Finally, this study will act as one way of contributing to the literature about educational policies in Malawi.

The overall approach for this study was concurrent mixed methods design. Both qualitative and quantitative procedures were used in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The setting of interest was rural primary schools purposively sampled from two districts in the southern region of Malawi. The population of interest was rural primary school teachers, standard eight students and parents. The study followed a backward mapping approach of policy analysis, which started looking at the policies from the grassroots stakeholders. To access these participants, permission was sought from all gatekeepers, and oral informed consent was sought from teachers, students and parents because this was one of the effective ways of getting people to participate according to the Malawian culture.

Purposive sampling was the major sampling procedure used to identify participants in this study.

In data collection, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. In qualitative procedure, the main data collection methods used were in-depth one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews. In quantitative methods, a questionnaire survey was used to collect data. Furthermore, document review was also done to supplement both qualitative and quantitative data.

Data analysis in this study was done separately within each method. Within the qualitative method, data were analyzed following the process of organizing them, reading and re-reading the interview transcripts for familiarity, generating themes and categories, coding data using the themes and categories and interpreting data through analytic memos. Within the quantitative method, data were analyzed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) computer software.

Other issues that were considered in the study were privacy and confidentiality of the participants, ethical issues, avoiding deception, respecting the norms of the participants and understanding my own subjectivities.

Having given the overview, the following section will present the detailed conceptual framework of the study.

The Conceptual Framework

In this section, the conceptual framework of the study is presented. The elements discussed in the framework are: research problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study and limitations.

Research Problem

The problem of primary education in Africa has been a historical phenomenon. That is to say, education in Africa has been facing problems of access, quality, equity and relevance. Most of the African countries, when they got independence, inherited the system of education from their colonial “masters”. According to Bude (1985), in the 1950s and 60s, education was seen as a key to political, social and economic development in these newly independent nations. As a result, the education system inherited from the colonial powers was expanded to achieve the goal of mass education and also to train nationals to replace the colonial specialists (Bude, 1985). However, as reported by Bude, little time was devoted to assess if educational policies and the knowledge taught in schools were relevant to the needs of these nations.

Nevertheless in 1961, African Ministers met at a conference for education in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where they agreed to provide all children between six and fourteen years of age access to education in their nations. However, despite the efforts made by the nationals and donor community to expand the capacity of formal education sector, it was reported that by 1970 it was clear that reaching the intended goals was not possible (Bude, 1985). Later in 1990, delegates from 155 countries met in Jomtien, Thailand, where they adopted the world declaration on Education for All (Malawi Ministry of Education & UNICEF, 1998). The framework of action that was adopted at this conference to address the needs of all children aged 0-18 covered areas like early childhood care, universal access to and completion of primary education, improvement in learning achievement, reduction of adult illiteracy, expansion of basic education and training for youth and adults, and increased acquisition of knowledge, skills and values

by individuals and families for better living (Malawi Ministry of Education & UNICEF, 1998).

Like in other African countries, British missionaries started formal education in Malawi, then Nyasaland, in 1875. The major aim of missionary education was to make African children literate so that they could read the Bible and spread the word of God and the benefits of civilized western life (Cameron & Hurst, 1983). However, since the Christian missionaries believed that “idleness leads to vice,” they trained some Malawians to become agriculturalists and craftsmen for them to have steady occupation (Banda, 1982, p. 42).

According to Kadzamira and Chibwana (1999, p. 7), following the Phelps Stokes Commission’s recommendation that there should be co-ordination and supervision of the missions’ education efforts and the need to redesign the curriculum that was overloaded with evangelism, the colonial government established the department of education to oversee education in the country in 1926. Nevertheless, the major changes in primary education in Malawi occurred when the colonial government began to actively be involved in education and the introduction of secondary education policy in 1940. As observed by Banda (1982), since education in England had begun to take a different shape during and after the world war, there was pressure from the colonial office in London to redesign the type of education offered in their colonies. However, the redesign was made without the involvement of the people who would be consumers of the education in Malawi, as such, education continued to follow foreign policies. This development therefore made education in Malawi to reflect that of the British system, far removed from the needs of the local communities and rural areas in particular. Secondly,

the establishment of secondary education policy influenced other changes in the primary education system. Since there was an urgent need to establish criteria for selecting students from primary school to secondary school, Kadzamira and Chibwana (1999, p. 7) observed that the colonial government established a “centrally organized examination system” and “set standards for curriculum content so that all pupils could have equal chances of competing in final examinations at primary level,” hence making it more academic, selective and exam oriented.

In 1964 when the Malawi government became independent, there was a great need to educate Malawians in order to promote social and economic development of the country and, consequently, the Malawi government increased the number of primary schools to enable more children access to education (Lumphenzi-Banda, 1990). However, Hauya (1991) pointed out that in 1964 Malawi inherited a foreign type of education that was not suitable to her local needs. He further emphasized that the adopted system was still alien, selective and elitist. Consequently, access to education was limited to the few elite, hence marginalizing most poor people who mainly lived in rural areas.

Since 1964, there has been a lot of progress witnessed in the primary education sector in Malawi. Policies to improve access, quality and equity have been introduced and the process of reforming curriculum to meet the socio-economic needs of the country has been initiated.

One of such policies introduced in 1994 by the Malawi government was free primary education. The aims of the policy were to increase access, eliminate inequalities and build a strong socio-economic base and enhance civic education on the social and economic benefits of education at the community level (Malawi Ministry of Education &

UNICEF, 1998). The implementation of this policy resulted into an enrollment increase of 2.9 million children in 1994/95 academic year from 1.9 million in 1993/94 (Malawi Ministry of Education & UNICEF, 1998). However, these children could not be accommodated in the available places in secondary schools later since, according to the report from the 7.00 am news bulletin on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) radio 1 on June 27, 2002, there were 300,000 pupils in standard eight who were competing for 70,000 secondary school places in Malawi in that year. This translated to only 23% of the standard eight students who were assured of going to secondary school. One wonders then what had befallen the remaining 77% and who was accountable for them? How did they continue with their education? Therefore it was important to conduct this study in order to inform policy makers on how this scenario affects students' access to further education.

While the Malawi government was struggling thinking how she would account for the large number of students finishing standard eight, another policy was introduced which further seemed to have an impact on these primary graduates' access to secondary education. This policy was the introduction of Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSSs) from the old Distance Education Centers (DECs). In the past, when students passed the PSLCE at standard eight but failed to be selected to secondary school, they sought secondary education through DECs where students did not need to be selected to attend. DECs were operating under the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) that was deliberately established in 1965 as an alternative route to formal secondary school education (Chirwa & Mwanjabe, 1990). The college never limited the number of

students to be enrolled in DEC's, and it was up to the individual centers to decide the number of students to admit (Mwanjabe, 1992).

However, in 1998 DEC's were converted to CDSS's (Malawi Ministry of Education, 2002). The purpose of converting DEC's to CDSS's was to unify secondary education and improve quality in CDSS's (Kuthemba Mwale, 2000). This conversion meant that DEC's would be run like other conventional secondary schools. That is, controlling the number of enrollees and introducing primary school selection to these CDSS's. Chakwera's (n.d.) pilot study on teachers and parents' perceptions of the CDSS policy for educational quality improvement concluded that still the quality in CDSS's was considered low and the communities felt they had been deprived of ownership of the schools. Furthermore, Chakwera found that the introduction of selection among other things had reduced enrollment in CDSS's and teachers' authority to control admission had been taken away from them. There was therefore need to take up this study at a larger scale and uncover what teachers, parents and students in rural schools thought of the effects of this conversion and its related policies on students' access to secondary education.

As if that was not enough, other policies that pertained to issues of repetition and selection, especially at standard eight, had also been enacted. In the past, when children failed to go to secondary school, instead of going to DEC's for their secondary education, some of them used to repeat standard eight in order to increase their chances of being selected. However, when the government of Malawi realized that repetition was not cost effective, they introduced policies that aimed at reducing repetition. According to Brandon, Davison and Williams (1994, p. 37), in an effort to reduce repetition, the

Malawi government and the World Bank agreed to allocate form one places according to the following policies beginning 1992/93: 75% of form one places to go to pupils who have not repeated standard eight; 20% of form one places to go to pupils who have repeated standard eight once; and 5% of form one places to go to pupils who have repeated standard eight two or more times. If students are discouraged to repeat, what alternatives have been put in place for them to go on with their education? Furthermore, Wolf, Lang, Mount and VanBelle-Prouty's (1999) study reported that in rural areas in Malawi there were problems of phones, faxes, good transportation; those who have radios, the radios did not work, and it was difficult to communicate policies. The question here is: what improvements have been done since Wolf et al.'s study to facilitate policy communication to rural areas, and what teachers and students think is the best way to communicate policies to them? And again, what do these policies mean to them?

As is the case with many developing countries, students' access to secondary education in Malawi has been a growing problem because of the mismatch between the number of primary graduates and available spaces in secondary schools. In addition, looking at the three policies, that is, free primary education, CDSS and selection policies, one would note that they have also strong implications on students' access to secondary education. Free primary education increases the number of students wanting secondary education while CDSS policy limits the number of students to attend secondary education. Furthermore, selection policies discourage those who fail to be selected to secondary schools from repeating standard eight in order to increase their chances of being selected to secondary schools. Yet access to secondary education is crucial for human resource development. That is, the way people are allocated in the education

ladder directly influences capacity building. So this study analyses how selection and CDSS policies constrain the transition of primary school students to secondary school through the lenses of teachers, students and parents in rural areas.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this concurrent mixed methods study was to better understand the complex problems of repetition, selection and community day secondary school (CDSS) policies and their impact on rural students' access to secondary education by converging both qualitative (detailed views) and quantitative (broad numeric trends) data. In the study, rural primary school students', teachers' and parents' perceptions on the complexities of standard eight repetition, selection and community day secondary school (CDSS) policies and their effects on students' access to secondary education in Malawi were explored using qualitative interviews. At the same time a questionnaire survey was used to determine the relationship between repetition, the knowledge of policies, and students' aspirations for secondary school selection. The study intended to answer the following two grand tour questions and their sub-questions:

- (a). What do standard eight repetition, selection and CDSS policies mean to teachers, students and parents in the rural primary schools?
 1. How do teachers, students and parents understand standard eight repetition and selection policies and students' access to secondary education?
 2. What are students', teachers' and parents' perspectives of the conversion of distance education centers (DECs) to CDSSs and students' access to secondary education?

(b). What is the relationship between standard eight repetition, the knowledge of policies and students' aspirations for secondary school education?

1. What is the relationship between standard eight repetition and students' aspirations for secondary school selection?
2. What is the relationship between standard eight repetition and secondary school selection?
3. What is the relationship between the knowledge of standard eight repetition policies and students' desire to repeat?

These last three questions lead to the following hypotheses:

1. The more students repeat in standard eight, the lower their aspirations are for secondary school selection.
2. The more students repeat in standard eight, the less frequently they are selected to secondary school.
3. If students know about standard eight repetition policies, they will not desire to repeat in standard eight.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to Malawi in a number of ways. Firstly, studies in Malawi have shown that children mostly repeat in lower grades of standards one to four and in standard eight. Consequently, the Malawi government has been trying to reduce repetition in standard eight as well as in other classes. However, reducing repetition at standard eight could be very successful if children were given alternative routes to continue with their education. So this study may help the government to think of the type

of alternative educational activities to give to standard eight students who fail to be selected to secondary school.

Secondly, following the study by Wolf et al. (1999) where they tackled the problem of policy communication to rural schools in the study of policy implementation process in Malawi and Namibia, this study gave a chance to teachers, students and parents to communicate to policy makers how they thought about education policies and how policies should be communicated to them. The study was intended to give voice to the voiceless. Consequently, rural parents, teachers and students were given chance to voice out their sentiments to policy makers through this study and their words were intentionally presented exactly as said in this study. This ultimately led to finding alternative ways of improving policy communication to rural schools, hence helping rural schools acquire knowledge of the policies and consequently behave in the way acceptable by the Ministry of education.

Thirdly, since the aim of the Malawi government in converting distance education centers to community day secondary schools was to improve educational quality, it seems the issue of access was overlooked. As such, this study may help policy makers to review the community day secondary school policy in order to increase rural students' chances of participating in secondary education rather than limiting the chances.

The fourth significance was that this study acted as policy learning to some teachers, parents and students in rural areas who were ignorant of the standard eight repetition and selection policies. As found by Wolf et al. (1999), some students, and encouraged by some teachers, were repeating standard eight out of ignorance of the repetition policies; as such they might have been disadvantaged in the selection process.

So this study followed up Wolf et al.'s findings to determine if four years later, rural students and teachers had acquired an understanding of the standard eight repetition and selection policies.

The other significance is that since there are very few studies that have been conducted on repetition, selection and CDSS policies in Malawi, this study will contribute to the literature about these educational policies in Malawi. This contribution will be made through publication of the results of this study in international journals and local journals in Malawi.

In general, the two grand tour questions for this study were (1) what do standard eight repetition, selection and CDSS policies mean to rural primary school teachers, parents and students? And (2) what is the relationship between standard eight repetition, the knowledge of the policies and students' aspirations for secondary education? Answers to these questions established the participants' perceptions on the complex problems of selection, repetition and community day secondary school policies and their impact on rural children's access to secondary education so that policy makers and those who are charged with education in Malawi should reconsider how primary education should be provided without disadvantaging or discriminating any group of people.

Limitations of the Study

Even though this study included community day secondary school policy, it should be noted that the purpose was not to study community secondary schools as a whole. The study was limited to studying those elements of community day secondary schools that had direct impact on standard eight students' access to secondary education. In addition, the study was not conducted with participants from CDSSs but from primary

schools. This was proper in this study because the aim was to seek primary school participants' perspectives of primary school students' access to secondary education, which, among other secondary schools, was also offered in CDSSs.

Secondly, the study was conducted in eight schools from two districts only in the southern region of Malawi and the sampling technique used was purposeful. As such, the results cannot be generalized to the entire nation though there are possibilities of applying the results to other similar cases in the country. That is to say, the rural schools chosen had some similar characteristics with other rural schools in Malawi and even with other developing countries, so the results of this study, though not generalized, can be applied to other similar cases in Malawi and beyond.

Thirdly, because of lack of resources to access the very remote rural schools, the study was conducted in those rural schools, which I could easily access, and purposively select using the available resources. So it was possible that more revealing issues would be found if the study was taken to the far and very remote rural areas. However, the schools studied had many features that are typical of rural schools in Malawi. Therefore, the results in the study reflect problems that are common with schools in rural areas.

Finally, it should be noted that the distances from the schools to main roads and to district education headquarters were only estimates. Because in most schools the actual distance from the district education headquarters was not indicated and because the people I asked gave different figures, I used my own judgment and what different teachers said about the distance to determine the estimated distances.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown that Malawi is one of the developing countries in the south of Sub-Saharan Africa and has the majority of its population in the rural areas. It is one of the poor countries with a GNP estimate of US\$210 and most of its poor population lives in rural areas. In addition, there is higher illiteracy rate in the rural areas than in the urban areas. Furthermore, it is noted that education in Malawi is in the process of being decentralized and its system is 8-4-4, that is, 8 years of primary, 4 years of secondary and at least 4 years of tertiary. For students to move from one level to another, they have to write national examinations. So the purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of teachers, students and parents on the complex problems of standard eight repetition, selection and CDSS policies and their impact on rural students' access to secondary education. Though it has been noted that there were some limitations, the chapter has shown that it was significant to carry out this study because it might contribute to the enhancement of educational policy issues in Malawi.

Having set the background, context, research problem and purpose of the study, the next chapter presents a review of literature related to issues of educational policy.

CHAPTER 2

DISCUSSION OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

This chapter starts with a theoretical description of the concept of policy and a discussion of models for educational policy process. Then factors that determine success and/or failure of the educational policy process are reviewed from both empirical and theoretical studies.

The Concept of Policy

Because of the complexity of the concept of policy, most writers on policy prefer describing to defining it. However, Reimers and McGinn (1997, p. 29) generally defined policy as “a statement of actions to be preferred in the pursuit of one or more objectives of an organization.” This definition suggested policy as a product, thus solid objectives or guiding statements that have already been formulated and are ready for implementation. In addition, Reimers and McGinn defined policy making as a process. In defining policy making, they stated that it is a process whereby questions are posed, problems presented, explanations offered, and choices suggested. Furthermore, they extended the concept of policy to education. They contended that educational policy referred to “the goals for the education system and the actions that should be taken to achieve them” (Reimers & McGinn, 1997). Therefore, the first part of this literature review will center on describing models for educational policy making process and, thereafter, the review will focus on factors affecting the success and/or failure of educational policy process. Policy process in this regard entails both policy formation and implementation.

Models for Educational Policy Process

Having briefly defined what policy is, it is worthwhile to provide a theoretical overview of some models for policy formation and development. For the purposes of this study, three broad models will be briefly reviewed: rational, contingent, and interactive.

According to Hartwell (1994), the rational model constitutes technical procedures of educational policy development. In support, Goulet (1986) stated that technical rationality entails the decisions made by experts like educators, planners, principals and so on. Welsh and McGinn (1999) referred to this rationality as professional expertise, which assigns authority primarily to those with expert technical knowledge about how best to operate education system. In addition, Reimers and McGinn (1997) explained that the belief of the rational model is that human behavior can be regulated based on universal laws, hence implying that policy analysis is a way of identifying those policies that are most likely to lead to an attainment of the stated goal. This model assumes that knowledge for policymaking is objective and can be expressed in codified and abstract language (Coombs, 1970). However, since the attention that is given to those who are responsible for implementation is insufficient, policies made on rational model often fail (Reimers & McGinn, 1997). Even Hartwell (1994, p. 121) concurred that if there is no social and political framework of participation in policy formation, "technical analysis alone leads to gross errors, to un-implemented policies, or to complete disregard of the recommendations."

The second model is the contingency approach. The proponents of this model saw it as a bridge from theory to practice. As put by Verspoor (1994), the implementation of properly designed tasks, organizational structures, and processes of management are

contingent on specific situations under which policies are implemented. This approach recognizes that when policies are introduced, they must be appropriate for the socio-economic environment in which they will be implemented “and the value orientation of those who will participate in them” (Verspoor, 1994, p.4516). The approach recognizes that successful implementation of policy depends on its objectives; specific economic, social and political conditions in a particular setting, attitudes and behavior within education institutions; and the characteristics and the needs of the people who are to benefit from the policy (Verspoor, 1994). Much of the emphasis of this approach is on the needs assessment, and Verspoor maintained that this process of needs assessment should continue during implementation so that policies can be adjusted due to some environmental changes. “The effectiveness of the contingency analysis therefore hinges critically on the assessment of the uncertainty in the environmental conditions and the analysis of the innovativeness of the education reform” (Verspoor, 1994, p. 4517).

The last model is the interactive one. In this model, policy is viewed as continuous processes of negotiations among stakeholders (Reimers & McGinn, 1997). Stakeholder here entails those who influence or are influenced by the policy or its process. According to Hartwell (1994, p. 4), the interactive model describes the process of “participation, dialogue, and negotiations which lead to properly supported political decisions about education.” Hartwell maintained that there must be an interaction of all models of policy analysis that may yield a politically sensitive dialogue concerning educational goals and priorities. In Hartwell’s (1994, p. 5) view, “an interactive, rather than simply a rational and technical approach, is essential when changes are sought in such areas as curriculum, the role of the teachers, ... and above all, examination and

selection procedures.” Furthermore, Coombs (1970) stipulated that the core of the interactive model is the notion that the world in which individuals live is created by themselves and any understanding of the society, its institutions and social processes depends on the point of view of the participants in that society.

In a nutshell, according to Hartwell, best policies are produced when there is an interaction of all the three models: rational, contingency and interactive approaches in the policy formation and implementation process.

Determinants of Educational Policy Process’s Success and/or Failure

Having discussed the models, the relevant empirical and theoretical studies will be reviewed in order to identify factors that determine the success and/or failure of the educational policy process. The review of some literature has shown that some of these factors fall into the categories of stakeholder participation, political context, cultural context, policy communication and resource availability. As observed by Evans, Sack and Shaw (1996, p. 2), policymaking is not linear but “a messy, fluid process.” It is therefore through the recognition of this “messiness” that this study reviewed literature on policy process rather than reviewing literature for each stage of the process, such as policy formation, implementation, evaluation and so on.

Stakeholder Participation

According to Maclure (1994), those who are affected by or have influence on the day to day education practice, such as parents, teachers, communities, private enterprises, government and so on, are the most significant partners in education development. Furthermore, Bude (1985) stated that a school as an institution can only be recognized by the community if efforts are made to find a compromise between national interests and

centralistic school administration, on the one hand, and local interests, thus those of the users, on the other. Therefore, several studies have found that the success and/or failure of the educational policy process are determined by how and whether stakeholders were involved. The major emphasis has been put on the participation of grassroots stakeholders such as teachers, students and the community. For instance, McDonough and Wheeler (1998) conducted a study on school and community collaboration in social forestry project in Thailand. The purpose of the project was to change teaching, learning and school-community relations by involving students in studies of local village problems related to forest management. In the findings, McDonough and Wheeler reported that the involvement of the community resulted in a strong support of the project by the community, which resulted to successful change of teaching and learning process and the development of community development projects. In addition, they reported that, due to the involvement of community in education issues in school, improved relations between the school and the community were noticed and the community expectations for the schools increased. Moreover, McDonough and Wheeler (1998, p. 49) reported that these findings “provided encouragement for educators, community members, policy makers and others who sought to change school-community relations, provide more enriching educational experiences and generate a greater support for community development efforts.”

Another study was conducted by the Malawi Ministry of Education and UNICEF (1998). The goal of the study was to document the experiences of Malawi in free primary education (FPE) policy by “describing the context of the FPE policy and the process of reform formulation and implementation; synthesizing lessons learned from the

implementation of the FPE policy and identifying steps for future action.” The study reported that the national symposium that was held in the process of FPE formulation had helped to build a common understanding on issues that involved several players in planning and implementation. The authors concluded that if responsibilities were shared with all stakeholders, successful policy formation and ownership of reform progress would be ensured.

In California, USA, Maxwell-Jolly (2000) reported on the study of factors influencing the implementation of mandated policy change in seven school districts. The context of the policy was that, in California, the policy called “proposition 227” limited the use of students’ primary language as a medium of instruction. However, bilingual programs were allowed when they were requested by an adequate number of parents as an alternative to English only instruction. The study found that, in the districts where there was a history of strong support for primary language programs among the community, the school board, district staff and bilingual teachers, the programs continued. However, where there was mixed support, schools and classrooms did not continue with bilingual approach.

Dyer (1999) used a backward mapping approach to study the implementation of educational policy in India. The policy was called operation blackboard. It was conceived as a response to the results of two surveys, one conducted in 1978 and another in 1986, that revealed a serious lack of blackboards, play grounds, drinking water and so on in schools in India. The backward mapping model indicated a major problem of lack of ownership of the innovations at every level, which led to lack of support of the policy in terms of its immediate remedial components or long-term normative components. The

reason for these problems was that, in the policy's planning stage, stakeholder interest was not sought because it was not considered as essential for the successful implementation of the policy. Consequently, the implementation of the policy finally failed. Dyer argued that, if deliberate efforts were taken to solicit stakeholder interest by consulting and involving those who would be responsible for the policy's implementation, more effective results would have been assured. The backward mapping model that Dyer used identified important local knowledge in India that would be used for the successful implementation of the policy but, according to her, this knowledge was not used. Even Evans, Sack and Shaw (1996) indicated that, for educational policies to be implemented successfully, the necessary conditions are: ownership, and appropriation, that result from consultation and participation of stakeholders. They argued that without involving a spectrum of stakeholders in the policy process, one ends up with policies that are not implemented.

Apart from painting a picture that active stakeholder participation in the educational policy process is necessary for successful policy implementation, some studies have found some challenges in stakeholder participation especially at community level. So it is imperative that those involved in educational policy should be aware of these challenges and possible ways to overcome them for successful stakeholder involvement in the educational policy process.

For instance, McDonough and Wheeler (1998) in their project of school and community collaboration in Thailand reported that, even though community support for a new approach to teaching and learning was shown in the focus group, the level of participation by community members depended on factors such as opportunity costs. In

their project study, villagers sacrificed their time only when they saw that the project helped teachers to improve students' learning. However, in all the villages where the project was implemented, village members raised the issue of time. Similarly, in their study of parental involvement in education, Williams, Williams and Ullman (2002) reported that parents cited the competing demands in their lives such as work commitments, demands of other children and lack of time generally as some of the barriers to their involvement in education.

The next challenge was reported by Kinsley (1992) in her study of integrating community service learning into the curriculum in Springfield, USA. Kinsley's study indicated that, if the participants did not understand the process and goals of their participation, it was possible for the activities to lose direction. For instance, she reported that in two instances the teachers had stopped the experiences in service learning when they discovered that their goals did not reflect those of the community in the service site.

In the study of community initiatives in education, Bray (2003) identified another challenge for community participation in Fiji primary school system. Bray reported that committee members who were involved in the Fiji primary school system were volunteers and in many cases they lacked expertise and understanding of their responsibilities. As such, discord arose over key issues of authority, especially because these committees owned the schools. They also appointed unpaid managers who were supposed to work with headmasters who were appointed by the Ministry of Education on a paid job. Sometimes the management authority of these two groups clashed and consequently disrupted the teaching and learning processes in the schools. Bray (2003, p. 37) also added, "Schools are political entities and reflect the communities they are in. If

divisions exist in communities, there tend to be divisions in school committees and level of management deteriorates. In such situations the whole teaching and learning processes suffers.”

Another challenge to community participation was observed in Zimbabwe. As reported by Bray (2003), with a goal of strengthening the nation and reducing inequalities during the 1980s, Zimbabwe placed greater emphasis on community financing of education as a way of generating resources and expanding educational provision. However, this policy yielded unintended results when “the management committees of schools in former white areas levied the parents to buy additional equipment, recruit extra staff and introduce additional subjects” whose costs could generally not be afforded by black parents (Bray, 2003, p.38). As a result, the policy perpetuated racial segregation instead of reducing it. Bray (2003) further reported that similar patterns were also observed in South Africa, Uganda and Pakistan where the elites became members of school committees and teachers and parents associations (PTAs) and advanced their own interests that disadvantaged the poor. To avoid such scenarios, deliberate efforts must be taken to equally involve members of different socio-economic status in educational policy process.

In Malawi, the 1995 Policy Investment Framework (PIF) indicated that, in the past, community participation meant community contribution in terms of human resources and money for the construction of schools, and the present government stated that “this aspect of community participation would continue as it enhanced access” (Rose, 2003, p. 51). However, Rose (2003, p. 51) criticized this type of community participation as “pseudo rather than genuine” because it was top-down in decision

making and focused on resource extraction from the community, hence transferring the burden for the government to fund schools to the community. According to Rose (2003, p. 47), “pseudo participation is ... a consultative process where citizens are merely kept informed of developments at a school level, and are expected to accept decisions that have already been made.” Genuine community participation, as put by Rose, was the one that allowed the community to decide how they wanted to participate instead of the government advocating the form of community participation. In this type of participation, communities are able to take part “in real decision making and governance, where all members have equal power to determine the outcome of decisions and share in a joint activity” (Rose, 2003, p. 47).

Furthermore, community participation is a challenge because it takes a long time for educational policies to be formulated and implemented. As observed by Evans, Sack and Shaw (1996, p. 19), the short-term cost of “high levels of community participation is the time it takes to complete the process.” Evans et al. (1996) reported that in Uganda and Mauritius, the formation of sector policies was delayed beyond initial estimates due to extensive participation. This long process, as said by Evans et al., led to “impatience by the external financing agencies whose timing was not compatible with that of those governments” (Evans, Sack & Shaw, 1996, p. 19). However, this is just a “short term cost” that should not lead to avoidance of community participation in educational policy process.

Political Context

Apart from being determined by the extent to which stakeholders participate in educational policy process, studies have shown that the success and/or failure of the

educational policy process also depend on the nation's political context. As observed by Evans et al. (1996, p. 10), the review of cases from, Benin, Mali and Uganda indicated that, "national reviews of education are often triggered by some combination of crisis and/or change motivated by political factors." According to Evans et al., the educational review in these countries took place after a new government had been introduced. The lesson learnt was that governments have different intentions for a review of educational policies at national level and one of them is to reinforce the new government's legitimacy. "Successful delivery of educational services is central to a regime's legitimacy and therefore its capacity for effective governance" (Evans et al., 1996, p. 11).

In addition, in the study for California's reading initiative, Sunderman, Amoa and Meyers (2001) reported that it was the state board and legislature that adopted a number of initiatives to improve literacy. They provided money and support for professional development in reading, purchase of instructional materials and, development of reading programs. Sunderman et al (2001) emphasized that these initiatives were politically and ideologically driven so much that they almost exclusively focused on basic skills and phonic instruction.

In the study about the implementation of English Language Teaching (ELT) reform in Namibia, O'Sullivan (2002) reported that one of the factors that led to the failure of the reform was that the personnel who were involved in ELT policy making worked under strong political pressure. When English was adopted as a national language, there was political pressure to develop new English curriculum as soon as possible. As such, there was little time to consult teachers and assess their "classrooms realities" (O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 232).

Moreover, Wolf, Lang, Mount and VanBelle-Prouty (1999) observed that some of the educational policies in Namibia failed to be effectively implemented because of a shift in power. For instance, the introduction of democracy made students resist some school policies because of their misunderstanding of the concept of democracy. To the students, the concept meant doing whatever one wanted. Similar incidents were also observed in Malawi (Wolf et al., 1999).

In the theoretical article, Hsu (1993) demonstrated how politics in the process of educational policy making played itself out in Malaysia. According to Hsu, there were three ethnic groups in Malaysia: the Bumiputras (who were Malays and other indigenous tribal groups), Chinese and Indians. For the last three decades, there had been racial and political conflict that emanated from the domination of the Chinese in the economic and educational systems. When the Malaysians became independent, the government adopted a number of policies that favored the Malays. For instance, the government introduced a policy of Malay as the only official language and the medium of instruction in schools and university, Islam was made an official federation religion, and the Malays were granted special privileges and priorities in “terms of access to university education, official employment and the establishment of special schools for Malays” (Hsu, 1993, p. 13). The reinforcement of these biased policies emerged after the 1969 racial riots and it was said that the Chinese and Indians’ loyalty was to their homeland not Malaysia. However, the rationale of the government for these biases was that the Malays had been put in a disadvantaged economic and educational position by the British colonial policies and could not compete with the Chinese and Indians. The author then concluded that the success of these policies depended on the criteria one used to define the word “success”

and where one's position was on the issue. For example, according to Malays and the government, the policies were successful because the Malays started to excel in education and economic systems. However, according to the Indians and Chinese, the policies could not be termed successful because they discriminated against these two racial groups.

Another study, which indicated that the success of education policy depended on one's perspective in the political context, was done by Benham and Heck (1993). The purpose of the study was to explore the context, in which policy decisions were made, and the actual content and outcome of the policy decisions over a period of time in Hawaii. The researchers selected three periods of time in Hawaiian history: (1) the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1820 who brought formal schooling, (2) the overthrow of a monarchy in 1893 and the establishment of the department of public instruction, and (3) the Hawaii's move to statehood and political power shift from Republican to Democratic party control. The researchers used a case study method and data were collected through in-depth interviewing and document analysis. The historic analysis was mainly done through document analysis.

In their findings, Benham and Heck (1993) stated that in each of the three periods, there was turbulence because of the conflict between two competing cultures. The dominant groups, who determined appropriate political behavior, ultimately controlled educational policy formation. These dominant groups were in the upper class economically, socially and politically and the participation in politics and policy making was limited to appropriate elite whether by kinship, religious beliefs, racial origin and so on. As such, the dominating values of efficiency and quality were defined by the beliefs

and activities of the political elite. Efficiency was seen as “a means of maintaining a predictable and controlled social order in which social unrest is restrained ... and quality worked with efficiency to provide the best programs and the best opportunities according to the dominant party’s beliefs, and usually for the benefit of the selected few” (Benham & Heck, 1993, p. 19). For instance, in each of the three periods, the commoners’ schools were severely lacking resources and qualified teachers, while the elite schools were given better resources and highly qualified teachers. According to the researchers, this case history illustrated an important concept that educational policy was determined by how the key political values of efficiency and quality were defined by the larger macro-political culture. Standing on the side of the dominant group, these policies were successful because they served this group. However, the commoners would view the policies as a failure because they did not benefit from them. These two last cases also showed that education policy-making process is a contested terrain. There is power struggle in the policy making process. This power struggle determines who benefits and who loses in the contest.

Cultural Context

The success and/or failure of educational policy process have also been found to be determined by cultural context. In Hong Kong, Morris and Ling (2000) used a major curriculum reform of target-oriented curriculum (TOC), introduced in primary schools, to study the interaction of cultures and curriculum reforms. It was then found that the curriculum reform was not well received because it exhibited values contrary to the culture of Hong Kong. The public reacted against it and the media, which played an active role in the debate of the reform, satirized TOC as “Totally Objectionable

Curriculum.” TOC was viewed as an attempt by the colonial government to impose the UK national curriculum model on Hong Kong schools and diminish traditional Chinese values. In addition, TOC required students to be active learners and construct their own knowledge, which was contrary to the culture in Hong Kong where the teacher was viewed as an expert who possessed knowledge to be transmitted to students. Teachers were doubtful of the new pedagogical model because it contradicted their beliefs and values. Though they tried hard to implement the new curriculum, teachers confronted the contradiction between the new pedagogy of learner-centered and the classroom culture of quietness and student obedience. When teachers tried the learner-centered methods, pupils became very excited and the noise level rose, which made some teachers to stop the activities in order to bring back order.

Problems similar to those in Hong Kong were also reported in the Namibian study by O’Sullivan (2002). Traditionally, as indicated by O’Sullivan, the child in Namibia was raised to respect and not question the authority of elders. This traditional culture contradicted the underlying assumptions of learner-centered approaches that teachers were required to introduce in schools in order to implement the English language teaching reforms. Consequently, teachers did not implement the approach successfully.

In Malawi, the pregnancy policy failed to be effectively implemented initially because teachers thought immorality would be encouraged if girls who once left school because of pregnancy were allowed to return to school (Wolf et al., 1999). According to Wolf et al., this cultural value impeded the successful implementation of the pregnancy policy.

Policy Communication

According to Evans et al. (1996), many African countries produced education policy documents that were long and complex and written in academic English or French. Most citizens found these documents difficult to read and understand, especially those societies whose main means of communication was more oral than written. Consequently, it was only senior government officials, funding agencies and their staff who used these documents. Furthermore, because the documents were long, they became very expensive to reproduce for distribution.

Wolf et al. (1999) also found that poor communication made it difficult for the policy on learner-teacher ratio to be effectively implemented in Namibia. This policy was issued in order to equitably redistribute teachers throughout the whole education system in Namibia, after the apartheid era when white schools had more teachers than other schools. The Ministry of Education, however, communicated the policy to schools through circulars that had little information about how the policy should be implemented and by whom. As such, in many schools, principals misinterpreted the policy to mean that they should limit the number of students to enroll in order to achieve the recommended learner-teacher ratio.

In a similar study, O'Sullivan (2002) also found that the implementation of English language teaching policies was heavily affected in the way the policies were communicated to schools in Namibia. The reforms were communicated to teachers through memos and policy documents and, as evidenced in the study, teachers in schools were not aware of the policies. Because of bureaucratic inefficiencies in the Ministry of education and lack of transport, the memos and policies did not get to schools. And again,

because of language barriers, even when the documents reached the schools, principals either failed to communicate to teachers or teachers failed to understand the documents. The communication was also mainly one way, top-down, and teachers had difficulties to communicate problems of the reforms back to the Ministry of Education.

Resource Availability

Some studies have shown that the availability of resources plays a crucial role in whether the educational policy process will be a success or not. For instance, in the Indian policy innovation of operation blackboard, Dyer (1999) indicated that the logic behind the policy was that educational quality improvements could not take place without better physical facilities.

In addition, in the California study which was aimed at determining influences of policy responses to proposition 227 and its impact to classroom practice, Maxwell-Jolly (2000) reported that teachers' common theme of comment was lack of training and materials to implement the policies. "Those who taught for the first 30 days in English and then returned to a program incorporating both English and the primary language had no materials nor preparation for how to make the best use of those 30 days of instruction" (Maxwell-Jolly, 2000, p. 45). This led to difficulties in implementing the policies.

Furthermore, Asagwara and Prince (1997), in their study of education in Nigeria, critically examined the quality of learning in the universal primary education (UPE) scheme. Even though they observed that the positive impact of the UPE policy was that many children had access to schooling and that many could read and write their names, they also stated that the educational standards had fallen far below what it was before UPE was introduced. The findings attributed this failure to unavailability of important

human and physical resources such as qualified teachers, equipment and textbooks. The researchers then advised other developing countries to act carefully when introducing politically motivated educational projects like UPE.

Moreover, Johnson and Pajares (1996) studied the process of implementing shared decision making (SDM) policy in one of the schools in South America. Their investigation took a period of three years. Their aim was to identify factors that both enhanced and constrained the school's efforts to implement the policy of shared governance. They collected data from multiple sources, such as observations, interviews, documents and videotapes. Among the factors found to enhance or constrain the implementation of SDM was resource availability. According to the researchers, shared decision making was enhanced when resources were provided at critical times. According to the participants, time for face-to-face talk was the most valuable resource. And again, at times committee members were provided with stipends that enabled them to meet and work before and after school, and the weekends. Teachers also mentioned the training and knowledge they got from the in-service and workshops organized by the principal and the council as one of the important resources. However, the researchers also indicated that when the resources were not available, the implementation of SDM was constrained. For instance, many participants felt the officials were not very serious about the success of SDM because they provided insufficient funds to support the implementation. They argued that enough money should have been provided in order to release teachers for SDM activities.

Chapter Summary

The review of literature in this chapter has shown that the concept of policy is defined as both product and process. In addition, it has been indicated that some models that are used in the educational policy making process constitute a rational model, a contingency approach and an interactive model. Furthermore, as has been shown in the review, the success or failure of the educational policy process is determined by a number of factors such as stakeholder participation, political context, cultural context, policy communication and resource availability. These are some of the factors that people involved in the development of educational policies need to bear in mind before they indulge themselves in the process.

These factors will be used in this study to understand the implementation of repetition, selection and community day secondary school policies in Malawi by exploring rural teachers', students' and parents' perspectives. The results of this study may help policy makers to revisit the policies of selection for community day secondary schools in order to find ways of increasing rural children's access to secondary education. In addition, the study may trigger thoughts on what alternative educational activities should be provided for rural primary school children who fail to be selected to secondary school. Lastly, the results of this study may help to find alternative ways of communicating educational policies to rural schools in Malawi.

CHAPTER 3
DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of design and research methods for this study. The discussion is centered on the following themes: theoretical framework, overall approach and rationale; the setting or population of interest; initial selection decisions and access negotiations; sampling techniques; data collection, management and analysis of data; biographical statement; ethical considerations; and the trustworthiness of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Pragmatism is the theoretical perspective framing the methods of this study. According to Creswell (2003), pragmatism does not commit itself to a single system of philosophy or reality. The position of the pragmatists in research is to choose a method or paradigm that will work best to achieve the goals of a particular enquiry (Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher, Perez-Prado, Alaeaci, Dwyer & Pappamihiel, 2003). Creswell (2003) also agrees that pragmatism is concerned with what works and getting solutions to problems. The problem is more important than methods, and researchers use different approaches in order to understand the problem (Creswell, 2003). When choosing data collection and interpretation techniques, the demands of a particular research problem are more important than philosophical assumptions (Rocco et al., 2003). According to the pragmatists, research usually takes place in particular historical, social, political contexts, and as such, “pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different world views and different assumptions, as well as to different forms of data collection and analysis in the mixed methods study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 12). As stated by Maxey (2003, p. 52),

“Pragmatism offers historical strands and warrants for the new discourse of social science research, which embraces plurality of methods and multiple methods philosophy.”

Therefore, following the pragmatic perspective, this study was not committed to one particular method and source of data in order to understand the research problem. Rather, it centered on what could work for the phenomenon under investigation and to make the results clear and credible.

Overall Approach and Rationale

Influenced by the pragmatic perspective, the overall approach for this policy study was guided by concurrent mixed methods design. According to Creswell (2003, p. 17), in concurrent procedures, the researcher “converges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem.” In this study both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in order to comprehensively understand the policies studied. The results obtained from both methods were integrated in order to arrive at a rich interpretation of the data. Even Creswell concurs that in concurrent research design, the “investigator collects both forms of data at the same time during the study and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results” (p. 17). Greater priority or weighting in this study, however, was put on the qualitative approach because there is little known in the issues pertaining to standard eight repetition, selection and community day secondary school policies in Malawi. As observed by Creswell, concurrent approach may have a dominant method that is used to guide the project and, according to Marshall and Rossman (1999), one of the justifications for qualitative research is that little is known on the phenomena or innovative systems. As such, the qualitative approach helped to generate new information and insights grounded

in the participants' own experiences while quantitative methods helped to provide information that could be quantified so that, together with data collected through qualitative approach, a holistic understanding of the problem was reached. This approach was used so that a "researcher can gain broader perspectives as a result of using the different methods as opposed to using the predominant method alone" (Creswell, 2003, p. 218).

The Setting or Population of Interest – the Unit of Analysis

This study followed a backward mapping approach of educational policy analysis in Malawi. According to Elmore (1980), backward mapping policy analysis begins at the last possible stage of policy implementation process. Once the relatively precise target is established at the lowest level of the system, "the analysis backs up through the structure of implementing agencies" (Elmore, 1980, p. 604). The setting of interest in this study was rural primary schools in two districts: Zomba and Thyolo in the Southern region of Malawi. The population of interest was rural primary school teachers, standard eight students and their parents. Since headmasters/mistresses were also teachers in primary schools, they were part of the sample. The analysis began with parents and students, then teachers. Some issues that emerged from parents, students and teachers were later followed up with education officials at district level.

Initial Selection Decisions and Access Negotiation

For me to access the setting of the study, I had to get permission from a number of gatekeepers until I got to the targeted participants at school level. As put by Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 80-81), "the research design section ... should contain plans for negotiating access to the site and/or participants through formal and informal gatekeepers

in an organization.” So the first gatekeeper to be contacted was the Ministry of Education. A letter was sent to the director of basic education in the Ministry of Education to introduce myself, explain the purpose of my study, and ask for permission to use the public schools.

The next level of gatekeepers was at district level. In each district, the overall management of primary education is in the hands of an education district manager. So to access the schools, district managers had to be contacted first. Letters were written to the district education managers outlining the purpose of the study and seeking permission to use primary schools under their jurisdiction. I hand delivered the letters to the district education headquarters myself. In Zomba, the letter was delivered to the desk officer responsible for rural primary schools in the district education office. After reading my letter, he asked me some questions in order to have more information about my study and then he orally told me to go ahead with my study. Similarly, in Thyolo, I delivered the letter to the desk officer in the district education managers’ office. In addition to giving permission to use the schools, the desk officer in Thyolo gave me a letter of introduction to take to the headmaster of each school.

After getting permission from the district education managers’ offices in the two districts, I proceeded to contact headmasters/mistresses in rural primary schools. From my experience in a previous qualitative study, if you contact headmasters in person, you establish a kind of relationship that encourages the headmaster/mistress to facilitate data gathering. And again, in person contact gives the headmaster/mistress a chance to ask questions about the study for him/her to understand it before committing the school to participate. Because of these reasons, I contacted the heads of rural primary schools in

person, explained to them the purpose of my study, and asked permission to use their schools. The other reason why I should contact the headmasters/mistresses in person was that there was poor communication in rural areas in Malawi and letters could not reach the schools in time. They might also fail to respond to letters because post offices are very far from most of the rural schools. So relying on letters would mean experiencing no or delayed responses.

After I had explained the purpose of my visit and my study and had asked for permission to use the schools, the headmasters in all the schools I visited agreed to participate and promised to inform their teachers and students and ask for their permission to participate. In my second visit to the schools, the head teachers informed me of the willingness of the teachers and students to participate. Consequently, the headmasters and I scheduled the days and time when I would administer a questionnaire to the students and conduct interviews with teachers and students. Despite the fact that the headmasters told me that the teachers and students had agreed to participate in the study, before the actual interviews and questionnaire administration, I once again asked for their permission to participate and told them that they had a right not to participate or not to answer any question they felt uncomfortable with.

Similarly, I worked with headmasters to involve parents in the study. Permission from the parents was sought through an invitation letter, which was sent to them through their children. Apart from inviting the parents to attend the interview at the schools where their children attended, the letter explained the purpose of the study and asked for their permission to participate. Nevertheless, parents were also informed that they had a right to turn down the invitation to participate or not to answer any question that would make

them uncomfortable. Furthermore, since many parents did not respond to the letter though they came for interviews, I once again orally asked for their permission to participate and they said their coming to the interviews meant that they had agreed to participate.

In all the stages of gaining access down to the level of the participants, everybody was informed of the purpose of the study. As commented by Punch (1994, p. 90), participants in research have “the right to be informed that they are being researched and also about the nature of the research.”

In addition, in all my contacts, the participants were assured of confidentiality. They were assured that their names, the names of their schools, and any other descriptions that would reveal their identity would not be used in the final report. As said by Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 74), confidentiality has two elements: “protecting participants’ privacy (identities, names and specific roles) and holding in confidence what they share with you (not sharing with others using their names).” This position is also supported by Bulmer (1982, p. 225) who states that to protect privacy and identity of research participants, “identities, locations of individuals and places are concealed in published results, data collected are held in anonymized form and all data kept securely and confidential.”

Sampling

The major sampling technique used in order to identify participants for the study was purposeful. As put by Merriam (1988, p. 48), purposive sampling entails the selection of a sample “from which one can learn the most to gain understanding and insight.” In addition, Stake (1995, p. 4) asserts that one should select a sample “that can

maximize what we can learn.” So care was taken that the schools where the participants were interviewed had all the characteristics that I needed to learn. For instance, the schools were full primary schools (those with standards one to eight). This assured me that there were standard eight students present. In addition, all schools were in rural areas and were public schools that were supposed to implement Ministry of Education policies. Furthermore, all were coeducational schools hence views from both males and females were heard. Moreover all the schools had been subjected to the same public examinations at the end of standard eight every year in order to determine students who would be selected to various secondary schools in Malawi. Therefore, I made sure that all the schools and participants sampled should have common attributes related to rural areas so that the results should be applicable to other rural schools in Malawi. As put by Kennedy (1979, p. 666), it is possible for a researcher to “describe several ‘common’ features of his sample” if he wants the findings to apply to other situations.

Furthermore, the schools were selected from two districts in the southern region of Malawi: Zomba and Thyolo Districts and were divided into two categories: high selection rate (HSR) schools and low selection rate (LSR) schools. The selection rate was determined after calculating the number of students who were selected from each school from 1998 to 2002 and expressed that as a percentage of the total number of students who wrote examinations in these schools in the same period of time. The period 1998 to 2002 was chosen because it was after 1998 when the standard eight selection and repetition policies and the community day secondary schools were all in operation. To determine whether a school was in an HSR or LSR category, a selection rate of 23% was chosen as a cut off point since it was an average selection rate in all public primary schools in

Malawi in 2002. So those schools that had an average selection rate of higher than 23% from 1998 to 2002 were put in the HSR category and those that had a selection rate lower than 23% in the same period were considered as LSR schools. The schools were categorized as HSR and LSR in order to compare participants' perspectives of the policies and students' success and access to secondary education.

In each district, four schools were selected: two belonging to HSR category and the other two from LSR category. In total, there were eight schools selected. The student questionnaire was administered to standard eight students in all the eight schools while interviews for students, teachers and parents were conducted in four schools; two from each district. Between the two schools selected in each district for the interviews, one belonged to HSR category and the other from the LSR category.

Data Collection

Since the study was a concurrent mixed methods study, both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering were used. As stated by Creswell, (2003, p. 21), in mixed methods design "the researcher bases the inquiry on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem." Furthermore, Johnson and Turner (2003) refer to the mixing of two or more methods concurrently as "intermethod mixing." According to them, "the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods will result in the most accurate and complete depiction of the phenomenon under investigation" (Johnson & Turner, 2003 p. 299). Furthermore, Caracelli and Greene (1997, p.22) state that mixed methods designs generate "more comprehensive and insightful understanding of phenomena." In this study, data collection

techniques will be discussed separately for each method though they were collected at the same time.

The first method used to collect data was by interviewing participants. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 180), “in-depth interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research.” They also state that in-depth interviewing is very important for the researcher to understand how participants view their worlds, and both interviewer and interviewee “co-construct” meaning. In addition, as put by Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 108), “an interview is a useful way to get large amounts of data quickly.”

In this study, 16 rural primary school teachers, 8 from HSR schools and 8 from LSR schools, were interviewed. The teachers interviewed were those teaching standard eight and headmasters. In addition, 8 student focus group interviews of 10 students in each group were conducted. 4 student focus group interviews were done in HSR schools and 4 in LSR schools. All were standard eight students. Furthermore, 4 focus group interviews were conducted with parents, 2 from HSR schools and 2 from LSR schools. In each parent focus group interview, there were also 10 participants. Moreover, 2 district education officers, one from each district, were interviewed in order to understand issues that cropped up from students’, teachers’ and parents’ interviews at the grassroots. Refer to table 1 for a summary of participants’ interviews and focus group discussion.

Table 1: A Summary of Participants in Focus Groups and Interviews

Selection Rate	No. of Schools	Participants	Sex	Interviews	Focus Groups		Total Participants	
					No. of Focus Group Participants	No. of Focus Groups		
High Selection Rate	2	Education Official	M	2	0	0	2	
			F	0	0	0	0	
		Teachers	M	8	0	0	8	
			F	0	0	0	0	
		Parents	M	0	12	2 of 10 in each	12	
			F	0	8		8	
	Students	M	0	20	4 of 10 in each	20		
		F	0	20		20		
	Low Select Rate	2	Teachers	M	8	0	0	8
				F	0	0	0	0
			Parents	M	0	9	2 of 10 in each	9
				F	0	11		11
Students			M	0	20	4 of 10 in each	20	
			F	0	20		20	
Total	4			18	120	12	138	

Three sets of open-ended structured questions were prepared in advance for teachers', students' and parents' interviews. In addition, district officials' interview

guides were prepared in relation to the issues discussed with parents, teachers and students. However, some questions in one set overlapped with those in another. As stated by Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 363), in structured interviews, “all respondents receive the same set of questions.” As such, in this study, all teachers had their own set of questions, all students another set and similarly, parents and district education officers had their own sets of questions as groups. Even though the questions were structured, a lot of flexibility was allowed for follow-up and modifications of questions during interview process. As put by Rossman and Rallis, (2003, p. 185), in follow-up questions, “you ask for more details, hoping to discover the deeper meanings and more concrete examples.” Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) have also emphasized that the main advantage of interviews are their “adaptability” in that vague questions can be followed up in order to get more information and clarifications. So follow-up questions were used to ask for further elaborations, clarifications and to determine the focus for the next interviews. Quoting Patton, (2002, p. 374), Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 186) emphasize that good follow-up questions can be asked through the skill that comes from **“knowing what to look for in the interview, listening carefully to what is said and what is not said, and being sensitive to the feedback needs of the person being interviewed.”** So listening to participants was one of the most important tools used in the interviews in order to capture the views of the participants in the study and ask appropriate follow-up questions. The interviews were recorded on a tape so that every detail of the interview could be captured. After asking for permission to interview the participants, they were also asked if their views could be tape-recorded. The interviews were conducted mainly in Chichewa, the language the interviewees were comfortable with and later on the transcripts were

translated into English. Though some participants mixed English and Chichewa in their responses, most of the interview quotations in the results are the translated ones.

The second method was reviewing documents. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 116) “researchers supplement ... interviewing ... with gathering and analyzing documents produced in the course of everyday events or constructed specifically for the research at hand.” Since standard eight selection and repetition policy documents could scarcely be found either in the schools, Ministry of Education offices and libraries I visited, few policy documents were reviewed in this study. There were also school documents that were reviewed and they helped to provide such data as students’ sex, year entered standard 8, year selected, secondary school type selected to, number of students who wrote examination and year, number of students passed and number of students selected and not selected. Pass rates and selection rates of schools had to be calculated from these data. This information was collected from the school documents from 1998 to 2002 and in total; there were 2197 student cases (N=2197). In addition, some policy issue documents were reviewed, and they also supplemented both qualitative and quantitative data in the discussion of results. Therefore, the documents that were found and reviewed helped to enrich the interpretation of issues in this study.

Thirdly, a questionnaire survey was used to collect more quantitative data. As put by Gall, Borg and Gall (1996, p. 289), questionnaires are documents “that ask the same questions of all individuals in the sample” and “respondents record a written response to each questionnaire item.” The advantages of using a questionnaire over interviews are that “the cost of sampling respondents over a wide geographical area is lower, and the time required to collect the data is typically much less” (Gall et al., 1999, p. 289).

However, as observed by Gall et al, participants are not able to express their feelings and opinions in a questionnaire, and it is not possible to modify the items once the questionnaire has been sent. So in this study, the limitations of a questionnaire were compensated for by the strengths of interviews and the limitations of interviews were compensated for by the strengths of a questionnaire. Even Creswell (2003, p. 217) concurs that in a concurrent triangulation strategy, separate quantitative and qualitative methods are used as “a means to off-set weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other method. In this case, the quantitative and qualitative data collection is concurrent, happening in one phase of the research study.”

Since the questionnaire was designed to answer the question of the relationship between standard eight repetition, the knowledge of selection and repetition policies, and students’ aspirations for secondary education, it was administered to standard eight students only. The students responded to the questionnaire in their classrooms. When the scripts were distributed to the students, I read with them question by question. First of all, each question item was read in English as was on the questionnaire, then it was translated into Chichewa, which is the language of both the researcher and participants; then students were asked to respond. The items were translated into Chichewa because not all standard eight students could clearly understand English. The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part required students to provide background information. In the second part there was one question that asked how long the students had been in standard eight. The third part asked questions about aspirations for selection and secondary education. The final part contained questions about knowledge of repetition and selection policies.

The sample size was N=348 from eight primary schools that were purposively sampled from the two districts in the southern region of Malawi. After visiting the schools and having a sense of the number of standard eight students who were in the schools, I planned to administer the questionnaire to 400 students. However, on the days when the questionnaire was administered in schools, some students failed to come to school for various reasons. According to teachers who were in charge of these standard eight students, some students failed to come because they were ill. In addition, some failed because formal teaching and learning had finished in standard eight and students were just reading on their own in preparation for their final national examinations. Consequently, some students preferred reading at their own chosen places to reading at school. However, every standard eight student who came at the schools on the days the questionnaire was administered responded to it and a response rate of 87% was reached. This was also facilitated because I administered the questionnaire in person to students in schools and waited to collect the scripts the same day after being filled.

Among the 348 students who responded to the questionnaire, 200 (57.5%) were boys and 148 (42.5%) were girls. Their ages ranged from 12 to 20. However, the majority (30.5%) were 15 years old, seconded by the 14 year olds (21.8%), and then 16 year olds (21.6%). Furthermore, 193 (55.5%) were from HSR schools and 155 (44.5%) were from LSR schools. Refer to table 2 for a summary of student respondents in the questionnaire according to sex, age and selection rate.

Table 2: Questionnaire Respondents Summary According to Sex, Age and Selection Rate

		Sex				Total Participants	
		Male		Female			
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Age	12 years	4	2.0	4	2.7	8	2.3
	13 years	17	8.5	12	8.1	29	8.3
	14 years	40	20.0	36	24.3	76	21.8
	15 years	46	23.0	60	40.5	106	30.5
	16 years	53	26.5	22	14.9	75	21.6
	17 years	20	10.0	9	6.1	29	8.3
	18 years	17	8.5	4	2.7	21	6.0
	19 years	2	1.0	1	0.7	3	0.9
	20 years	1	0.5			1	0.3
Total Participants		200	100	148	100	348	100
Selection Rate							
	High	114	57	79	53.4	193	55.5
	Low	86	43.3	69	46.6	155	44.5
Total Participants		200	100	148	100	348	100

Data Management

This study had yielded two major types of data, that is, qualitative and quantitative. As such, care was taken to make sure that the data were well organized, kept and easily accessible.

To start with, interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed to a hard copy. Thereafter, the transcribed data were entered in the computer and kept both in a diskette and hard drive. These data were retrieved during analysis, which was done on a hard copy by coding the data into themes and categories. When the data were coded into these themes and categories, a number of analytic memos were written and each memo was kept in its own file in the computer diskettes and hard drive.

Secondly, after coding the questionnaire, the data were entered into the computer package for analysis (SPSS) and kept in both hard drive and floppy diskettes. The hard copy questionnaire scripts together with the hard copy interview transcripts were filed separately in the paper files for references.

Notes from the documents were treated in the same way as the questionnaire scripts. They were kept both in the hard drive and floppy diskettes. However, the notebooks were not destroyed for later reference.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study was done separately within each method. That is, qualitative and quantitative and the interpretations were compared and similar themes were integrated and differences were pinpointed in order to seek alternative interpretations. As stated by Creswell (2003, p. 220), analysis in mixed methods study “occurs both within the quantitative (descriptive and inferential numeric analysis) approach and the qualitative (description and thematic text or image analysis) approach.” Caracelli and Greene (1997) call this type of concurrent mixed methods design a “component design” where methods remain distinct throughout the investigation and become discrete aspects of the overall research. According to them, in component design

the integration of different methods happens during interpretation and conclusion, not in the first phases of data collection and analysis. Having said that, qualitative data analysis will be discussed first in this section.

Data analysis in the qualitative approach was an on going process. Starting with the reading of documents through to interviewing and transcribing data, tentative themes and insights that emerged were jotted down and small analytical memos were written. Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 271) also concur that in qualitative study, data analysis is an on going process and throughout the study the researcher is “describing, analyzing, and interpreting data, although different activities may be more focused and instrumental at various times.”

However, after transcribing the interviews, the data were organized and read over and over again, and the tape-recorded interviews were re-listened to in order to be familiar with them. As stated by Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 281), this process of rereading and re-listening “enables you to become familiar in intimate ways with what you have learned.” New insights, categories and themes that emerged from this process were used to critically look at and revise the previous themes, insights and analytical memos.

After the themes and categories had been identified, the data were read once again, this time more slowly and carefully thinking through them and identify the type of data that would be used as evidence to support these themes and categories. These types of data were coded by hand on a hard copy using the identified themes and categories. As illustrated by Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 286), “in coding the data you will have to be clear about what words or phrases illustrate and elaborate each concept.”

After coding was done, a number of concept maps were drawn to show the relationships between theme, categories or issues and data as exemplified in figure 1.

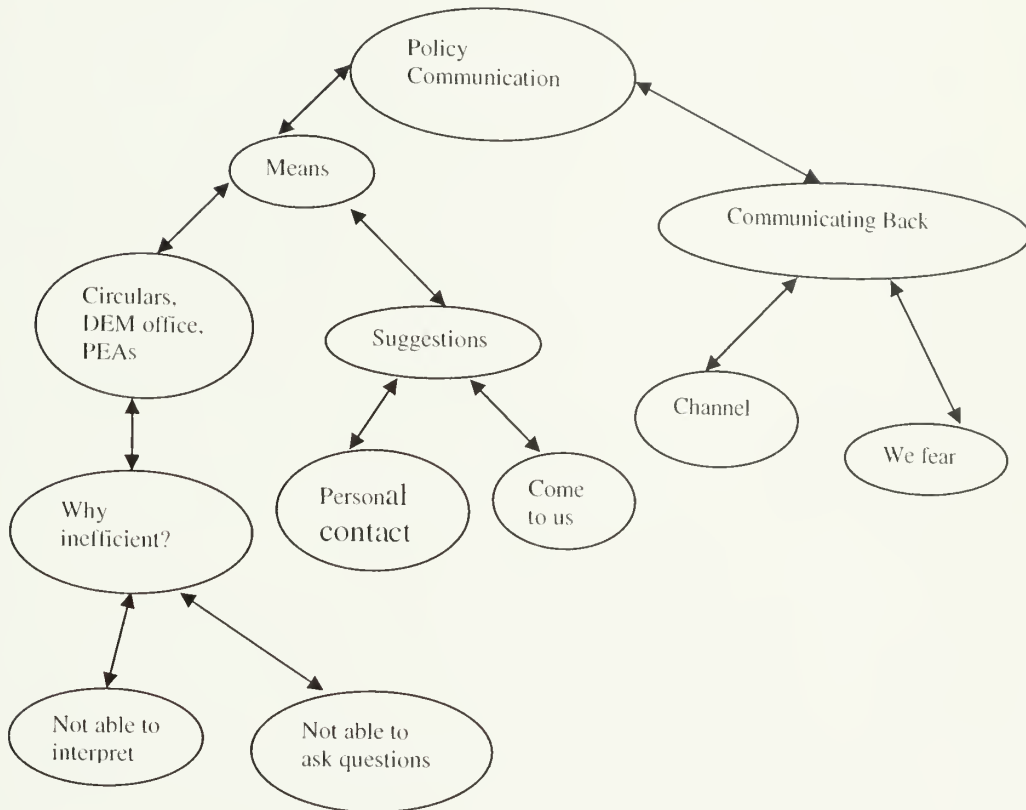


Figure 1: A Concept Map
Modified from Rossman and Rallis (2003).

After all the data were coded and organized conceptually, a story was narrated by using more and more analytic memos. These memos narrated a story that showed the relationships between research questions, themes, categories, supporting data, and my own comments. In other words, the narrations were supported by data and my own comments in order to interpret the meaning embedded in the data as they related to the research questions. As stated by Patton (2002, p. 480), “interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing

conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order.” It was at this stage of interpretation where data collected from both quantitative and qualitative methods were integrated.

The aim of the quantitative method in this study was to determine the relationship between variables such as (1) repetition, (2) selection, (3) knowledge of repetition policies, and (3) aspirations for secondary school selection. However, some control variables were introduced like gender and repetition rate of schools. Data analysis in this approach was done by using a computer package known as the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). To begin with, frequency distributions were run to determine the occurrence of the variables and also to clean the data. Then a series of cross tabulations were performed to determine the relationships between (1) standard eight repetition and aspirations for secondary education, (2) knowledge of repetition policies and students’ desire to repeat, and (3) repetition and selection. Thirdly, some control variables were introduced to determine if there were differences in these relationships in terms of sex and selection rate of schools. Finally, some Chi-Square tests were also performed to determine the significance of results.

Role of the Researcher – Biographical Statement

It is important to mention that I approached this study with my own experiences and subjectivities about the impact of selection, repetition and community day secondary school policies on students at primary school in Malawi. As an educator, teacher trainer and rural community member, I had been observing with interest many children failing to go to secondary school after primary school. These children seemed to have no direction when they came back to their rural areas. This had been giving me a feeling that Malawi

was wasting a lot of human resources that would be used if proper educational policies were put in place to help these children continue with education. In addition, I had a feeling that the introduction of repetition and selection policies at standard eight to limit children from repeating might yield unintended dysfunctional results, if those children who failed to go to secondary school did not have alternative ways of earning a living or continuing with school. Furthermore, seeing that the distance education centers, which were the only alternative route that helped those who failed to go to secondary school to participate in secondary education were closed by converting them to community day secondary schools and introducing selection policy, I began to wonder what these rural children thought of their future education career.

Then this led me to ask research questions like: (1) what do standard eight repetition, selection and community day secondary school policies mean to rural primary school students, teachers and parents? And (2) what is the relationship between standard eight repetition, the knowledge of the policies and students' aspirations for secondary education? There was a possibility therefore that my own subjectivities and experiences influenced the way I collected and interpreted data from these questions. However, as observed by Peshkin (1988, p. 18), "subjectivity can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers' making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected."

Though the study was a mixed method study, it was dominated by qualitative methods as stated earlier on. So I did not pretend to approach it with an objective view of the world. I went into the field as I was, dissatisfied with educational policies, particularly in relation to rural schools. As stated by Rossman and Rallis, (2003, p. 51),

“being ourselves means that we have articulated our perspectives or frames of reference towards the topic- that is we know our beliefs, and values and our assumptions and biases relative to the topic.” The feeling of dissatisfaction that I had about primary education in Malawi might have influenced how I viewed the actions of my participants and what they said about my topic. This made me think more about my topic and react to the participants’ views depending on what I already knew. As put by Rossman and Rallis, the researcher reacts to the participants’ action and words as she observes and interviews. These words and actions “trigger thoughts, hunches, working hypotheses, and understanding of the setting and the participants” (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, p. 51).

However, as a researcher, I did not allow my subjectivities to take the lead in the research process. They were just at the background and were led by the views of the participants. Since I was aware of these subjectivities, I knew when they had come up and had seen to it that their influence did not distort my understanding of the participants’ views. Even Peshkin (1988,) states that he had to monitor himself to sense how he was feeling in his study in order to identify his subjectivity. Hence, I was careful and cautious of my judgment of issues that transpired.

I was also aware that my participants would have their own subjectivities about me as I entered the setting. Knowing that I was a university lecturer and a student in USA, they regarded me as a person of higher status than their own and this affected their actions and words. To reduce this view, I avoided making my communications through letters. Most of my contacts were personal which were intended to allow participants to become familiar with me. For example, permission to get them participate was made in person so that we should start interacting before the actual data collection. And again, the

participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire first before I started interviewing them. This was one way of buying time and prolonging the interaction between me, as a researcher, and participants. As said by Rossman and Rallis (2003), the researchers' presence might not affect much the everyday routines of the participants if he/she stays longer in the setting and appears to be like the members of the setting.

In short, I entered the research setting carrying my own experiences and biases about primary education in Malawi, and these might have influenced my understanding of the views of the participants. However, I monitored myself so that my biases should not be dominant. And again, I increased my interaction with the participants so that they should be familiar with me in order to reduce their subjective views about me. Nevertheless, it is recognized that both researcher's and participants' biases could not be avoided from influencing the results of this study.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, there were some ethical issues that I needed to observe for the study to be well thought-out and sturdy. The first issue, as already mentioned, was gaining informed consent from the participants in my study. As stated by Gall et al. (1996, p. 88), "researchers must inform each individual about what will occur during the research study, the information to be disclosed to the researchers, and the intended use of the research data that are to be collected." So after getting permission from the Ministry of Education, district education managers and school headmasters/mistresses to use schools as the setting of the study, I met the participants (teachers, students and parents) to explain to them the purpose of my study and asked for their consent to participate. The participants were told that they were free either to participate or not. However, the

importance of their participation in the study was explained and that their participation would be appreciated. Even when headmasters/mistresses offered to explain to the teachers and students of the purpose of the study and requested their consent on my behalf, this consent was sought again in actual data collection so that participants should understand that they were not being coerced to participate and also that they should have a chance to ask questions before they committed themselves to participate.

As stated by Gall et al. (1996, p. 88), each participant needs to receive an explanation of the research procedures to be used and the explanation must show the participants “that participation is important and desirable and that it is to the subject’s advantage to cooperate.” It should be noted that informed consent from teachers, students and parents were sought orally because, according to the Malawian culture, that is an effective way of getting people to participate in the study. Even though the parents were invited to participate through a letter, which also included some information about the study, this information was provided again orally to the parents for them to understand the study and make informed choice to participate.

The second issue was about privacy and confidentiality, which has already been mentioned. The participants were assured of confidentiality, both in the interviews and questionnaire. Furthermore, in the questionnaire, participants were told not to write their names or the names of their school in order to conceal their identity.

The third ethical issue concerned deception. According to Gall et al. (1996, p. 93), “deception is the act of creating a false impression in the minds of research participants through such procedures as withholding information, telling lies, or using accomplices.”

In this study, deception of all kinds was avoided. Participants were told the true information about the study and all their questions were answered truthfully and honestly.

Finally, from my experience in a previous study, schools had their own established norms that were expected to be respected for the smooth interaction of the individuals. As such, upon my arrival in each setting, I had to find out the norms and procedures that were followed so that I should abide by them in order not to appear as a total stranger to the participants. Some of the norms I followed included respecting the authority of the headmaster, greeting teachers and greeting students when you enter a classroom and tell them to sit down.

Ensuring the Trustworthiness of the Study

There were a number of features that were built into this study to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the results. The first feature was triangulation. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 66), triangulation entails drawing “from several data sources, methods, investigators or theories to inform the same question or issue.” In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were triangulated in order to strengthen the conclusions that were made. In addition, the data were collected from many sources. For instance, 16 teachers and 2 district education officials were interviewed, 80 students and 40 parents were involved in focus group interviews, and 348 students responded to a questionnaire. Furthermore, some data were taken from documents. According to Gall et al. (1996, p. 573), triangulation enhances the validity of findings and “interpretations are more credible if the researcher demonstrates openness to the possibility of multivocality.”

The second feature was the use of critical friends. From the beginning of this study through to data collection, analysis and reporting, critical friends were used to critique the ideas of this study. These critical friends are what Rossman and Rallis call “communities of practice.” These were “small groups of peers working together to test out ideas, critique one another’s work, offer alternative conceptualizations, and provide both emotional and intellectual support” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. xvi preface). Most of my critical friends were those who had been taking classes together. In addition, when I went to Malawi, I used my fellow lecturers and professors at Chancellor College as my critical friends. Critical friends looked at my questionnaire, interview guides, analytic memos and preliminary interpretations of the data and gave their comments and insights.

Finally, before the research instruments were used to collect data, they were pre-tested. First of all, the questionnaire and interview guides were distributed to colleagues in the University of Malawi for their comments. The comments helped to either modify or change position of some question items. Secondly, one primary school in the rural area was chosen to pilot-test the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to criticize and make comments about the questions that were not clear to them, in addition to responding to the questionnaire itself. The questionnaire was administered exactly the way it would be administered in the field. Then some modifications were made to the items that students had difficulties understanding. Furthermore, I asked primary school teachers at the school to read the questionnaire and give their own comments. This pilot testing was aimed at ensuring both validity and reliability of the research instrument. That is to say, pilot testing helped to identify errors and unclear statements in the instrument.

Consequently, participants understood the questions and responded appropriately, hence

the instrument was able to measure what it was intended to measure and also gave results consistently whenever it was used. Gall et al. (1996) also recommended that a questionnaire should be pre-tested before using it. In addition, they concurred that pre-testing “should provide space for respondent to make criticisms and recommendations for improving the questionnaire” (Gall et al. 1996, p. 298). It should also be noted that the features that were presented in the ethical consideration section were also important for making this study credible.

Chapter Summary

In general, the theoretical framework that guided the design and methods of this study was pragmatism. Consequently, the study followed a concurrent mixed methods design in its overall approach. The population of interest was teachers, students and parents in rural areas in the two districts from the Southern region of Malawi. These participants were identified through a purposeful sampling technique. Data were collected through one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, questionnaire and document reviews. In qualitative method, data were analyzed through the process of identifying themes and categories, coding, and writing analytic memos. In quantitative method, data were analyzed using computer software of statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). Furthermore, the study was conducted while recognizing issues of ethics, triangulation, use of critical friends, and pilot testing the questionnaire in order to make the results credible.

CHAPTER 4

REPETITION, SELECTION AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE POLICIES:

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis and discussion of standard eight repetition and selection issues and the policies that accompany them. The discussion begins with a brief description of the four schools where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Secondly, the issue of standard eight selection and its process is presented. Thirdly, the statement of repetition and selection policies is discussed followed by the analysis of the knowledge of repetition and selection policies. In this, the knowledge of teachers, students, and parents on the policies is explored. In addition, the views of district education officials are presented. Fourthly, the perceived effects of the repetition and selection policies are examined. Then the investigation on how repeaters were tracked in schools is given. Finally, the discussion centers on the analysis of the relationship between repetition, knowledge of policies and rural students' aspirations for secondary education.

A Brief Description of the Four Schools

Before presenting the actual results of this study, it is worthwhile to put the study in context by briefly describing the four schools where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. As said by Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 275), "thick description makes analysis and interpretation possible." This description helps to understand the issues presented and discussed in this study. Just to repeat, the schools were divided into two categories: high selection rate (HSR) schools and low selection rate (LSR) schools.

From the four schools selected for both qualitative and quantitative data collection, two were from Zomba district and the other two were from Thyolo district. In each district, one school was in the high selection rate category and the other in the low selection rate category. The description starts with the schools in the low selection rate category from both districts and then ends with those from the high selection rate. For confidentiality purposes, the schools are not addressed by their names.

Low Selection Rate (LSR) Schools

To begin with, the low selection rate school in Zomba is one of the schools located on the foot of Zomba Mountain. This school is about 20 kilometers from the District Education Headquarters but about two kilometers from the main road. So access to the school is not difficult at all. The nearest community day secondary school is about 7 kilometers away from the school. This means that some students who are selected to this community day secondary school walk longer than 7 kilometers, as they live some kilometers away from their primary school and further away from the CDSS.

At the time of the study, there were too many students in the lower classes but very few in the upper classes. For instance, there were only 22 students in standard eight but 200 children in standard one. Each standard in lower classes was divided into two classes up to standard four and, thereafter, each standard was a single stream. Most of the teachers in the lower classes were female and unqualified.

At this school, school buildings and teacher houses form a rectangle with a playground on the middle. The teachers' office and staff room is located at one corner of the rectangle but the people who were mostly found in this room for the whole period I was at the school were standard eight teachers, the headmaster and his deputy, and they

were all male. The headmaster's office is located inside the staff room, and it is where I conducted interviews with the headmaster and teachers. Parent focus group interviews took place in the staff room and those for students took place in their classrooms.

Even though some of standard eight students came from the same village where the school is located and others from the surrounding villages, they were all put on boarding. One classroom was used as boys' hostel, while girls occupied one teachers' house, which was deliberately made available for them. The teachers who had no houses on the campus found houses outside the campus; some were very far from the school.

Historically, there have been very few students selected to secondary school at this school every year. In reference to table 3, the average selection rate from 1998 to 2002 was 4%. Even after CDSSs were introduced between 1999 and 2002, the selection rates were not considerable except in the year 2000 when selection went up to 15%.

Table 3: Standard 8 Students' Performance at the Low Selection Rate School in Zomba

Year	No. Wrote Exam	No. Passed	No. Selected	Pass Rate	Selection Rate
1998	50	30	0	60%	0%
1999	35	20	1	56%	3%
2000	40	25	6	63%	15%
2001	34	17	0	50%	0%
2002	35	17	1	49%	3%
Average	39	22	2	56%	4%

The culture of the community surrounding the school values marriages and initiation ceremonies; as such early marriages are so common. Once a child is initiated, he or she is pronounced mature and gets married despite the age. Some children drop out

of school to get married once initiated. Teachers at the school said that even though there were 200 students in standard one, most of them would have dropped out to get married by standard 8. Furthermore, the community's main economic activity is making and selling charcoal. They make charcoal from the trees in the Zomba Mountain. Those children who get married early support their families with money from the charcoal business. Teachers were worried that children in this community are not being encouraged to go to school. Once they decide to leave school, parents do nothing about it.

When parents were invited for focus group interview, they were asked to indicate by ticking whether they would come or not. Interestingly, none of the parents from this school responded whether they would come or not, but all the parents invited came on the day of interview. When they were asked if they agreed to be interviewed, they stated that their coming meant that they agreed to be interviewed though they did not indicate in writing that they would attend the interview. My own comment is that this kind of response might have an implication on how parents in this community encourage their children to continue with school. There is a possibility that most of the parents in the community might be either illiterate or semiliterate. Thus the prevailing culture of communication in most of the rural areas in Malawi is oral, and the illiterate and the semiliterate respond more quickly to oral communication than written. So since most of the school communications to parents about the education of their children are written as I did with my letter, it is possible that parents respond to such communications with laxity, hence affecting how their children participate in education. The letter to parents was written in a language that parents spoke and understood – Chichewa.

The second low selection rate school is in Thyolo district. This school is about 30 kilometers from the District Education Headquarters and about 17 kilometers from the main road. The nearest community day secondary school is about 5 kilometers away from the school.

Like the other low selection rate primary school, the headmaster and deputy who ran this school were all male. In addition, teachers in standard seven and eight classes, which are senior classes, were also male. Most female teachers and unqualified staff taught the lower classes.

Unlike the low selection rate school in Zomba, the one in Thyolo had a considerable number of children in standard eight. At the time of this study, there were 60 students in standard eight. Historically this school had been experiencing diminishing standard eight enrolment though its annual selection rate did not vary much except in the year 2000 when it was 10% (refer to table 4). The diminishing enrolment rates may be caused by the running away of children from the school to repeat at other schools where more students were selected to secondary school. However, its average selection rate from 1998 to 1999 came closer to the cut off point of 23%. This school's performance was better than its counterpart in Zomba.

Although the community around the school also values marriages, much of their time is committed to farming and various small business enterprises. As said by teachers, the community around this school, to some extent, encourages children to be in school but because of poverty, the children drop out and participate in small businesses to earn money to support themselves.

At this school, though not all parents responded to the letter inviting them for the focus group interview, more than three quarters indicated that they would attend the interview and, on the day of the interview, all the parents invited were present.

Table 4: Standard 8 Students' Performance at the Low Selection Rate School in Thyolo

Year	No. Wrote Exam	No. Passed	No. Selected	Pass Rate	Selection Rate
1998	98	86	20	88%	20%
1999	76	61	16	80%	21%
2000	73	17	7	23%	10%
2001	61	18	12	30%	20%
2002	58	40	11	70%	19%
Average	73	44	13	58%	18%

High Selection Rate (HSR) Schools

Having described schools in the low selection rate category, the next description centers on the other two high selection rate schools: one in Zomba and the other in Thyolo.

The high selection rate school in Zomba is about 20 kilometers from the District Education Headquarters and about 14 kilometers from the main road. However, it is only about 2 kilometers from the nearest community day secondary school. At this primary school, there is a Teacher Development Center (TDC). This is a center where teachers from other surrounding schools meet regularly to share teaching experiences, knowledge, materials and so on.

The school is an old school, which started as a mission school and was later taken over by the Malawi government. At the time of the study, the school had many children

from standard one to standard eight. For instance, there were 82 students in standard eight. However, there were many other classrooms at the school that were vacant. Under normal circumstances, the school would have used the extra classes to create double or triple streams in standard eight. So it was not normal to see that a high selection rate school, which usually attracts many standard eight students, has some classrooms unoccupied. Like in other schools studied, the headmaster, deputy and standard eight teachers were all male.

Though it was found that there is also a culture of early marriage for children in the community where the school is located, the community values education and encourages the children to go to school. For instance, the headmaster of the school indicated that there was nothing in the culture of the people around that interfered with the education of children at his school. Though he admitted that some children got married while they were young, the headmaster said that the problem was nevertheless not grave. Students also agreed that their community encouraged them to continue with school and, if they were absent from school, “people ask us why we have not gone to school and this makes us to go to school the next day.”

My meeting with parents also indicated that the parents had the education of their children at heart. The first indicator was that every parent who was invited for the interviews responded that he/she would come. On the day of interview, the parents were so active that they brought in many issues, some of which I did not solicit. Though I planned to conduct the interview for one and half to two hours, it took three and half-hours. The parents liked to continue talking so much that I had to cut the discussion down because of time.

Historically, the school had been performing well except in 1998 when nobody was selected to go to secondary school (refer to table 5). This is a period when DEC's were in the process of being converted to CDSSs and a number of schools experienced low selection rate because students were being selected to national and district secondary schools only. Those who went to DEC's were not counted on the selection list because there was no selection to DEC's.

Table 5: Standard 8 Students' Performance at the High Selection Rate School in Zomba

Year	No. Wrote Exam	No. Passed	No. Selected	Pass Rate	Selection Rate
1998	92	26	0	28%	0%
1999	63	53	19	84%	30%
2000	67	63	18	94%	27%
2001	66	64	50	97%	76%
2002	69	69	31	100%	45%
Average	71	55	24	81%	36%

The second high selection rate school is the one in Thyolo. The school is located about 15 kilometers from the District Education Headquarters and about 3 kilometers from the main road. At the school, there is also a community day secondary school. The CDSS shares building structures with the primary school. The school is half surrounded by tea farms and estates.

Just near the school, there is an interesting private secondary school. It is an old grocery building with poor light and ventilation. Unless one was told, one would not recognize the building as a secondary school. However, it seemed it attracted a considerable number of students. Just observing when passing, I could see that the rooms

that were used as classrooms were about full. My question nevertheless was, are students happy to be at this school? This study answered this question.

The community surrounding the school is very active and was in the process of constructing school blocks for the community day secondary school at the time of the study. It appeared to me that most people in this community are literate because half of the parents in my focus group interview frequently compared their school days then with the school days of their children now. In addition, most of them mixed English and Chiehewa when speaking. It is common for educated people in Malawi to mix English and their mother tongue when speaking in their mother language. Furthermore, every parent who was invited to attend the group interview responded by indicating that they would come. The community at this school is very eager to improve the education of their children, and they strongly encourage the children to go to school. Even the headmaster indicated that he received strong support from the community in running the school. However, still some children drop out of school to work in the tea estates or indulge in micro-business. Like in other schools, the administrators and those teaching senior classes were largely male. In particular, the headmaster, his deputy and standard eight teachers were all male.

The school had a good success history since 1998 except in the year 2002 when only 4% of the standard eight students who sat for examinations that year were selected to secondary school (refer to table 6). However, it was difficult to explain what happened in 2002 because when teachers were asked, they stated that they even did not understand why there were irregular pass and selection rates in their schools. They indicated that

every year they receive different examinations and selection results that are not consistent with the previous years.

Table 6: Standard 8 Students' Performance at the High Selection Rate School in Thyolo

Year	No. Wrote Exam	No. Passed	No. Selected	Pass Rate	Selection Rate
1998	100	20	20	20%	20%
1999	79	77	32	97%	41%
2000	82	64	25	78%	30%
2001	105	100	54	95%	51%
2002	95	49	4	52%	4%
<u>Average</u>	92	62	27	68%	29%

In brief, both high selection rate and low selection rate schools had some characteristics in common. For instance, all were run by male administrators, senior classes were taken by male teachers, while most teachers in the junior classes were female and most unqualified. Though the schools are far from district headquarters and some far from main roads, the roads to the schools are accessible either on foot or by car. Consequently, distance from the district education headquarters did not seem to influence the success of the schools where interviews were conducted. However, the major differences between the high selection rate schools and the low selection rate schools are in: the prevailing culture and values of the community in which the schools are located; whether there is a TDC or community day secondary school at the school or near it; and the type of economic activity taking place in the community and how the community values the activity as compared to schooling.

Standard Eight Selection and its Process

When participants were asked to give their views about secondary school selection in standard eight, there were no differences between those from HSR schools and LSR schools. In general, all participants agreed that they found standard eight selection a problem. One teacher indicated that there are so many inequalities in the way students are being selected to secondary school from one school to another. Even though this teacher was from HSR school, he lamented, "there are some schools where for a long time no child has been selected to secondary school while in other schools children go to secondary school every year." The teacher observed that children who attend schools where students are not selected to secondary school become disinterested in school and usually they drop out. In addition, the teacher stated that children drop out because they have no role model to follow and, even when teachers try to encourage such children, they do not take that encouragement seriously. "In some schools they just select one child out of, for example, sixty children. So children say 'if they have selected only one student, when will our turn come?' Then they drop out," the teacher explained.

This problem was also a concern of some teachers from LSR schools. For instance, one of them similarly complained, "there are some schools where always many children are selected to secondary school while in other schools, even if teachers work extra hard, children are not selected." Furthermore, parents from the same LSR school lamented about selection especially at the school where their children went. In their cry, they uttered:

For example here at (name of the school mentioned) children in standard eight are not selected to go to secondary school. However, if we go in other schools, we hear that ten children or twenty children have been selected but here none. So we tend to wonder as to what happens at this school?

And again another parent chipped in:

The major issue is what that lady has said. What happens at this school (with emphasis)? In other schools we hear that children have been selected but why not here (with emphasis)? So we all tend to wonder.

Parents thought that children at the school might have become so used to the teachers since most teachers had been at the school for a long time. As a result, students looked down upon them. Therefore, the parents suggested that the Malawi government should introduce a policy that would not allow teachers to stay at one school for a long time. They felt that if teachers at the school are changed, the school might improve and be able to send their children to secondary school. That is, they supposed that if new teachers keep on coming to the school, they will be working harder and students will be able to listen to them more seriously because their weaknesses will not have yet been known to the students. Consequently, their performance will increase and many students will be selected to secondary school. When some teachers were asked how long they had been at the school, one teacher who had been teaching for forty-six years said thirteen years. Another teacher, who was also headmaster and had been teaching for twelve years, had the whole twelve years spent at this one school. As a rural school, it was also possible that it was not getting much attention from the Ministry, either at district or division levels, to check how long same teachers had been at the school.

Moreover, one of the headmasters in an LSR school indicated that selection is also a problem because of corruption that leads to unequal access to secondary education between students from poor and rich backgrounds. He stated, "Some children in standard eight are selected to secondary school because of the names of their parents in the government." He stated that the children who go to very good secondary schools are

those whose parents are doing very well in the government. This headmaster indicated that most children in rural areas do not have many chances of going to secondary school “because of their names.” The children in rural area come from poor parents whose names are not known in the government.

Parents also reported the issue of corruption. For instance, one of the parents from the HSR school complained, “It is clearly seen that there is corruption in secondary school selection.” He gave an example of second selection, which was not done at the school where his children went, though it was indicated at the district education office that some children had been selected from that school. That is to say, standard eight selection is usually done twice. The first selection is done after the students have written their examinations to begin form one at secondary schools in the first term. Then when some students fail to attend their assigned schools by the end of the first school term, the Ministry does the second selection to fill the places of those who have failed to attend. This is the second selection the parent was talking about. According to the parent, some children were later on selected to secondary school after parents had launched an inquiry with the district education office. “So selection begins to bend right from the top,” he emphasized.

Another teacher who was a deputy headmaster from an HSR school indicated that standard eight selection is further affected by malpractices that the Ministry of Education is failing to control. He said that there are some teachers who help their students write examinations and such children are selected to secondary school leaving intelligent children who write examinations on their own. “Even though selection is based on merit, the children who are intelligent and write examinations on their own are disadvantaged

because they cannot compete with teachers,” he complained. The teacher felt that when teachers help their students during examinations, it means that other children who write the same examinations on their own do not compete with their fellow students but with teachers. Consequently, such children cannot perform above the teachers who are more educated and knowledgeable, experienced and mature. Giving his views, he narrated:

I would be happy if the Ministry of Education found a way of curbing cheating so that at least a child should be writing examinations alone. In this way, children would be selected according to their own performance, and competition would be genuine.

Some students also echoed the problem of cheating in standard eight examinations and said that this makes selection to be a problem. For instance, one student from LSR school complained that there are “some teachers who reveal answers to their students during examinations and are selected to go to secondary school.” According to her, such children perform poorly when they get to secondary school.

Apart from failing to compete with their teachers, the study has revealed that the issue of cheating affects whether intelligent children will work hard during examinations or not. Some students were worried that since the issue of cheating is widely known to many people, including teachers who mark examinations, they did not know if they should be working hard to score higher grades in examinations. As one student who seemed intelligent and responded to my questions in English, though sometimes in broken English, stated, “Nowadays selection, it is not going on well.” When asked why, he said, “Because when someone has intelligence, the people who mark examination papers they can think that you were cheating. For example if you pass 90% English, some people can think that you have been cheating.” Students felt that students who perform very well on their own might have been penalized and not selected to secondary school

because examination markers thought that their teachers had helped them to do well, as had been the trend in many schools. So cheating may have put intelligent children at a disadvantage in the sense that they are discouraged to work hard in case they are taken as cheaters. Whether it is true or not that examination markers think that way, it cannot be ruled out that the way people think about performance of cheaters might affect the participation of intelligent children in education especially at standard eight, hence affecting their access to secondary and further education.

In addition, parents concurred with teachers and students that selection in standard eight is problematic. As one of the parents from an HSR school said, "As for me, I feel that selection is a problem because of one thing: children write examinations before they finish the standard eight syllabus. Children are asked questions on topics they have not covered." In support another parent said, "Yes! Children usually complain to us that some examination questions are centered on the topics they have not covered." Another parent from an LSR school related the problem of lack of content coverage to cheating and stated, "Because teachers know that they do not cover the whole standard eight syllabus, they start cheating during examinations by revealing answers to students. They fear of being ashamed when their students fail examinations." Parents thought that standard eight national examinations are solely centered on standard eight syllabus so if teachers fail to cover the syllabus, their children will not be able to answer the questions that come from the uncovered topics. Similarly, they indicated that once their children see strange questions during examinations, they think the questions have come from the topics they have not covered.

One retired teacher at an LSR school who had been teaching for 46 years and was invited back into teaching on contract after the Malawi government introduced free primary education also mentioned the problem of selection at standard eight. He said selection is a problem because standard eight acts as a “bottle neck.” When asked to expound on this, he said, “Yes! Secondary schools are fewer. So even if all children pass examinations, not all will be selected to secondary school.”

In addition to selection being a problem, participants indicated that even its process is hardly understood. One of the teachers in LSR school complained that at their school they become confused when they receive selection lists from the Ministry of Education. What they always observe on the list is that, among children with similar grades, some are selected to secondary school while others are not. Worse still, they also observe that some children with lower grades are selected to secondary school while some with higher grades are left out. “For example, here we had two children. One had Cs in all the subjects he wrote but was selected while the other had two Bs and Cs but was not selected. So we do not know what criteria they use in the selection process.” Even students had similar complaints; one of them said, “I personally do not think well of selection because sometimes they select students with low ‘positions’ leaving those with high ‘positions’.” Grading in standard eight ranges from ‘A’ to ‘F’. ‘A’ is highest and ‘F’ lowest or failure. It seems teachers and students are kept in the dark about the selection process and as such, they are concerned because they do not know how they can make students abide by the ‘rules of the game’. It seems they are made to play a game whose rules are not known and mistakes are made ignorantly. As stated by another teacher:

We teachers who teach standard eight would be happy if we knew the rules that are followed in the standard eight selection process because we just hear rumors

that selection is done by primary education advisors (PEAs) and others say no, it is done by District Education Managers (DEM).

One teacher from an LSR school complained that at his school students are not being selected, whether examinations are tough or not. However, he did not know the reason why. He emphasized that when they compare grades of students from those schools where children are always selected and their school, they see students of similar grades who are selected in the other school but are not selected at their school. "As a result, teachers here are seen as if they do not work while we do work very hard but we do not know what actually happens," the teacher complained emotionally charged. Even parents showed their concern about selection process and said:

When we hear that a child has passed examination but s/he has not been selected, we, parents, are disappointed and we do not know why the child has not been selected. Even the child him/her self becomes demoralized.

Parents from another school, which was an HSR school, had similar sentiments and explained that many children fail to be selected and as a result they drop out at standard eight, "but we do not know what qualifications one should have for him or her to be selected." Some parents from an HSR school strongly recommended that when children pass standard eight examinations, the Malawi government should find a way of making them go somewhere instead of selecting some and leaving some suffering as if they have not passed the examinations. As stated by one of them:

If a child has passed, has passed. Why should s/he be left behind? For example, we hear that when a child passes in Form two, s/he proceeds to Form three. Similarly in the primary schools, the government should find a way of pushing forward those children who pass examinations.

Parents here expressed their concerns with a lot of emotions as if they were presenting them direct to the Ministry of Education so that it should do something with immediate effect.

Parents were also mostly concerned with girls. They stated that girls in rural areas become pregnant quickly once they are not selected because they do not have any other alternative. So they suggested that girls should be pushed forward quickly once they pass standard eight examinations so that they should be confident that they would finish school, hence shun away from becoming pregnant early. To support this suggestion one parent in a lengthy statement said:

For example, I have a daughter who wrote two standard eight examinations: one from mission school and another from government school. She passed both exams but she was not selected to government secondary school. I did not want to delay her, so I sent her to the mission school. This daughter now is in form three. However, she had a friend who also passed both government and mission examinations but was not selected to government school. Her parents told her to repeat so that she should go to government school. She repeated twice but no selection. Do you know then what happened? She ended up becoming pregnant and her education ended there. That's why I support that it is dangerous to delay girls. Once they pass, at the same time they should proceed.

These parents committed themselves to build more school blocks for the community day secondary school, which is right at the primary school where their children were, if the government supported them to do so. However, they said that at the meantime the government should introduce shift system in the community day secondary schools so that more students should access secondary education as they wait for more school blocks to be built.

Furthermore, participants wondered why most students from rural primary schools are not selected to national secondary schools or district secondary schools,

which are of better quality than community day secondary schools (CDSS). As one teacher stated:

I don't know the criteria they use because the majority of students from rural schools go to community day secondary schools and most of those from urban areas go to national and district secondary schools. Now it seems like CDSSs are for the rural people, which is not good. Rural children would like also to learn in national secondary schools.

The issue of most rural students attending CDSSs was also supported in the quantitative data collected from school documents where 82.5% of rural pupils who wrote examinations between 1998 to 2002 in the eight schools were selected to CDSSs, while only 9.9% and 7.6% were selected to district secondary schools and national secondary schools respectively. However, more research is required to determine the rate at which urban students go to district and national secondary schools as compared to those from rural areas. Nevertheless, according to the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (2000, p. 3), there are more students enrolled in CDSSs than those enrolled in conventional secondary schools. That is to say, approximately 100,000 students are enrolled in CDSSs while almost 40,000 are enrolled in conventional secondary schools.

In a nutshell, participants agreed that there are many problems in standard eight selection to secondary school. It is clear that the basic cause of problems in secondary school selection is that there are too few secondary schools for all primary school students to be selected to. This problem has also led to other problems that participants indicated. That is to say, participants further felt that selection is not well distributed in schools, as such; it promotes educational inequalities between schools and between the rural poor and the rich. And again, they felt that some children get selected because of cheating, a tendency that puts intelligent children at a disadvantage. They also felt that

cheating is further encouraged because teachers do not finish teaching the standard eight syllabus, hence they become obliged to illegally assist their students in examinations so that they should be selected; hence many are being left out. Furthermore, participants felt that even the selection process itself is not very clear to them. Many times selection results are contrary to participants' expectations about selection.

However, except the district education officials, participants did not mention the standard eight selection and repetition policies that are designed to reduce chances of going to secondary school for repeaters. Was it that the policies are good, or that it was just an omission or that the policies were not known? With these questions in mind, I proceeded with an investigation whose results are presented in the next two sections beginning with statement of repetition policies then knowledge of the policies.

Statement of Repetition and Selection Policies

According to Robinson, Brandon, Davison, Jean and Williams (1994) high repetition rates in the Malawi education system is attributed to two major factors. The first one is poor quality especially at lower standards which is a result of large classes; few textbooks, exercise books and writing materials or teaching aids; insufficient classrooms, desks and chairs; and an overly demanding curriculum. The second major factor is insufficient secondary school places that do not meet social demand, hence leading to pupils repeating in standard eight in order to improve their scores on the PSLCE, which is used to allocate positions in secondary school. Through the program of GABLE (Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education), the government of Malawi worked to reduce repetition in a number of ways:

1. Setting annual targets to reduce repetition rates by 25% over the life of GABLE program.
2. Convening a broadly representative committee in 1992 to consider policy options to reduce repetition. The Ministry of Education then decided to distribute a circular requiring schools to restrict repetition rates within prescribed limits.
3. Establishing a primary pupil registration system (PPRS) to gather accurate and timely information to monitor the reduction of repetition. According to Robinson et al. (1994) the PPRS appeared to have been successfully implemented in 1992/93. However, they observed that there was not clear instructions to schools to use the unique pupil identification numbers (PIN) when identifying pupils on the report and PIN were not provided with the registration forms to be completed.
4. In an effort to reduce repetition in standard eight, the World Bank agreed with the Malawi government to allocate form one places according to the following policies beginning 1992/93:
 - a. 75% of form one places to pupils who have not repeated standard eight.
 - b. 20% of form one places to pupils who have repeated standard eight once.
 - c. 5% of form one places to pupils who have repeated standard eight two or more times.

So this study was mainly concerned with the standard eight repetition and selection policies that discourage repetition at standard eight while at the same time, there are not enough secondary school places for all primary school graduates who pass PSLCE. According to Kuthemba Mwale (2000), education in Malawi is elitist and

primary students are ill prepared for other route but academic and they try all possible means to get into the academic route. One of the means is through repetition at standard eight in order to secure selection to secondary school. If the alternative routes are not provided and students are discouraged to repeat in order to improve their scores and access secondary education, how will they continue with their education? In addition, how do these policies impact rural students' access to secondary education? How much knowledge do grassroots' stakeholders have about the policies?

In this study, district education officials were asked about the process of secondary school selection at standard eight and they indicated that selection is done following a number of policies. The first one is "a 50-50 policy." That is, they select 50% boys and 50% girls to each secondary school. The second one is a "5 kilometers radius to a secondary school especially CDSS." They said that they allocate primary schools to each of the community day secondary schools, which they call "Feeder Schools." These are primary schools that are at least within five kilometers radius to a particular CDSS. "Students from those schools are selected to that particular CDSS." However, I wanted to know what happen to those students who are outside the five kilometers radius, or are all the primary schools within the five kilometers radius to every CDSS? In response one of the district education officials said, "In fact we have some schools that are more than five kilometers to the nearest CDSS. So for those, we still select them to the nearest CDSS though the distance may be more than five kilometers." This confirms that some students have to walk a distance of more than five kilometers to a CDSS or a distance of more than ten kilometers to and from a CDSS.

In addition, another district education officer stated that standard eight students are selected on merit. The first category goes to national boarding secondary schools: "These are students who perform extremely well." The second category goes to district boarding/day secondary schools, and the third category goes to community day secondary schools. "Those who go to CDSSs are the ones whose examination grades are lower than those who are sent to either district or national secondary schools," he concluded.

When asked how students who repeat and those who do not repeat are treated in the selection process, the district education officer said that priority goes to those who just come from standard seven. "The one who scores highly as a beginner is considered to secondary school. If there is still vacancy, the other categories are considered. The policy is that if you are a beginner and you have done well, it means you are intelligent."

"But do you select all the beginners that do very well in examinations?" I asked.

"No! No! There isn't enough space in secondary schools," he responded.

"So does it mean that a beginner who is intelligent and does well this year but is not selected will be unintelligent next year if he/she repeats?" I probed further.

However, the officer just laughed and said, "It's not me who make policies."

The officers' response nevertheless showed to me that repeaters could not be avoided and I planned to follow this up when dealing with the theme of participants' perspectives and knowledge about selection and repetition policies. Another district education officer also concurred with his colleague that in principle, the selection chances of those who write examinations more than once are reduced. However, he said that sometimes the policy is overlooked because of "too much work." "Those policies are implemented when thinking of national and district secondary schools but they are not

strictly implemented to those who go to CDSSs,” said the officer. However, it was found later in this study that even though first priority is given to beginners, more repeaters are selected to national and district secondary schools than beginners.

Furthermore, when asked who does the selection, the district education officers said that it is the Ministry of Education that selects children to secondary schools. According to them, the job of MANEB is just to set, administer and mark examinations, “and once the results are processed, they are sent to the Ministry headquarters.” The first selection, to national and district secondary schools, is done by the people in the planning section in the Ministry headquarters. “Now those that go to CDSS, it’s the district education managers that are invited to the Ministry headquarters. They do not do it here.”

Knowledge of Repetition and Selection Policies

This study’s main interest was on standard eight repetition and selection policies that imply that students who are beginners in standard eight have a higher chance of being selected to secondary school than those who repeat. So participants were asked questions that would establish whether they knew the policies or not. The logic was that if participants, who also are stakeholders in primary education, did not know the policies, their behavior would be contrary to the expectations of the policies, hence students’ chances of participating in secondary education would be affected. Therefore in this section, the participants’ knowledge of repetition and selection policies is explored and the differences and common characteristics in policy knowledge between participants from LSR schools and HSR schools are noted.

Teachers' Knowledge

The first category is teachers; the discussion starts with those from LSR schools. First of all, I wanted to know what advice teachers gave to their students if they failed to be selected to secondary school. All the teachers that were interviewed from LSR schools indicated that they encouraged them to repeat, and they gave various reasons for that. For instance, one of the teachers said, "I tell them that it is good that they repeat because secondary schools are fewer and private schools are very expensive." This teacher said that he encouraged the students to work extra hard in the following academic year so that they should be selected. In answering the same question, another teacher said that he told students that those who were so unfortunate that they were not selected should not be disappointed because failing to be selected did not mean that they were not intelligent, but "maybe because there were some technical faults some where. So if you fail to be selected don't be discouraged, come back and repeat." The other teacher was a headmaster and when asked, he said, "We tell them that nowadays they have got a right to go to private school if they pass, but we advise them that most private schools offer very poor quality education so it's better to repeat and their chance will come for them to be selected." Another teacher was a deputy headmaster and he said that he encouraged students to repeat because "there is a mentality that the first year in standard eight is for warming up, and the second year is when one should work hard so that one should be selected." He further said that when students repeat, their performance improves because they become more familiar with the materials than a beginner.

When teachers were asked if they knew any policies that dealt with standard eight selection and repetition, they expressed ignorance of them. For example, one of the

teachers said, “Aaah! I do not know of any. We are just doing things anyhow without knowing any policy that deals with repetition and selection.” Another said, “We don’t know. We just teach the students and when they fail, they come back and teach them again. But we don’t know if there are any policies that we can follow on this.” Even when the question was asked in a different way indicating what the policies say, still teachers said they did not know them. For instance, with a surprise one headmaster said, “Aaah! They were hidden. This is my first time to hear about these policies.”

There were only two teachers among the eight teachers interviewed in the LSR schools who had heard about the standard eight selection and repetition policies just in a glimpse, and they said they were not sure if the policies were being implemented. When the policies were mentioned to one of them he said:

In fact I never knew them in the way you have put it. But what you have said has just reminded me of what happened before I came here. Just before examinations, teachers were asked to indicate the names of those children who were repeating and those who were not repeating. Then we just heard rumors that a beginner in standard eight would have higher chances of being selected than a repeater. That is the only thing I knew but its implementation seemed to have died away.

This teacher said he had never seen anything in writing mentioning the policies and teachers never mentioned them again in his eight years of teaching. Another teacher said that he had heard of the policies longtime ago but “as a result, the policies brought some cheating in a sense that teachers did not want to reveal that their children were repeating because they depended on those repeaters for secondary school selection.” So even though these teachers had some knowledge of the policies, they never implemented them because they were not sure of the policies’ continual existence.

From the HSR schools, it was only headmasters who knew the policies. In fact only one headmaster knew the policies better than the others. When this headmaster was

asked what advice he gave to students when they were not selected, he said, "If they have passed examinations, we will now go to the government policies. Because the government now does not recommend that a child should repeat, so I encourage them to go to private secondary schools." Even though this headmaster knew the policies better than his colleagues, he did not know them entirely. When he was asked why the policies were introduced, he just said, "It came in 1994 just to discourage large classes." He could not even mention the selection percentages allocated to repeaters and non-repeaters for secondary school places. According to the Malawi Government (1999), "high repetition rates have serious implications on classroom sizes and raise the cost of education." That is why the government has been working on policies to reduce repetition. Another headmaster also stated that he had heard of those policies but "I do not know if they are put into practice Even in the meetings I have attended with MANEB, I have never heard these policies being stressed." He said he heard of the policies in his first year of teaching in 1996 and since then, he had never heard about them. It seems those who slightly knew about the policies did not take them seriously because it was just like a rumor.

However, none of the teachers in HSR schools were aware of the standard eight repetition and selection policies. They continued encouraging students to repeat so that they should be selected. Students' response to questionnaire had also shown evidence that teachers from both HSR and LSR schools encouraged students to repeat. Table 7 shows that 79% of the respondents said that teachers encouraged students to repeat. That is, 61% strongly agreed and 18% agreed that teachers encouraged students who were not selected to repeat. The only difference was that, apart from encouraging the students to repeat, teachers in HSR schools also strongly encouraged students who passed examinations to

go to private secondary schools. For example, one of them said, "If some students are not selected, we tell them that it is not the end of their education. They can go to private schools where they accept children even if they have not been selected. But I also tell them that if they repeat they can do well." The response of this teacher indicated that he was implementing the headmaster's ideas of encouraging students to go to private secondary schools though he was not aware of the standard eight repetition and selection policies, and his own feelings that students needed to repeat for them to be selected to secondary school. Another teacher also said, "Some children fail to be selected while they are intelligent so we encourage them to go to private secondary schools." It cannot be doubted that these teachers encouraged the students to go to private school because of the influence they got from their headmasters who slightly knew about the policies.

Table 7: Teachers Encourage Those Who Are Not Selected to Repeat

Students' Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	213	61
Agree	62	18
Moderately Agree	19	6
Moderately Disagree	7	2
Disagree	20	5
Strongly Disagree	27	8
Total	348	100

However, it was surprising to note that teachers in HSR schools did not know about the standard eight repetition and selection policies despite the fact that their headmasters knew about them. Even when the policies were mentioned, one of them said,

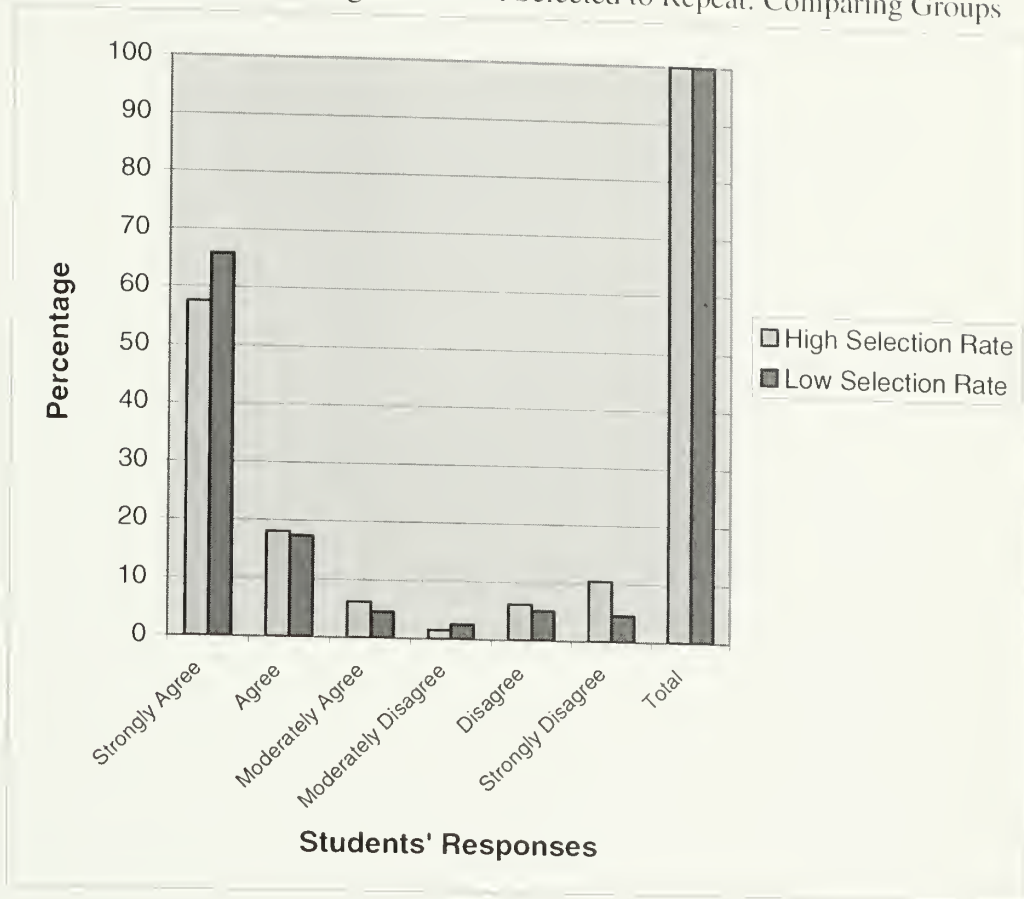
“Aaaaah! No! No! I have never heard of these policies.” It seemed also that teachers could not question why the headmasters encouraged students to go to private secondary schools and refused them to repeat at the school when most of the rural students are poor. This lack of power to question may indicate how powerful headmasters are in primary schools to influence decision-making and implementation at school level.

A small difference was also observed in the questionnaire between teachers in HSR and LSR schools in the way they encouraged their students to repeat. In reference to table 8, when the two groups were compared, about 83% of the students in LSR schools indicated that their teachers encouraged them to repeat. That is to say, about 66% strongly agreed and about 17% agreed that teachers encouraged those who failed to be selected to repeat. In the HSR schools, about 76% of the students indicated that teachers encouraged students who would not be selected to repeat. That is, about 58% strongly agreed and about 18% agreed that teachers encouraged students to repeat. However, this difference was not statistically significant. Similar information is also represented in chart 1 where student responses from high selection rate schools are compared with those from low selection rate schools on whether teachers encourage those students who fail to be selected to secondary school to repeat in standard eight or not.

Table 8: Teachers Encourage Those Not Selected to Repeat: Comparing Groups

Selection Rate	Students' Response	Frequency	Percent
High	Strongly Agree	111	57.5
	Agree	35	18.1
	Moderately Agree	12	6.2
	Moderately Disagree	3	1.6
	Disagree	12	6.2
	Strongly Disagree	20	10.4
	Total	193	100
Low	Strongly Agree	102	65.8
	Agree	27	17.4
	Moderately Agree	7	4.5
	Moderately Disagree	4	2.6
	Disagree	8	5.2
	Strongly Disagree	7	4.5
	Total	155	100

Chart 1: Teachers Encourage those Not Selected to Repeat: Comparing Groups



In short, it has been observed that teachers from LSR schools did not know about the standard eight selection and repetition policies. As such, they encouraged their students to repeat so that they should be selected to secondary school. Even for the very few who expressed some knowledge, their knowledge was not adequate to make them implement the policies or tell other teachers about them. In fact they thought it was just a rumor. In addition, in HSR schools, it was only headmasters who expressed some knowledge of the repetition and selection policies. These headmasters mostly encouraged their students to go to private schools if they failed to be selected. The only surprising thing was that their teachers expressed ignorance of the policies. Why did the headmasters not communicate to their teachers about the policies? This question made

me go back and ask two headmasters why they did not communicate the policies to their members of staff. One of them said, "These policies came long time ago and we are not very sure if they are being implemented because they did not come in writing. So I just let them lie." Another said, "I assumed that they knew the policies because when I tell students not to repeat at this school, they support me." However, teachers supported the headmaster not because they knew the policies, but because the headmaster, as an administrator, is one of the most powerful and influential persons at school. Nevertheless, most teachers in HSR schools also continued to encourage children to repeat.

Students' Knowledge

Turning to the students' knowledge of repetition and selection policies, all the students interviewed, from both LSR and HSR schools, were ignorant of the policies. When they were asked to say if they knew any policies concerning standard eight repetition and selection, most of them mentioned about cheating policies. When the selection and repetition policies were revealed to them, they said they had never heard about them. Even those students who responded to a questionnaire, in table 9, 78 % thought that the Ministry of Education supported the idea that those who failed to be selected should repeat. That is, 61% strongly agreed and 17% agreed that the Ministry of Education wanted students who failed to be selected to secondary school to repeat.

Table 9: Ministry of Education Wants those Not Selected to Repeat

Students' Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	210	61
Agree	60	17
Moderately Agree	13	4
Moderately Disagree	5	1
Disagree	17	5
Strongly Disagree	41	12
Total	346	100

When groups were compared, a slight difference, which was not statistically significant, was observed between students from HSR and LSR schools. In reference to table 10, more students (about 84%) in LSR schools thought that the Ministry of Education supported the idea of repetition at standard eight than their counterparts from HSR schools (about 73%).

Table 10: Ministry of Education wants Failures to Repeat: Comparing Groups

Selection Rate	Students' Response	Frequency	Percent
High	Strongly Agree	111	57.8
	Agree	29	15.1
	Moderately Agree	10	5.2
	Moderately Disagree	2	1
	Disagree	11	5.7
	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>15.1</u>
<u>Total</u>		<u>192</u>	<u>100</u>
Low	Strongly Agree	99	64.3
	Agree	31	20.1
	Moderately Agree	3	1.9
	Moderately Disagree	3	1.9
	Disagree	6	3.9
	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>7.8</u>
<u>Total</u>		<u>154</u>	<u>100</u>

In addition to the thinking that the Ministry of Education supported repetition, students indicated that once they failed to be selected they would repeat. For instance in table 11, 78% of the respondents indicated that if they failed to be selected, they would repeat. That is to say, 57% strongly agreed and 21% agreed that they would repeat.

Table 11: If I Fail Standard Eight Selection I will Repeat

Students' Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	196	57
Agree	74	21
Moderately Agree	11	3
Moderately Disagree	11	3
Disagree	14	4
Strongly Disagree	41	12
Total	346	100

When groups were compared, there was a very small difference of 2% between students from LSR and HSR schools. This further confirms that in both HSR and LSR schools students were not aware of the repetition and selection policies so the majority of them wanted to repeat in order to increase their chances of being selected. However, the trend continued that more students from LSR schools said they would repeat standard eight than their counterparts from HSR schools. Nevertheless, statistically, this difference was not significant.

Even though students showed that they did not know about the standard eight repetition and selection policies and also indicated that they would repeat the following year if they failed to be selected, there were very few students who were repeating in the schools where students were interviewed. When I asked students why there were very few repeaters at their schools, the reasons they gave were not because of the standard eight repetition and selection policies that discouraged repetition. They gave reasons that did not directly touch on the policies. For instance, students in one of the LSR schools

said that many students were not repeating at their school because the school had a long history of students failing to be selected to secondary school; as such, some standard eight students who failed to be selected went to repeat at other schools where many students had been selected. For instance one said:

Teachers here do not want to cheat in examinations by revealing answers to students. They want children to pass on their own. So there were so many children here but only few passed. As a result, some students said, 'we will go to another school because students here do not do well.' Then they left for those schools where many students do well.

Another said, "Some students who failed to be selected were encouraged by their parents to get married." Yet another said, "Some students refused to repeat because they did not want to stay in class together with students who were their juniors in standard seven."

Despite the fact that students did not know the standard eight selection and repetition policies, there were some differences found in interviews between students from LSR schools and HSR schools on whether they would repeat next year if they failed to be selected to secondary school and the reasons given.

All the students who were interviewed from LSR schools indicated that, if they were not selected, they would repeat standard eight next year. Asked why they would repeat, one of them said, "when you repeat, you know how MANEB asks questions and that helps you to do well." Another said, "you understand the materials better and this increases your chances of being selected." Some students believed that, when they repeated, they would be intellectually mature and that would help them survive in secondary school. In general, every student said that they would repeat because they wanted to go to secondary school. For example one said, "We also have a desire to go to secondary school; that is why we say that we will repeat."

However, students from HSR schools were divided. Some said they would repeat if they were not selected while others said they would not repeat. The reasons of those who said would repeat were not very different from those given by students from LSR schools. For instance one student said, "I will repeat because I want to prepare for my future. I do not want to drop school but continue so that I reach the stage I want to be, for example, an air captain." Another said, "I will repeat because when you repeat you become more intelligent and you don't suffer when you get to secondary school." And another said, "I will repeat because when you repeat, you know a lot of things. You learn some other things, which you didn't learn in your first year. As a result, you can be selected to a good secondary school." Again another said, "I will repeat because my ambition is to go to a good secondary school."

The students from HSR schools who said they would not repeat had also their own reasons. For example, one of them said, "At this school, they tell us that once we fail we cannot repeat here. So if we want to repeat, they refuse us." This is the school where the headmaster had some knowledge about the repetition and selection policies. So when students were asked why they were told not to repeat, one of them said, "They say we should not repeat in order to give space to those who come from standard seven."

However, another student chipped in:

I feel that is not the main reason because here there are so many unoccupied rooms and it is possible to have standard eight A and B as is the case with other schools. But here, there is one standard eight, one standard seven and one standard six. There are so many rooms that are not being used but they tell us not to repeat.

This student really had a good observation because this is also what I observed at the school. It seems that, apart from not telling his members of staff about the repetition and

selection policies, the headmaster did not tell the students. So the students did not understand why they were not allowed to repeat. This is the problem of policy communication that will further be explored in this study later. Some students said they could not repeat because they did not want to waste their time. Others said if they repeated they would not be able to work hard because they would think that they had known everything, which could make them fail to be selected again the following year.

In general, the study revealed that students were ignorant of the standard eight selection and repetition policies, and they said, if they failed, they would repeat. However, it was only students who were in HSR schools who were discouraged to repeat by their teachers, especially the headmasters, though the reasons were not disclosed to them. To reconfirm their ignorance, students thought that the Ministry of Education supported repetition at standard eight. Nevertheless, while all students from LSR schools who were interviewed indicated that they would repeat if they failed to be selected, those from HSR schools were divided. Some said they would repeat while some said they would not repeat. However, the reasons of those who said would not repeat did not show that they knew the standard eight repetition and selection policies.

Parents' Knowledge

Coming to the knowledge of parents, none of them, whether from LSR or HSR schools, had shown that they knew the standard eight repetition and selection policies. When they were asked to say what advice they gave to their children if they failed to be selected, one of them said, "A child can pass while he/she is not intelligent, so such a child needs to be given a chance to repeat. That's what I advise them, to repeat." Another parent said, "If we see that the child is not doing well at school, we tell him/her to repeat

the same standard eight class.” Asking them if they knew any policy about repetition and selection, they all said that they did not know any. Students’ questionnaire also showed that parents/guardians encouraged their children to repeat standard eight if they failed to be selected. In table 12, 90% of the students who responded indicated that their parents/guardians encouraged them to repeat standard eight if they failed to be selected. That is, 72% strongly agreed and 18% agreed that their parents encouraged them to repeat standard eight.

Table 12: Parents/Guardians Encourage Children not Selected to Repeat

<u>Students’ Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly Agree	250	72
Agree	63	18
Moderately Agree	10	3
Moderately Disagree	7	2
Disagree	5	1
<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>348</u>	<u>100</u>

When groups were compared, there were no significant differences between parents from LSR and HSR schools. In both groups, about 72% of the respondents strongly agreed that their parents/guardians encouraged them to repeat standard eight if they failed to be selected.

In addition, the parents, especially those from one of the HSR schools, were very worried because their children were not allowed to repeat standard eight and they did not know why. For instance one of them furiously said, “ The other thing that disappoints us,

and I hear it repeatedly, is that when a child fails to be selected at this school and he or she wants to repeat, he/she is told, 'you don't have a place here'." Parents did not like this tendency of refusing children who wanted to repeat, and they furiously spoke against it while looking at one of the parents in the group who was also a teacher at the school where these parents' children went. The parent/teacher did not say anything on this point. If he knew the standard eight repetition and selection policies, I think he would have defended himself. While parents from HSR schools liked their children to repeat at the same school where they were, those from LSR schools stated that they told their children to repeat at a different school. "If we see that a child is not doing well, especially because of how they are taught, we change the school. We tell the child to try another school." These parents felt that poor teaching was what made children not to be selected.

Briefly, all the parents interviewed did not know the standard eight repetition and selection policies, and they encouraged their children to repeat if they failed to be selected. Parents from HSR schools liked their children to repeat at the same school where they were while those from LSR schools encouraged their children to change schools.

Seeing that parents did not know the standard eight policies, I wanted to know if teachers and students thought it was important for parents to know school policies. In their responses, one of the teachers said that pupils, teachers and the community are stakeholders in education and parents are the "backbone" of the stakeholders. As such, parents need to know school policies so that they should take part in encouraging their children to work hard at school. "But because parents don't know school policies, that is why we hardly get parents come to encourage their children at school," said the teacher.

Another teacher also said that parents must know school policies because a school is surrounded by a community and, if the school does some things without the knowledge of parents, this is when conflicts arise between the parents and the school. The community then starts hating the school because they do not know the school policies. Another teacher also felt that parents should know school policies because, as said by him, "We are all educators of the child." According to this teacher, parents and teachers need to join hands in educating the child.

Students also felt that their parents should know school policies because, from their experiences, parents react badly to teachers when a child fails to abide by school policies, which parents did not know. "Parents come to shout at the headmaster or teachers if their child is suspended because of not following school policies," complained one of them. Students requested that teachers should be able to explain school policies to their parents and guardians so that when advising them, parents should do that in line with school policies.

District Education Officers' Views

When district education officers were asked if they thought teachers knew the standard eight repetition and selection policies, they both thought teachers knew the policies, and one of them said, "But they do not disclose them because they want their students to be selected to secondary school." This may explain why headmasters in HSR schools did not explain the selection and repetition policies to the teachers, students and parents. Another education officer thought teachers knew the policies because, when they are asked to indicate the names of repeaters, they respond favorably. However, this study

has shown that teachers did not really know why they were asked to submit names of repeaters. Some just speculated the reason but they did not stick to it seriously.

All in all, there is strong evidence that teachers, parents and students who were in this study were ignorant of the standard eight selection and repetition policies. However, those from LSR schools seemed to be more ignorant because there was nobody among them who had a considerable knowledge of the policies to raise alarms to students that repetition was detrimental to their desire to be selected to secondary school. For those from HSR schools, alarm was at least being sounded. Though it was sounded without enough knowledge of the policy, it might, to some extent, have helped students to work hard in their first year knowing that they would not be allowed to repeat the following year if they failed to be selected. Therefore, there is a high possibility that the repetition and selection policies may have negatively affected students from LSR schools more than those from HSR schools because of the extent of their ignorance. However, since in general, rural parents, students and teachers did not seem to have adequate knowledge of the standard eight repetition and selection policies, it is possible that they behaved contrary to the expectation of the policies, hence affecting rural students' chances of being selected to secondary school.

Selection and Repetition Policy Effects

Even though the standard eight repetition and selection policies were not known to most of the participants, this study acted as a learning process to them because I disclosed the policies to them. After disclosing, they were asked their views about the policies. Similarly, those who had some ideas about the policies were also asked to say what they thought about them. Therefore, all the participants gave both good and bad

effects, and there was no difference between participants from HSR schools and LSR schools in their perspectives.

Good Effects

For those participants who said the policies are good, they gave some reasons for saying so. For instance, one teacher said the policies are good because they give chances to those students who come from standard seven to be selected. The teacher said so because one of the policies states that 75% of secondary school places should be given to the students who are beginners in standard eight. Some teachers also agreed with this teacher, "It's those who come from standard seven that benefit from these policies." Students also agreed and one said, "It is good to you, a beginner, that you should be able to be selected."

Another teacher said that the policies are good because if somebody from standard seven performs well, it means he/she is intelligent and will do well in secondary school. According to him, repeaters perform well because of experience so "when they go to secondary school, their performance goes down and they do not do well."

Another good effect is that the policies can encourage students to work hard. For instance, one teacher said, "I feel these are good policies because they will encourage those lazy students to work hard knowing that if they fail, their chances of being selected will be reduced." Apart from encouraging lazy students, another teacher said the policies could also encourage all students who come from standard seven to work hard. Furthermore, students agreed that the policies might encourage them to work hard. For instance one of them said, "The goodness is that if you lose your first chance, it means you have wasted your time. So it is good to work hard in the first year." In addition, one

parent said the policies are good because “they will encourage children to work hard and that if they fail to be selected in the first year, their chances will be reduced.”

Bad Effects

Despite the good effects, most participants said the standard eight repetition and selection policies are bad. One teacher explained that many children have been getting grades that are required for one to be selected to secondary school but they have not been selected. However, he said, that is not the problem of the children but the problem of Ministry of Education and the government that do not provide enough secondary school spaces for children who perform well. He felt that it is unfair to push the government’s problem to children. “These policies could have been introduced if there were enough secondary schools so that each child who passed examinations was able to be selected,” he said. Other teachers agreed that the policies would be effective if there were many secondary schools for students to go. “If the child does not repeat, where is he/she going to go?” One teacher asked. “There is even no technical school where a standard eight graduate can go,” he continued. In support one parent said, “we, parents, tell our children to repeat because we have no where to take them to if they are not selected. It is not our intention that they should repeat but we’re forced to.” In addition, one student said, “These policies are a burden to repeaters and that is why they become unsettled.” According to her, repeaters move from one school to another so that they should be selected and “thereafter, he/she loses hope and drops out of school to become bar girls and charcoal makers, hence contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS and deforestation.” In support one parent stated that students who repeat should be encouraged to go to

secondary school, otherwise they will drop out and “once they drop out the result will be that they will be cutting down trees, get married or become thieves and snipers.”

Another problem is that the policies can encourage cheating. As one teacher said, “We teachers, our duty is to teach children so that they should be selected. So because of these policies, teachers will do everything possible that the child should be selected including helping him/her during examinations.” One teacher who slightly knew the policy further said that those children who knew about the policies changed their names when repeating so that they should appear as beginners. So the implementation of these policies appears problematic. Another teacher said, “if these policies are in use, it means that those students we feel that are very intelligent, but have not be selected, will be allowed to repeat the following year but we will not indicate to the Ministry of Education that they are repeaters.”

In addition, participants said that implementing these policies means denying the chances of repeaters to be selected. According to one teacher, “repeaters also have a right to be selected like anybody else. Especially when the problem is not his/hers, it’s murder.” Another teacher said, “These policies are an oppression to a repeater. If they are implemented, it means that the interest of many children in education will be killed.” Another said, “These policies do not respect the right of a repeater to participate in secondary education.” Parents also felt that the policies do not respect a repeater’s rights to education. As said by one of them, “Already there is a discrimination there against a repeater. They do not want to select these because they are repeaters. I feel this is down treading the freedom of repeaters,” said the parent. Another parent felt that there is “lack of justice” in the policies. The parent further said that there are so many things that made

a child fail to perform extremely well at school in the rural areas. According to her, “May be the time of examination the child’s relative had passed away, as you know nowadays, because of HIV/AIDS, funerals are so common.” She therefore felt that penalizing such a child who is affected by his/her relative’s funeral is unfair.

On the part of students, the policies are not good because “the repeater also works hard so that he/she should be selected.” So reducing his/her chances of being selected means discouraging him/her from working hard. When the policies were revealed to students, one of them was shocked and exclaimed, “Aaaaaah!!! That’s killing.” Parents also felt that their children’s future will be “killed” if the policies are emphasized. One parent elaborated:

Standard eight is just like a roadblock. It is a difficult class. It makes a child fear and we, parents, do have concerns about the same child. All these do not give a child a good chance to score very high marks and be in the first best group. We indeed see that the child becomes restless. So these policies are like adding more salt on the child’s wound so that he/she should feel more pain.

In this parent’s observation, children who seem not very intelligent at standard eight may perform very well when they go to secondary school. Students approach standard eight with fear because of the stiff competition at standard eight and that makes them make mistakes especially if they are attempting the examination for the first time. Another parent stated that children are born different. Some are born naturally intelligent who understand things at once while for others, it takes a long time to understand the same thing. Giving an example of her child she passionately said:

My last born, in standard one, two, three up to six, I was pinching his eyes and ears, saying, ‘do these eyes see? Do these ears hear?’ Then in standard seven, he wrote me a letter saying, ‘Mom, I can now see. The time when you were pinching me I couldn’t see anything.’ When he passed standard eight examinations, because we had money, we sent him to secondary school. He did well there and now he is in college despite the fact that I was pinching him because of slow

learning. So if we say that those who have difficulties to see should not be selected, we are intentionally killing them.

Furthermore, participants felt that these policies are more disadvantageous to students in rural schools than those in the urban schools. According to one teacher, because of these policies, few students from rural areas would be selected to secondary school because many students in rural area do not do well in their first year in standard eight due to many problems associated with rural schools, as such, they repeat so that they should be selected. "Students' performance in rural schools is mostly lower because we do not have resources in the rural areas. We have also a lot of large classes and few teachers, making it difficult for a teacher to teach effectively." Another teacher said, "In rural areas, teachers cannot cope with large classes as such, students' learning is slow. Consequently, they fail to go to secondary school first time." He also said that the environment in the rural area is not conducive to learning.

Position of the Participants

In general, all participants stated that the standard eight repetition and selection policies should not be implemented or should be stopped if they are being implemented. They felt that the policies have more disadvantages than advantages. For example, one headmaster said, "My stand is that these policies should be stopped with immediate effect." Another teacher supported the idea of the headmaster and added, "the government should just give us adequate resources and also increase the number of secondary schools and the problem of repetition will be solved." Even parents stated that when children repeat, they must be given equal opportunities with beginners so that all should continue with their education. Repeaters should not be oppressed because they are repeaters. In addition, one parent complained, "The main issue is that the Ministry does

not help us rural people so that our children should go to good secondary schools. They just dump our children in the CDSSs, is it because we are poor?" Parents said they asked their children to repeat so that they could go to good secondary schools, not CDSSs. The issue of 'good schools' and CDSSs will be discussed further later in this study.

From what has been discussed, it seems the problem lies in the implementation of policies that do not fit the system. The problem with the standard eight repetition and selection policies in Malawi is that they are implemented into a system which is shaped like a pyramid where those from the bottom, even if all performed extremely well, not all could get a place in the next level. As a result, innocent children are being victimized.

Tracking of Repeaters

For the Ministry of Education to successfully implement the standard eight repetition and selection policies, they needed to have proper mechanism to track repeaters in schools. As such, I wanted to find out how repeaters are tracked in schools. When teachers were asked how repeaters are tracked, they said that every year they receive what they called "Nominal Rolls" from MANEB where there is a section that asks teachers to indicate the year when a child started standard eight. "So we indicate. If he/she is repeating once, say this year is 2003 isn't? The one who repeats once we indicate that he/she started in 2002," responded one of the teachers. Asked how they deal with transfer cases, teachers explained that there are some codes they use on what they called "Pupils' Promotion Status (PPS)" form. The transfer student is asked to carry the PPS form with him/her to a new school and, if the student is coming from standard seven, a code of 'P' is used meaning that the child has been promoted from a lower class. 'RA (Repeating because of Absence)' is used if the child is repeating because he/she did not

finish the whole school year in that particular class and he/she decides to start school again the following year or after some years. The code of 'RF (Repeating because of Failure)' is indicated to the child who decides to repeat standard eight after either completely failing to pass the exam or failing to be selected to secondary school after passing the exam. However, with these codes, one would only know if the child is a repeater or not, but it is difficult to know the number of years a transfer child has repeated in standard eight except for the nominal rolls that indicate the year when the child entered standard eight.

Nevertheless, as earlier stated, it was learned that some students changed their names so that they could register in schools like beginners. Even though I insisted to know why students changed their names, the reasons given were not because they were aware of the repetition and selection policies. For instance one teacher said, "Nowadays students are just ashamed to be known that there are repeaters." One parent said, "It is because of peer pressure." However, whatever reason given, it was a fact that students change their names in order to repeat and appear as beginners. Therefore, I wanted to ask district education officers how they deal with issues of changing names. One of the officers agreed that the issue of changing names is common in schools but, "we always do have management meetings with these heads telling them that that is very bad." This officer felt that by holding management meetings with headmasters is enough to curtail the practice. However, this study has shown that the issue of changing names concerns more stakeholders than headmasters alone. Some students change names on their own, some with the influence of their parents and some with the influence of teachers, in

addition to some headmasters' influence. When another district education officer was asked, he admitted, "changing of names is difficult to deal with."

In short, if some students cannot be tracked because they have changed names or have changed schools, as indicated earlier on, it means that there are some students in schools who have been treated like beginners in standard eight and enjoy the privileges of a beginner in the selection process while they are repeaters. Therefore, it is only the 'honest' that indicate that they are repeaters who are affected by the standard eight repetition and selection policies. According to the participants, the decision to indicate whether one is a repeater or not is made either by a student alone by registering as a beginner, or by a student in collaboration with his/her parents, or by a student in collaboration with teachers, or by teachers alone, or by teachers in collaboration with students and parents.

Relationships: Repetition, Knowledge of Policies and Secondary Education Aspirations

There were three hypotheses formulated under this theme. The first one states that the more students repeat in standard eight, the lower their aspirations are for secondary selection. This hypothesis was based on the supposition that if the standard eight repetition and selection policies are being implemented and students know about them, it means that the repeaters' aspirations for secondary school selection will not be strong. Data to test this hypothesis were taken from the students' questionnaire. When the cross tabulation between 'number of years in standard eight' and 'I will be selected this year' variables were run (see table 13), the results showed that 100% of the students who had been in standard eight more than three years strongly agreed that they would be selected that year, about 82% of the students who were attempting standard eight for the second

time strongly agreed that they would be selected and, about 71% of the students who were in standard eight for the first time strongly agreed that they would be selected that year. However, these results were not statistically significant so it is difficult to conclusively reject the hypothesis. Nevertheless, the results give preliminary conclusion that the more students repeat in standard eight, the stronger their aspirations for secondary school selection are, but maybe with more data from many schools the results can be conclusive. This preliminary conclusion is made on the basis that interviews had shown that students did not know about the selection and repetition policies, and they felt that repetition was one way of increasing chances of being selected. As such, it is possible for them to become more confident about being selected the more they repeat.

Table 13: I will be Selected this Year and Number of Years in Std 8 Cross tabulation

		<u>Number of Years in Standard 8</u>		
		<u>First Year</u>	<u>2nd Year</u>	<u>More than 3 years</u>
I will be selected this year.	Strongly Agree	71.3%	81.5%	100%
	Agree	22.5%	13%	0%
	Moderately Agree	5.8%	3.7%	0%
	Moderately Disagree	.3%	0%	0%
	Strongly Disagree	0%	1.9%	0%
Total		100%	100%	100%

When groups in HSR and LSR schools were compared, the same trend was observed. Those who were repeating showed a stronger expectation of secondary school selection than those who were not repeating in both groups. However, the responses from LSR schools were more statistically significant than the responses from HSR schools (refer to

table 14). This confirms that more students in LSR schools than those in HSR schools repeat because they think their chances of being selected will be increased.

Table 14: I will be Selected this Year and Number of Years Chi-Square Tests

Selection Rate	Value	df	Asyp. Sig. (2-sided)
High			
Pearson Chi-Square	1.886	6	.930
No. of Valid Cases	193		
Low			
Pearson Chi-Square	7.434	3	.059
No. of Valid Cases	155		

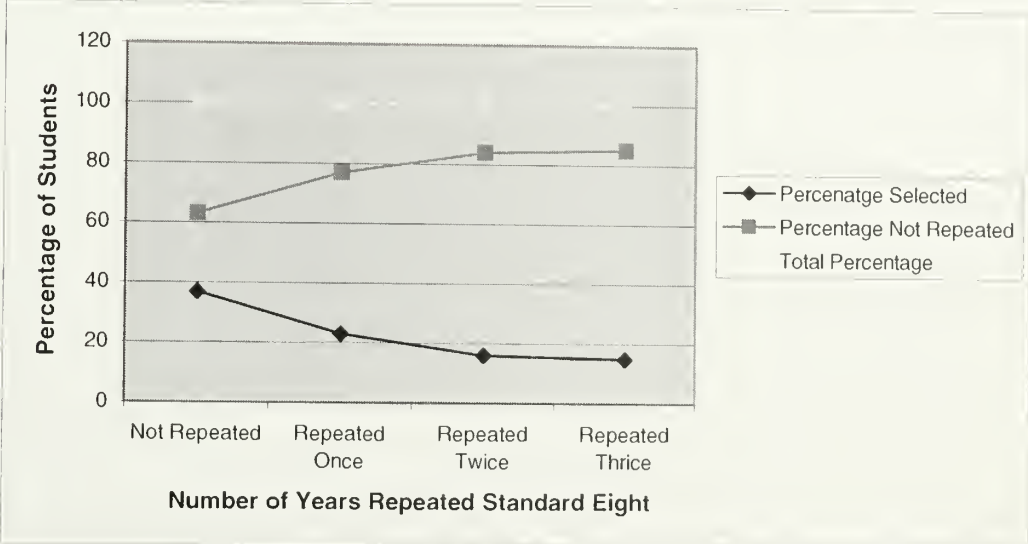
The second hypothesis states that the more students repeat in standard eight, the less frequently they are selected to secondary school. The basis for this hypothesis was that if the standard eight repetition and selection policies were being implemented, more beginners would be selected than repeaters. The data to test this hypothesis were taken from school documents, which were provided by the headmasters. The data were collected from years beginning 1998 to 2002. This was the period when selection and repetition policies and CDSSs were all in operation. There were 2197 student cases altogether (N=2197), that is, those who were not selected plus those who were selected to secondary schools from 1998 to 2002 in the eight primary schools. Among the 2197 cases, 647 were indicated to have been selected to CDSSs, District Secondary Schools and National Secondary Schools from the eight primary schools. When cross tabulation of 'selection' and 'number of years repeated' were performed (see table 15 and chart 2),

the results showed that more beginners (37%) were selected to secondary school than those who were repeating for the first time (23%), those who repeated twice (16%) and those who repeated three times (15%). These results were highly statistically significant. The Chi-Square test showed the significance level of .000. These results support the second hypothesis and the conclusion can be that the standard eight selection and repetition policies are being implemented in the selection process. This also agrees with what the district education officials stated that the policies are being implemented.

Table 15: Selection and Number of Years Repeated Cross tabulation

	<u>Number of Years Repeated</u>			
	<u>Not Repeated</u>	<u>Reptd Once</u>	<u>Reptd Twice</u>	<u>Reptd Thrice</u>
Selected	37%	23%	16%	15%
Not Selected	63%	77%	84%	85%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Chart 2: Selection and Number of Years Repeated



However, even though it has been shown that more beginners are selected to secondary school than repeaters, the results further show that the majority of the beginners go to community day secondary schools. According to table 16, about 86% of the beginners who were in standard eight from 1998 to 2002 went to CDSS as compared to 75% and 18% of those who repeated once and twice respectively. Furthermore, there were more repeaters selected to district and national secondary schools than beginners. These results were significant at .001 Chi-Square tests. Though the repetition and selection policies disadvantaged repeaters, the results have shown that most of those who had a chance of being selected went to district and national secondary schools, which participants viewed as good schools. It is also possible that, because of the practice of changing names and schools, some students who were treated as beginners and went to district and national secondary schools might be repeaters. This implies that there are problems in the implementation of the repetition and selection policies.

Table 16: Secondary School Selected to and Years Repeated Cross tabulation

<u>Secondary Type Selected to</u>	<u>Number of Years Repeated</u>		
	<u>Not Repeated</u>	<u>Reptd Once</u>	<u>Reptd Twice</u>
CDSSs	85.7%	75.4%	18.2%
District Secondary Schools	8.5%	14.4%	27.3%
<u>National Secondary Schools</u>	<u>5.8%</u>	<u>10.2%</u>	<u>54.5%</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

When groups of HSR and LSR schools were compared, about 90% of the students selected from LSR schools went to CDSSs as opposed to about 80% from HSR schools.

And again, about 8% and 2% of the students who were selected from LSR schools went to district and national secondary schools respectively as compared to about 11% and 9% of those selected from HSR schools who went to district and national secondary schools respectively. This difference was statistically significant with HSR schools at .000 Chi-Square test but with LSR schools, no statistical significance was observed. This was so maybe because the number of valid cases in HSR schools was higher (503) than those in LSR schools (144). Just a reminder, these were data collected from 1998 to 2002 from the eight schools and there were 2197 student cases of which 647 students were indicated to have been selected to CDSSs, District Secondary Schools and National Secondary Schools from 1998 to 2002 in the eight schools.

Furthermore, when the comparison was done based on sex, in reference to table 17, more girls (89%) were selected to CDSSs than boys (about 78%). In addition, more boys were selected to both district and national secondary schools than girls. These results were statistically significant at .001 Chi-Square test.

Table 17: Secondary School Type Selected to and Sex of Students Cross tabulation

		<u>Sex of Students</u>	
		<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Secondary Type	CDSS	77.5%	89%
Selected to	District Sec. Sch.	12.9%	6.1%
	National Sec. Sch.	9.6%	4.9%
<u>Total</u>		<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

The third hypothesis states, that if students know about standard eight repetition policies, they will not desire to repeat in standard eight. Data to test this hypothesis were

taken from the students' questionnaire. There were at least two statements that students were asked to respond to, in order to determine whether they knew about the selection and repetition policies. The first one required students to indicate whether they would have a high chance of being selected to secondary school if they wrote the standard eight examinations again the following year. In response, about 64% of the students agreed that they would have a high chance. The second statement required students to indicate if they felt that the Ministry of Education wanted students who fail to be selected to secondary school to repeat standard eight. In response, 78% of the students thought the Ministry of Education supported the idea of repetition. Therefore to test the hypothesis, each of these two statements were related with the variable, 'If I fail to be selected, I will repeat next year,' in cross tabulations. In the first cross tab in table 18 shows that about 72% of those students who strongly agreed that if they wrote standard eight examinations again the following year they would have a high chance of being selected also strongly agreed that if they failed to be selected, they would repeat. These results were strongly statistically significant at .000 Chi-Square test. In the second cross tab of 'If I fail I will repeat' and 'Ministry of Education (MOE) wants failures to repeat' in table 19 shows that about 71% who strongly agreed that MOE wanted failures to repeat also agreed that if they failed they would repeat. These results were also statistically significant at .000 Chi-Square test. From these results, it can be concluded that those who do not know the selection and repetition policies strongly want to repeat in order to increase their chances of being selected to secondary school.

Table 18: If I Fail I will Repeat and Rewriting Examination Gives High Selection Chance
Cross tabulation

	<u>Rewriting Exams Gives High Selection Chance</u>					
	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	Agree	Moderately Agree	Moderately Disagree	Disagree	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
<u>I Will Repeat</u>						
Strongly Agree	72.4%	41.2%	36%	30.8%	38.9%	48.1%
Agree	12.4%	37.3%	32%	61.5%	27.8%	15.4%
Moderately Agree	1.2%	3.9%	8%		8.3%	3.8%
Moderately Disagree	1.8%	5.9%	8%		2.8%	3.8%
Disagree	1.8%	3.9%	16%		8.3%	3.8%
Strongly Disagree	10.6%	7.8%		7.7%	13.9%	25%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 19: If I Fail I will Repeat and MOE Wants Failures to Repeat Cross tabulation

	<u>Ministry of Education Wants Failures to Repeat</u>					
	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	Agree	Moderately Agree	Moderately Disagree	Disagree	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
<u>I Will Repeat</u>						
Strongly Agree	71.4%	31.7%	30.8%	60%	35.3%	35%
Agree	12.9%	48.3%	15.4%	40%	29.4%	20%
Moderately Agree	2.4%	5%	7.7%		5%	3.2%
Moderately Disagree	1.9%	3.3%	15.4%		5%	2.9%
Disagree	1.9%	6.7%	23.1%		11.8%	2.5%
Strongly Disagree	9.5%	5%	7.7%		23.5%	32.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Chapter Summary

This chapter has shown that participants felt that there are some problems in standard eight selection. One of the problems is that there are some inequalities in the way students are being selected to secondary schools from different primary schools. Some schools frequently witness high selection rates while others witness low or no selection at all. More inequalities are also witnessed in access to secondary education between the rich and the rural poor. Participants felt the rich use their power to put their children in good secondary schools while the poor remain unhappy either in CDSSs or at home because of not being selected to secondary school.

Participants further felt that selection is affected by cheating that makes intelligent children who write examinations on their own fail to go to secondary school. Some felt that selection is a problem because students do not cover the whole syllabus for them to be prepared for examinations while others felt that lack of enough secondary spaces makes selection to be difficult.

As if that is not enough, participants indicated that even the process of selection itself is not clear to them. They wondered why students who obtain lower grades are being selected to secondary school, leaving those who have higher grades, and why most students in rural areas are selected to CDSSs. According to the district education officials, selection follows policies of 50% boys and 50% girls in secondary schools, a 5-kilometer radius to CDSS, merit, and giving priority to beginners in standard eight.

However, participants indicated that they did not know about the standard eight repetition and selection policies. In HSR schools, it was only headmasters who had some ideas about the standard eight repetition and selection policies but they did not

communicate to teachers, students and parents. In LSR schools, only two teachers out of eight had heard about the policies but did not take them seriously because they thought they were just rumors. Consequently, teachers in both HSR and LSR schools encouraged students to repeat standard eight if they failed to be selected. Nevertheless, apart from encouraging students to repeat, teachers in HSR schools also encouraged their students to go to private schools because once they failed to be selected they would not be allowed to repeat at the school. Headmasters in HSR schools also encouraged the students to go to private secondary schools once they failed to be selected.

In addition, participants felt that the repetition and selection policies have both good and bad effects. However, they felt there are more unbeneficial effects than beneficial ones so they felt that the policies should not continue to be implemented.

Furthermore, it was observed that repeaters are being tracked by using nominal rolls and pupil promotion status (PPS) forms but, it is still difficult to track repeaters because some children change their names and register as beginners, some register as beginners at a different school, and some, though they repeat at the same school, teachers who know the policies register them as beginners so that they should be selected. Therefore this makes the implementation of selection and repetition policies a problem.

Moreover, in the relationships between repetition, knowledge of policies, and aspirations for secondary education, it was preliminarily concluded that the more students repeat in standard eight, the stronger their aspirations to be selected are, because interviews showed that students were ignorant of the repetition and selection policies though statistical data were not significant. And again, it was shown that the more students repeat, the less frequently they are selected to secondary school. This confirms

that the selection and repetition policies are being implemented. However, the majority of the beginners in standard eight are selected to CDSSs as compared to the majority of repeaters who are selected to district and national secondary schools. These results further indicate that there are some problems in the implementation of the standard eight repetition and selection policies. Though beginners are given a high chance of being selected, most of them do not perform to the level required to be selected to district and national secondary schools. As such, the future academic career of beginners appears to be dim because CDSSs have been said to have lower success rate of students in examinations. Furthermore, a higher percentage of girls frequently go to CDSSs as opposed to that of boys and in turn, a higher percentage of boys go to district and national secondary schools than that of girls. It was further observed that students who do not know about the selection and repetition policies at standard eight indicate that they will repeat in standard eight when they fail to be selected.

CHAPTER 5

RELATED POLICY ISSUES: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Chapter Overview

In the discussion of standard eight repetition and selection policies, participants further discussed some related policy issues. These concerned issues of policy formation and implementation process, policy communication, power to influence policy change, special rural policies, and the new policy of cluster system by MANEB. It is therefore the purpose of this chapter to discuss these policy issues.

Policy Formation and Implementation Process

Most participants in this study indicated that there are so many problems in the schools with teachers, parents and students because the Ministry of Education does not involve them when making educational policies that concern them. They felt it was this lack of involvement that made the participants ignorant of the standard eight selection and repetition policies. For instance, one of the teachers complained, “You know, it is very surprising that some times when these people want to make some of the regulations and some of the new developments in education, they do not consult people in the grassroots.” The teacher said that sometimes they just receive circulars telling them that “follow this policy and follow that policy” without knowing when the policies were formulated and why they were formulated.

This problem was also evidenced in the teachers who had some knowledge about standard eight repetition and selection policies. When asked why the policies were formulated, they gave reasons, which were different from those given by the policy makers: Ministry of Education and the World Bank. If these teachers were involved in

the policy formation process, they would have shared the reasons with the policy makers. When another teacher was asked what he would have said to the Ministry of Education about policies if he was given that chance, he said, "For any policy to be formulated and become effective, there is need to consult people at the grassroots." This teacher insisted that if the Ministry of Education continues not to involve the "grassroots stakeholders" who are implementers of policies, "their policies will be either partially implemented or not implemented at all."

This agrees with what Evans, Sack and Shaw (1996) said that when stakeholders are not involved in the policy process, one ends up with policies that are not implemented. One of the headmasters further said that sometimes they receive some policies which, when they assess them, they know that when implemented they will cause problems "but because we have not been involved we just implement what we have been given, then poor results follow." The headmaster said that the Ministry of Education should first of all send policies to the implementers before they are put in use to assess and advise their weaknesses and strengths so that they could be modified and implemented accordingly.

Furthermore, some teachers said "top people" formulate most of educational policies and teachers do not participate. They gave an example of the English curriculum the schools are presently implementing that, because of not involving teachers in its development, the designers had put too many activities to be tackled in a short period of thirty-five minutes and the curriculum was designed as if it was for the native English speakers, not Malawian children. "They just come to us, 'Do this!' And we do. At the end we fail, and they blame us," complained one teacher. In support another teacher

complained, "We just work as slaves. Because you want to save your job, then you just implement whether the policy is good or not." Teachers stated that they must be involved in the policy formation process because they stay with the children in schools and as such they understand their problems. Consequently, they can help policy makers to design policies that would meet the needs of the students and the schools as a whole. One teacher elaborated the issue of participation in a metaphor form. He said education is just like a football game. In a football game, once one player gets the ball, he/she needs to pass on to another if they want to score. "So for this passing on to be systematic and effective, every player needs to be present during coaching and training," he emphasized. He therefore said that policies could be effectively implemented if teachers were involved in its formation process, and this would not make policies look strange when they got down to the schools.

Apart from teachers, parents were also concerned about not being involved in the education policy formation. One parent complained that the Ministry of Education only consults people in higher positions and the rich when formulating their policies. "They do not consult us so that we should know where our children's education is going," she lamented. This parent stated that when she was invited to give her views in this study, she was surprised because she had never been invited to give her views about education in such a forum. "I even failed to clearly explain to my friends who asked what I would be doing here. If I was once involved in such discussions, I would have told her that we will be doing what we did previously," she said. Another parent supported her and said that to show that their concern is only on the rich, the Ministry of Education sometimes uses the radio only to ask people to give their views about policies. "But we in rural areas are

poor. We do not have radios and phones for us to give our views. That pains me a lot because I do not have a chance to give my opinions.”

Parents felt that the Ministry of Education should involve parents, teachers and students to assess the weaknesses and strengths of policies before they are set for implementation. “Some of the people who make policies for us are like you who once went to developed countries and copy whatever those people do, the things that we cannot afford, and dump them on us,” one parent retorted. Parents felt that if policies were made cooperatively with them, they would be relevant to the schools where they were implemented. They said that parents should be asked whether they are agreeable to the policies or not. Parents felt that through discussions, policies can be accepted, rejected, refined or new policies can emerge through the informed contributions from them.

To show that parents valued participation in education, they appreciated and felt honored to be invited to participate in this study. For instance, one of them said:

For me, as a parent to a standard eight child, this is the first time to see parents sitting together discussing their children’s education in a free atmosphere like this one. I am so thankful and if this continues, we will be able to improve education in this country.

This parent said that participation like this one would make them enlightened and know the stage where education and their children were. “So I just say the one in heaven should be praised because through our discussions here, our minds have been opened and we have also known a lot of things,” said the parent. In support another parent said that this was a rare type of discussion and, “if possible, it should be held frequently.” Other parents also agreed that our discussion was one good example of what should happen in policy formation process because from the points raised, one would be able to assess

those points that many people had raised and see how they could be used in the policy formation process.

In brief, teachers and parents felt that they have been sidelined in the policy making process in education and, as such, many policies are implemented with a lot of difficulties. Kadzamira and Rose (2001, p. 10) also supported teachers' and parents' arguments and said, "The education policy formation in Malawi does not have the tradition of consulting with stakeholders." Teachers and parents suggested that all stakeholders, that is, teachers, parents and students in the grassroots level, must be involved in the education policy formation process so that policy implementation should be facilitated.

Policy Communication

Because the study has shown that participants were ignorant of the standard eight selection and repetition policies, it was important to investigate how educational policies are communicated to stakeholders at grassroots level. On this theme, participants discussed how educational policies are communicated to them, whether the means of communication is effective, whether participants are able to communicate back policy effects to policy makers, and their suggestions for alternative means of communication. In all these, there were no noticeable differences between participants from HSR and LSR schools.

Means Used to Communicate Policy

Asked how the Ministry of Education communicates policies to the schools, teachers mentioned that communication is done through circulars, radio, and primary education advisors (PEAs). Teachers indicated that sometimes PEAs communicate

policies to schools by word of mouth, not in a written form. This might be one of the reasons why some policies are not communicated to other teachers because, once the one who heard about them leaves the school or dies, those policies are gone. For instance, one headmaster said:

We just hear. No booklets are given to us. Sometimes when they come for supervision and when they see that students have sat in rows according to gender, they accuse us and say education policies do not allow students to sit according to gender.

Other teachers indicated that communication is done through district education managers' offices. For instance, one headmaster said that when some policies come, they are pasted onto the wall of district education manager's office so that headmasters should read whenever they go to the office. However, he complained that sometimes headmasters fail to go to the district offices very often because of many reasons, including long distance. "If you do not go to the district education managers' office, it means that you will not know that policy," he said.

In addition, students indicated that policies are communicated to them mainly through the headmaster and teachers. Some mentioned the radio, but none of the students mentioned education officials from the Ministry.

Parents indicated that some policies get to them through the head, to the school committee, to them. However, they complained that many policies do not reach them. As said by one of the parents, "Sometimes we only know the policy when our children behave against it and the headmaster invites us for a hearing, it's when we say ooh! there was this policy?" Parents said the policies that are communicated to them are only those that are common, for example uniform policy. Most of the very important policies, like the standard eight repetition and selection policies, are not communicated to them. They

also cited an example of curriculum change and said, “for example, the syllabuses that were being used in the past are not the ones used now, but the change had never been communicated to us. We just hear from other people that syllabuses have been changed.” Parents said that policies should be communicated to them because sometimes they accuse teachers that they do not do some other things not knowing that it is because of a certain policy. Similarly, they said that teachers complain that parents do not behave according to some policies, forgetting that the policies are not communicated to them.

When district education officers were asked how they communicate policies to schools, one of them said that there is a hierarchy from the district education office to the schools. He said that at the bottom there are schools; above the schools there are zones whose headquarters are teacher development centers (TDCs), which are headed by PEAs. Above TDCs there are district education offices. “So what ever we have here as a policy, we communicate to PEAs in TDCs and there pass the message to the schools,” he said. The officer also said that officers in the district education office sometimes organize meetings with teachers in the TDCs to communicate policies to them. Another officer also said that they use PEAs and “our notice boards.”

Assessment of Means of Policy Communication

All the participants agreed that the way educational policies are communicated to them is not effective. Teachers said sometimes it is difficult for them to understand the policies as written on the circulars and “we cannot ask questions. As a result, we just file them and forget about them.” Moreover, they indicated that even though the Ministry of Education use PEAs, they are just like containers used to bring policies to schools but do not know how and why the policies were made. As such, they fail to answer questions

that teachers ask about the policies they bring. And again, one headmaster said, “sometimes when the policies arrive through circulars, it becomes difficult to interpret them to teachers.” To this effect, Evans, Sack and Shaw (1996) also commented, as indicated in the literature review, that most African countries produce policies that are written in academic English or French. As a result, it is difficult for citizens to read and understand them. Reflecting on how policies are communicated from the Ministry of Education, through the district education headquarters and PEAs to teachers, one teacher said policies fail to reach the schools in their original form. He referred to those policies that are communicated to schools orally through PEAs without a written document following.

In addition, another headmaster stated that the way policies are communicated is not effective because what the Ministry does is to send one copy of the circular to the district education office so that the office should make copies for the schools. However, the district office sometimes does not have a photocopier and, as such, they fail to make copies to schools. Consequently, “the circulars are just left in the district education managers’ office hoping that headmasters will come and take notes, but yet it is a policy which is supposed to be filed.” Evans et al. mentioned that most African countries produce policy documents that are long and, consequently, it becomes very expensive to reproduce for distribution. Because of this poor communication, some teachers complained that they sometimes have conflicts with Ministry officials in trying to implement policies. For example, in complaining one teacher said, “one official would tell you ‘this is what the policy says’ and in trying to implement that, another would come and accuse us of implementing the policy badly.” Even one district education

official indicated that there is lack of proper communication of policies to schools.

According to him, "There isn't a good channel through which policies are communicated to these heads."

Asked whether they have ever had an opportunity of communicating back to policy makers those policies they felt were detrimental to the students' school life, the participants said they never had that chance. For instance, in reference to a policy that states that in standards one to seven, teachers should allow only a maximum of 10% of the children to repeat, one teacher said this policy is difficult to implement especially in the rural areas where most of the teachers are unqualified and students are ill prepared. However, because of the policy, most students are just passed before they attain basic skills for that particular class. This teacher said such problems have been communicated to the PEAs but the response they get from the PEAs is, "Even if you tell us, there is nothing we can do to this policy. Whatever the government has decided, has to be like that." According to him, this means that teachers have no chance of communicating policies back to the policy makers.

Teachers said they wish they had a chance of communicating the effects of policies to the policy makers so that these authorities should know what happens on the ground with the policies, but they are denied that opportunity. One headmaster said that teachers and headmasters never communicated back to the policy makers the effects of policies because they fear that policy makers might think that teachers look down upon them. "It does not mean that we are happy to implement some of the policies which we feel are not good but we fear that if we say something, what will happen to us," the headmaster said. Another headmaster said that they are just at the receiving end and they

do not have chances of communicating policies back. This headmaster thought that if teachers were given chance to communicate policies back to the makers, the policies would be improved “because we learn through mistakes.” Another teacher also said that teachers never communicate back policies because for the government to send policies to schools, it means that the government thinks that the policies can be implemented but “sometimes the government imposes on us things that are difficult to implement.”

Parents also indicated that they do not have the opportunity of communicating back effects of education policies to the policy makers. They speculated that policies are made only by few people who think what they have made is final and will be accepted by parents. In addition, one parent said they are not given the chance to respond to policies because the government knows that parents might not agree with the policies they make. As a result, they make them confidential so that parents should not know what is happening. Another parent said while frowning, “I feel that because we are rural people, the government thinks we do not know anything and there is nothing we can say about these policies.” Another said, “Simply because they are more educated than us, they think they are more intelligent.” Another said, “Yes! That’s why they bring us things from UK, which are not relevant here and continue to oppress us.” Parents were very emotional about this issue and felt that they are being treated as if they are not one of the players in the education of their children.

Furthermore, students also indicated that they never have had the chance of communicating policies back to policy makers. Some students said they do not know how they should communicate back because they have never been told that they can say anything on the policies. As said by one student, “when a policy comes, our teachers just

tell us about it but they do not say that we can communicate back.” Some students said that teachers communicate policies to them with threats so, as put by one student, “We do not have a chance to think of communicating back.” Some students thought if they communicated the weaknesses of a policy back, the authorities would think that they were rude so they choose to remain silent. One student said, “It’s because this is a rural area. Most policies are communicated to urban schools so what can we say about them?”

Suggested Means of Policy Communication

Having assessed how policies are communicated, participants suggested some more ways they thought would be effective for communicating educational policies to them. Teachers felt one best way is for Ministry officials who are conversant with the policies to assemble teachers from one zone and communicate to them about the education policies. “In this way, we will be able to ask questions where we don’t understand and they will be able to answer us,” said one teacher. Teachers said that after policies have been explained to them, circulars should follow for the purposes of filing them and act as references. As one teacher put it, “to have effective communication there must be personal contact. At least there should be Ministry representatives who can contact us before the actual circulars come out.” This sentiment reflects how people in rural areas culturally value face-to-face interaction in communication.

Other teachers felt that PEAs can still be used but the Ministry should see to it that the PEA who is bringing the policy to schools “is conversant” with it so that he/she should be able to answer questions from teachers. Furthermore, some teachers felt that policies could be communicated if the Ministry of Education organized a workshop where headmasters, PEAs and Ministry officials discuss policies. In this workshop,

participants could speculate about questions that teachers, students and parents would ask in the schools and provide possible answers so that headmasters and PEAs should be able to answer questions when communicating the policies to schools.

Students also felt that the Ministry officials should be able to come to them and communicate policies so that if they have questions they should be able to ask. “The Ministry should come to us and tell us what the policy is and at the same time encourage us to ask questions without fear,” one student said. Some students said teachers should tell them about education policies but they must do it in “a friendly manner so that we must not fear to ask questions.”

Parents said that when policies come to the school, the headmasters/mistress should invite them and inform them of the policies. They should also be allowed to comment on the policies so that the headmasters/mistress should be able to communicate parents’ ideas to the Ministry of Education. In addition, parents said policies could be communicated to them through school PTAs. For those parents who owned radios, they said policies could be communicated to them in a form of a short radio play. However, some said, “Some of us do not have radios so they should invite us and communicate policies to us through school committees.”

Briefly, teachers, students and parents indicated that the methods that are used to communicate policies to them are not effective mainly because some policies do not reach them and, for some, they have no opportunity of asking questions so that they can understand the policies. In addition, they said they have no chance of communicating policies to policy makers if they feel that there are some problems with the policies. Finally, they suggested alternative ways of communicating policies to them. The most

common one which was felt to be the best is that the Ministry officials who are conversant with the policies should come and explain policies to these teachers, students and parents so that, if they do not understand, they should have a chance of asking questions. Because of the decentralization of education in Malawi, this idea is practical. District managers can assign his/her members of staff to communicate policies to headmasters in the education zones, who will later communicate to teachers in schools. The 13 to 20 zones per district should be able to be covered within a month. The other alternative is to educate PEAs, who are zone leaders, about the policies so that they should competently communicate the policies to headmasters and teachers in their respective zones. It is also possible for the DEM him/herself to meet headmasters and teachers at zone level to communicate especially those policies that are extremely crucial and complicated.

Power to Influence Policy Change

When participants were asked if they have power or any resource they can use to change policies which they felt are not in line with their needs, they indicated that they do not have the power. For instance, one teacher said that, since they are at a receiving end, they receive everything “already cooked.” To continue, the teacher said, “Unless the policies started from here, we could not have the power.” Another teacher thought that he does not have power because the Ministry of Education does not “open the channel” for them to feel empowered and actively participate in the policies: “If we do not have even enough information about why the policies were made, how can we influence change?” he asked. Another teacher said that, even in the court of law, “if you do not have enough information, even if you are on the right, you will lose the case.” Teachers also felt that

they could not have power unless they are “freed” by the Ministry of Education by telling them to “freely direct our comments to the people responsible for the policies in education.” When one headmaster was asked the question of whether he has power to influence policy change, he looked surprised and asked, “power to change policy? We have no power to influence policy change. We are forced to follow any policy whether it is good or not.”

The only power teachers thought they have in schools is to ignore policy implementation. As stated by one teacher, “We cannot change policy because once the policy is made, it is fixed. But sometimes what we do is to ignore it in schools. We do not implement it.” Teachers said they are forced to implement policies that are closely monitored by the Ministry of Education but those that are not strictly monitored, if they are bad, they are ignored. For example, they said it is difficult to maneuver the standard eight repetition and selection policies at the selection process level “apart from changing students’ names and submitting names of repeaters at school level.” However, teachers said it is easy for them to modify the standard one to seven repetition policy, which does not allow more than 10% of students per class to repeat. They can make more than 10% of the students repeat if they feel students have not attained basic skills for that class. Even if teachers said they could not maneuver the standard eight selection and repetition policies, they affect the implementation by registering students as beginners and also encouraging them to change names.

On the part of students, they also indicated that they do not have power to influence policy change. One student talked of lack of resources. For example, he said, “Even though we do have a desire to influence change, we do fail because we don’t know

the channel to follow. We also don't have phones, no electricity, and we don't know how we can get to the Ministry of Education." Another student thought students have no power because "those who made policies are great thinkers" (these were actual words spoken in English by the student). Then when he was asked why he thought students are not "great thinkers," he said, "no! Students do not make policies. We would be great thinkers if we were able to make policies." Maybe if students were involved in the policy making process and made aware of it, they would have confidence in themselves as "great thinkers." So involving students in policy making might increase their self-confidence.

Among all the students interviewed, there were only two students who thought that they have some power to influence policy change. One of them said, "If they give us poor policies, we can take the Ministry to court." This was really interesting for a rural student to know that he could take the Ministry to court for poor policies. When I inquired about this student, I discovered that his father is a retired government officer. So it is possible that he learned many things from his father and also from the town environment where his father worked. Another said he would discuss with teachers so that the teachers could take their ideas to the Ministry of Education. However, it was doubtful if teachers would be able to deliver students' ideas, if they said they do not have power themselves.

Furthermore, all the parents said they have no power at all. "If we do not have chance to be involved in the policies, we do not have power," one parent said. Other parents said they wish they had the power to influence policy change, but they feared the government. Since the policies come from the government, parents said they could not

change them. As said by one parent, “We fear because policies come from the government. But if the government had given us the power to say, ‘parents, now you are free to influence policy change,’ we can really do.” Another parent said parents have no power because they have no “proper channel” to use to influence policy change.

When district education officials were asked if stakeholders at the grassroots have power to influence policy change, one of them said that policies are just handed down to them to implement. Grassroots stakeholders are not given chances to propose changes in the policy. “When it hits the ground, it is when the government feels the impact,” said the officer. He gave an example of a housing allowance policy, which resulted into revolt of rural teachers because the allowance was intended for urban teachers only. Another district official also concurred with his colleague, that grassroots stakeholders have no power to influence policy change. He gave an example of a cluster system by MANEB, which inflamed mixed feelings among grassroots stakeholders. However MANEB and Ministry of Education continued to implement it. Cluster system will be discussed in a separate subtopic later in this study because many participants talked about it and also because it was the first time to be implemented in Malawi.

When asked if there are any laws that protect grassroots stakeholders from policies that are not good for them, the district education officer said, “The only law is our constitution.” The officer stated that many of the educational policies are in conflict with the constitution and, as such, many people’ especially from the urban areas, have been taking the Ministry of Education to ombudsman. According to him, “ombudsman says education is rotten because there are so many policies against the constitution.” When asked if the rural people are aware of the constitution, he said the majority of the

rural people are ignorant of it. When I wanted to know what these rural stakeholders do with poor policies if they are ignorant of the constitution, the officer said, “Those people who are not aware of the constitution suffer in silence.” Furthermore the officer said they make sure that policies are implemented by communicating them to headmasters and “headmasters are told what they have to do.” If policies are not implemented, the officer said the concerned headmaster is “put to task.” This is a sign of policy imposition on headmasters. The better way is to find out why headmasters are not implementing the policies before “putting them to task.” “In primary schools we have Heads, PEAs and DEM. Heads are answerable to PEAs and PEAs are answerable to DEM,” the officer emphatically explained.

In general, teachers, students and parents in the rural schools felt that they have no power to influence policy change in education because the Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, has not come in the open to encourage them to assess policies they make. Participants also have not been provided with a proper channel to air out their views. As such, they feel too threatened to criticize government policies. In addition, they indicated that they have no resources to use to influence policy. That is, they do not have adequate information, no law to protect them apart from the constitution, which is not known to the rural population, and no access to the Ministry headquarters. The only power that the teachers have, for example, is not to implement policies they feel are not good. However, if the policy is extremely harmful, participants react through revolt.

Special Rural Policies

Most participants, especially teachers and parents, observed that the majority of children in rural areas do not go to secondary schools because they are not as advantaged

as their counterparts in the urban areas though they are expected to compete on the same level. As such, they felt it would be helpful for rural students to continue with education if they had special policies that would take into consideration their disadvantaged situation. For instance, one teacher stated that children in urban areas perform better than those in the rural areas because they experience at home most of the things they learn at school. "Urban children learn as they move about in the banks, shops and so on," he said. The teacher said that urban teachers do not struggle to teach a child, for example, issues of banking because banks are within the children's experience. However, it is not as easy to teach a rural child banking because the child had never seen a bank before so he/she has to understand what a bank is first, then how it operates, all in theory. Another teacher gave an example of himself when he first went to urban area. According to him, when he had arrived in the town, he had seen that on the face of many shops there was a label "SALE! SALE! SALE!" So he was so surprised and he asked his urban friend if all those shops belonged to "Mr. SALE." "I was taking SALE to mean Mr. SALE," he said while laughing. It was when he learned that the label 'SALE' meant that the prices for the items in the shops had been reduced.

Another teacher concurred that students in urban areas perform better than those in the rural areas because of "exposure." According to him, students in the urban areas are exposed to such things as libraries and parents try that students should be involved in school work while those from rural areas, once they come from school, "there they are, taking hoes, to the garden or to collect fire wood or are involved in other domestic activities." This teacher said a rural student touches a book only when going to school. Once he/she comes back from school, s/he is involved in too many things that are not

related to schoolwork. However, this practice could not be avoided because people in the rural areas are poor so children are involved in other activities, which are detrimental to their education just for survival.

In addition, one teacher stated that children in urban areas are more advantaged because there is easy communication between students and teachers of one school and another. As such, they are able to share teaching/learning materials and notes. “Consequently, the children are able to cover a variety of topics and when examinations come, the questions are asked within those topics,” he stated. However, he said that in the villages, some schools are very far apart which makes it very difficult for teachers and students of different schools to communicate. And again, he said in rural areas teaching and learning materials are very scarce, so children do not learn as much as their counterparts in the urban areas. Another teacher added that even teachers in the rural areas are very few and many are unqualified, “so it makes it difficult for students to acquire high quality education and compete with their friends in the urban area.”

According to Kadzamira and Rose (2001, p. 20), “by 1997, the pupil/teacher ratio in urban schools was 48:1 on average, compared with 63:1 in rural schools, and 75% of teachers in urban schools were qualified compared with 51% in rural schools.” Moreover, another teacher stated, “in town, teachers type students’ tests so children become familiar with typed exam scripts just like MANEB examinations. This removes fear of typed examination in students and they do well in real exams.” However, in the rural areas, he said that students’ tests are written on the chalkboard while real national examinations come in typed scripts. Consequently, a typed script appears so strange to rural students and this affected their concentration in the examinations.

Furthermore, some teachers felt that children in the urban areas perform better because their parents can afford to employ private teachers. For instance, one headmaster said, "These children are taught the same material twice and are made to compete with those who were taught once." In addition, he observed that children in the urban area are also inspired by their fellow children who are in secondary schools because they can see them going to secondary school while in the rural areas children can hardly see their friends going to secondary school apart from CDSS which is not valued by many people.

Parents also thought that students in rural areas do not do well because the interest of those who are charged with education is in town. Parents said this is so because of the long failing history that rural schools have had and those charged with education always expect students in rural areas to fail. "They think that children in town are more intelligent so they become more careful when marking exam scripts from urban students than those in the rural areas." Parents further felt that it was this lack of interest that makes the Ministry of Education not to provide adequate teachers and teaching resources in rural schools. As said by one parent, "teachers and teaching materials are not enough in the rural areas. In town one teacher teaches one subject or teaches one class while in rural areas, because of inadequate teachers, one teacher teaches many subjects and in all classes."

In general, most teachers said that the environment in rural area is not as conducive to learning as that of the urban area. As such, they suggested that there must be special policies that should help rural students access secondary education just like urban students. For instance, they said that the government should introduce policies that should allow rural students to compete among themselves for secondary school places and in

addition, a quota system should be introduced so that rural students should have their quota and urban students their quota in secondary schools. The quota should be determined according to students' population in these areas. As said by teachers, a quota system should be considered so that "there shouldn't be a monopolization of secondary school places by urban students" One teacher concluded, "if some students receive good things and others do not, it means those people are different. So if they are going to be treated equally in examinations, it means it's only urban students who will be frequently going to good secondary schools."

Policy of Cluster System

Even though this study did not intend to study the policy of the cluster system, I have included it because it frequently came up in the interviews with students, parents and education officials. I decided to include it so that those who are concerned with this policy should start thinking about it in relation to what participants said. What will be given here are the perceived consequences of the system as seen by teachers, students, parents and education officials. However, it is not a full assessment of the policy because this was the first year for it to be implemented. Further study on the system is recommended.

To begin with, cluster system is the policy that was introduced by MANEB in order to curtail the practice of cheating. While in the past students wrote the national examinations in their respective schools, the cluster system, requires a number of schools to write examination at one chosen school, called a cluster examination center. According to the practice, the schools that are required to write their examinations at one center are, as one MANEB official said, those within five-kilometer radius of the cluster center.

2003 was the first year when this policy was implemented. Though unsolicited, participants brought up their own views about the introduction of the system.

Some students from the HSR schools were concerned about students from other schools coming to write examinations together with them because of what they had experienced on their mock examinations. Mock examination is the type of examination that reflects the final national examination but is prepared either at district level or zone level for the students of that district or zone. Mock examinations are written in order to determine how ready students are for the final national examinations. Because teachers had heard that a cluster of schools would write examinations in one center, they also used the same system to administer their mock examination. During this mock examination, students from other schools used to peep on the work of students from this HSR school and copied down the answers they had written. Therefore students in the HSR school felt uncomfortable and became skeptical of the cluster system. When asked why other students were peeping on the work of the students of this HSR school, one of them said, "they said they did not learn enough at their schools." The students who were peeping knew that the school where they were writing examination was an HSR school and believed that students in the cluster center learned many things that they did not learn at their schools.

In addition, some students said they had even seen some teachers cheating with students, even though this was just a mere mock examination. "We were writing exams right here, and I could see a student asking a teacher a question which was on the exam and the teacher would say, 'if you don't circle A, it's your own fault'." Students also said that some teachers were using their fingers to show to their students whether for example,

the answer to “question 1 is A, B or C.” These students said it was only the teachers’ students who understood the finger sign. “We were really confused,” one student complained.

I think students and teachers here were practicing tricks they could use during final national examinations for them to cheat successfully. Students also asked me so many questions about this system, which of course I told them that I could not answer because I was only a researcher. For instance, one student said, “They are saying we will write examinations together with other schools here, so I have got a question. If they write in their schools, will there be a problem?” Another student asked, “Do you think cluster system will curb cheating? How?” Another student was very concerned and said:

Does this policy, that says we should be writing examinations with other students from other schools at the same place, come from where you come from? I can see that it is not a good policy because you also know that people say ‘a dog is proud and barks at his/her home.’ So some people leave their own schools to write exams here. As a result, instead of writing their exam with a peace of mind, they become uncomfortable. Should we write examinations sitting on one desk with somebody we do not know? May be this is not good.

This student argued that students do well in examinations if they take the exams at a place they are familiar with and are with the people they are familiar with.

However, there were two students who felt the system is good. One of them said it is good that all students should be writing examinations together because some teachers help students to pass examinations when other schools are not present in the exam room. That is to say, because the cluster system takes students from different schools to write examinations in one exam room, teachers fear to illegally assist their students to pass. The presence of members from other schools prevents some students and teachers from cheating. Another student added, “We should say that it is an opportunity for us to write

examinations together because in the past, it was a competition of children and teachers but now, it will be a competition of children only.”

Parents also brought up the issue of cluster system, especially when we were discussing the policy formation process. They said that they had just heard that their children would start writing examinations in clusters but they were not involved in its formation. One parent stated, “If we sat down and discussed cluster system, parents would have told them the weaknesses and strengths of the system and that would help them determine how and whether to implement it or not.” Some parents said they had been invited by MANEB officials but just to tell them that the method of administering examinations had changed. “We were told when the policy had already been formulated so we had nothing to say,” one of the parents said. Another said, “and we asked them why they had done so and they said, ‘so that cheating should be reduced and that the government should save the money it would have given to the invigilators’.” Parents stated that they could not assess the strengths and weaknesses of the system because it was already decided that it would be implemented. Kadzamira and Rose (2001, p. 10) also observed that policy consultation in Malawi takes place “after the document has already been drafted.” Rose (2003) called this type of involvement “pseudo participation”.

Furthermore, the parents felt that the cluster system has bad effects especially for people in the rural areas because schools are far apart and the cluster system will make students walk even longer distances to write examinations. They said the future of their children is continuously being spoiled because it is only top people who make these policies but they do not address the problems poor children in the rural areas face. They

said that these top people should know that there is no public transport in the rural areas and, even if the transport was there, rural children could not afford paying for it. As a result, the cluster system will make children walk a very long distance to write examinations at a center. This walking will make them feel tired during examinations and fail to do very well and be selected to good secondary schools.

One of the district education officials also brought up the issue of the cluster system when we were discussing the issue of power of grassroots stakeholders to influence policy change. The officer stated that there are mixed feelings among people about the cluster system. Some said the system is good because cheating will be eliminated, while others said it is bad because only those students who are at the cluster center have an advantage. These students cannot lose anything in terms of transport costs. At the examination break, those from the center can go home to eat while those from other schools will either have to buy food or remain hungry until the next examination session. Definitely this means remaining hungry for the rural poor students, hence affecting his/her performance in the exam. In his conclusion, the official said, "The MANEB people think that those who are in the villages may have negative feelings about the cluster system because they do not know the advantages and disadvantages. After sometime, they may come to their senses and say the system is good." However, advantages and disadvantages of a policy are not supposed to be hidden to the people who are affected by it. If they are involved they should be able to understand these advantages and disadvantages and agree with the policy makers whether to implement the policy or not or how to implement them. Unless stakeholders understand the policy, they cannot yield their support.

In short, it seems as if there was lack of advocacy and wide involvement of the grassroots stakeholders from rural areas in the cluster system policy formation process. The involvement was only done in the implementation just to inform the rural people of the policy. However, further studies are required on this policy.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, participants indicated that they have not been involved in educational policy formation process and many policies are not communicated to them. Consequently, many policies are implemented with difficulties or are not implemented at all. However, they indicated that they could not influence policy change because they have not been empowered to do so. The only power they have is to ignore implementing some policies that are not closely monitored by the Ministry of Education. Education officials also indicated that there is not any law that protects grassroots stakeholders from bad policies apart from the constitution, which most rural people are not even aware of.

Moreover, participants felt the government should consider formulating special policies that might help rural students to continue with school due to the many problems they face in rural areas that militated against their performance. Finally, participants discussed the policy of the cluster system by MANEB. Generally, parents indicated that they had not been involved in the formulation of the cluster system so, they had not contributed their opinion. Apart from agreeing that the system might curb cheating, participants felt the system was a disadvantage to rural children because schools are far apart in rural areas and children will be walking long distance to a cluster center. And again, those students who commute from other schools cannot have their meals during break time since they cannot go home to eat. Furthermore, students felt they will not feel

comfortable writing examinations with a person they do not know and a place that is not their school.

Having presented an analysis of the participants' perceptions on repetition, selection and the accompanying policies in chapter four, and examined perceptions on related policy issues in this chapter, the following chapter discusses participants' perceptions about the conversion of DEC's to CDSS's.

CHAPTER 6

THE CONVERSION OF DEC_s TO CDSS_s: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Chapter Overview

This chapter answers the question of the perceptions of teachers, students and parents in rural area towards the conversion of DEC_s to CDSS_s and the impact of this change on rural students' access to secondary education. The chapter contains five sub-themes: perspectives on the concept of community day secondary school, conversion of DEC_s to CDSS_s, introduction of selection to CDSS_s, the notion of a good school and, students' aspirations and parents' expectations for education. There were also no differences observed between participants from HSR and LSR schools on the issues discussed in this chapter.

Perspectives on the Concept of Community Day Secondary School

When participants were asked what they understood by the concept of CDSS, some said it is a secondary school that is intended to serve the community around it. As defined by one teacher, "it is a school that takes students from the surrounding villages but it is not a boarding school and all necessary teaching and learning materials are available." In addition, some teachers understood CDSS_s as secondary schools that take students who pass primary school leaving certificate examinations (PSLCE) but are not as intelligent as those who go to district and national secondary schools. Students also gave a similar definition. They saw CDSS_s as intended for the less intelligent. One student further said, "It is for the remote people." She defined CDSS as for remote people because most of the students in rural areas were said to have been selected to CDSS_s.

According to parents, CDSS is a school that is established by the community surrounding it and also enrolls students who come from the same community. One parent said, "If we take the word 'day' it means children go to and come from that school before the sun sets. Now, the word 'community' means that that secondary school is run by the people around it."

Asked if they felt the way CDSSs are run in their community meet their definition, most of them indicated that, though there are some elements that show that the schools are for the community such as taking children from the community and that they are not boarding schools, they do not totally meet the definition of CDSS. For example one teacher said, despite the fact that children who go to CDSS are from the surrounding community, the number is so low that the community is not adequately served. "Right now we have got our CDSS, it's there. But how many students are there? Those who are in form four now, they are less than twenty yet when they were in form one, they were fifty," he stated. The teacher said the CDSS enrolls a very small number of children that does not represent the number of children who want secondary education in the community, and those who finish form four are even fewer. Another teacher said the CDSSs do not fit the definition because people from the community who want to upgrade themselves academically cannot do so due to the introduction of selection to these CDSSs. "If it were for the community, it would be open to the community so that those who wanted to upgrade themselves could be going there, not through selection," he said. In addition, another teacher said, since the people who select students to CDSSs are not from the community but from the Ministry of Education, CDSSs do not fit the name. In support other teachers said for the community schools to suit the name, the community

should do the selection. They suggested that when grading is done by MANEB, students' grades should be sent to a community selection committee, which should be formed solely for issues pertaining to selection. Asked what the composition of this committee should be, they said it should consist of: chairpersons for school committees in the catchment area of a particular CDSS, heads of primary schools, head of CDSS, parent representatives, PTA chairperson and one district education official. In addition, teachers emphasized that the community should be empowered to determine the kind of students and teachers to have in CDSS and what the government should do for them.

When parents were asked if their definition of CDSS was related to how CDSSs are being run, their responses did not differ much from those of the teachers. They said CDSSs do not suit the name because people who are outside the community are the ones who run those schools. One of them angrily said, "We are being remote controlled!" Like the teachers' perspective, another parent said that CDSSs would meet its definition if parents were involved in the student selecting process but "it seems even selection is done there." Parents said selection to CDSSs is done following outside rules rather than those from the community. They said that what happens in CDSSs shows that parents and the community have no power to run the schools. "If we were empowered, we would be able to help solve problems faced in CDSSs," said one parent.

Students also did not feel differently. They said that even though CDSSs are catering for remote people, most of them have little say in what happens in them. As said by one student, "for example, there are no resources in the CDSSs and most teachers are unqualified but the people in the community do not do anything." Students felt that if CDSSs were for the community, they would be working hard to improve the conditions

in them. As primary school students, they also indicated that they would be able to say how they would like CDSSs to look so that they should be attractive to many children from the community.

In general, even though CDSSs are intended to serve the community, participants felt that they do not meet all the characteristics of a community school. According to them, the Ministry of Education still controls the schools and the community has not been empowered to run them.

Conversion of DEC's to CDSSs

On the theme of the conversion of DEC's to CDSSs, participants' discussions centered mainly on the advantages and disadvantages/problems of the conversion.

On the strengths of CDSSs, some students felt the introduction of CDSSs has increased the number of students who might claim that they have been "selected" to secondary school. They said in the past students who did not do well were not "selected" but now some students are selected to go to community secondary schools, even though their grades may be lower than the expected grades for one to go to national and district secondary schools. These students only value the status of being "selected" and the status of being in "secondary school", regardless of the type of secondary school they are selected to. "If you were reading very hard so that you should be selected to national or district secondary school, and you failed and got selected to CDSS, you still say at least I tried," said one of them. Because selection is competitive, students felt that to be among the people who are "selected" is a great achievement because it shows that they have been working hard. Another student said, "If I am selected to CDSS, it will still be better because I will stop putting on short trousers and I will start wearing long trousers."

Students in public primary schools in Malawi are not allowed to put on long pair of trousers at school, so they felt that being selected to secondary school is one way of getting freed from this “bondage.” Another student also said, “If I am selected to CDSS, I will be happy because here, we are not allowed to plait our hair but when I go to CDSS, I will be plaiting my hair.” It is interesting that students did not mention that going to CDSS would give them chance of participating in secondary education. Their interest was only on “being selected” and change in one’s appearance, hence their status changed. That is to say, once selected, they will stop being called primary students and instead they will be called secondary students. In Malawi, secondary students enjoy a higher status in their community than primary students.

On the part of some teachers, the introduction of CDSS has helped to deploy some teachers who are qualified to these schools even though the majority of them are not qualified.

However, most participants dwelt much on the disadvantages/problems of the conversion of DEC to CDSSs. Most participants felt that, though the idea is good, the conversion was done in a hurry. For instance, teachers felt that the government could first of all see to it that enough teachers were trained to a level of a secondary school teacher and adequate teaching and learning materials were bought for the schools. They were concerned that most of the teachers in CDSSs are not qualified and teaching and learning materials are not available; as such, they contribute to poor quality education in these schools. As said by one teacher, “they hurried to convert DEC to CDSSs because even now most of the teachers there are like us who just attended a primary school teacher training college.” Parents also indicated that the idea was implemented in a hurry

“because the government wanted to increase the number of secondary schools without considering resource availability.” Parents stated that even though the government selects students to CDSSs, their performance is poor because teachers force themselves to teach materials, which are not at their level of competence. Some teachers emphasized that even though CDSSs are taken as other secondary schools, there is still a big gap between CDSSs and conventional secondary schools. Conventional schools such as National and district secondary schools enjoy good teaching and learning facilities and enough qualified teachers while CDSSs are deprived of the same. For instance, one teacher said,

Students have to receive the same education. Facilities that are found in conventional secondary schools should also be found in CDSSs. Teachers should also receive the same training so that students should receive the same education.

Teachers felt that the inequalities that exist between CDSSs and other conventional secondary schools are also carried into the job market. They indicated that CDSSs in rural areas have no laboratories for science subjects such as Physical Science, Biology and so on; as such, most students do not pass examinations in these subjects. However, most job advertisements require secondary school graduates to pass science subjects, mathematics and English. Consequently, it is only those who attend national and district secondary schools where good science facilities are available who get jobs.

The Ministry of Education (n.d.) also registered that CDSSs recorded a pass rate of only 8% at Malawi School Certificate Examination (MSCE). However, according to the Malawi Government (1999, p. 86)’s education basic statistics, the 1999 MSCE pass rates were 26.6% for the conventional government schools and 3.8% for the CDSSs. MSCE is taken at the end and after four years of secondary education. Since it was found that the majority of the rural children go to CDSSs, it implies that they are the ones who

never succeed in science subjects, hence fail to get jobs in the job market. Even district education officials were also concerned with the differences between conventional secondary schools and CDSSs. As said by one of them:

Most CDSSs lack facilities like desks, electricity, books, library, and lab equipment while conventional secondary schools have all these facilities. However, when it comes to paying tuition fees, students in both schools pay the same. I, as a person, feel it's not good.

In support, the Ministry of Education (n.d.) even stated that there is evidence that CDSS students pay far more than conventional secondary school students, yet the quality of education received in CDSSs is much lower. Because of lack of resources, apart from paying tuition fees, students in most CDSSs buy their own textbooks, workbooks and also pay development funds, which raise the amount of money they pay.

In addition, other participants agreed with students that the conversion has increased the number of students selected to secondary schools but reduced the number of students participating in secondary education. This sounded ironical but what they meant was that in the past, when CDSSs were DECs, students were not required to be selected to attend. So those who went to DECs were not counted on the selection list. However, after the conversion, the students are selected to go to CDSSs and are being counted on the selection list. As such, the number of students selected to secondary school has increased. Nevertheless, they said the conversion has reduced the number of students participating in secondary education because before the conversion, DECs, which were also providing secondary education, were enrolling more than fifty students per class but after the conversion, most DECs were advised to enroll a maximum of fifty students per class. For instance one teacher said:

When CDSSs were DEC's, students could go to ask for a place and DEC's could accommodate a large number of children but now CDSSs follow secondary school rules that children enrolling form one should not exceed fifty. So there, the number of students to participate in secondary education through CDSSs, then DEC's, has been reduced.

Another teacher further said the 50-student enrollment policy to CDSSs has placed "a road block" for rural students to participate in secondary education. As a result, "many students are left out of the system." Teachers indicated that those who are left out usually drop out of school. Even district education officials concurred with this argument. For instance, one of them stated, "The system of CDSS has pushed some students away from participating in secondary education." He explained that in the past there were more students enrolled in DEC's as opposed to now. "Now, in most DEC's they take only fifty students per class." He therefore agreed that the conversion has decreased the chances of rural students to participate in secondary education. Kadzamira and Rose (2001, p. 18) also predicted this scenario and stated:

The recent and sudden transformation of DEC's into CDSSs is likely to reduce the number of school places available further, since these now have to meet the same requirements as government schools, including a limit on the pupil/class ratio of 50:1

Furthermore, participants felt that the conversion has left some students who fail to be selected to have "nowhere to go". For instance, one of the students worriedly said, "by converting DEC's to CDSSs, they had wronged us because here there was a DEC, so if one failed to be selected, you were just going to DEC but now, once you get a pass, you will have nowhere to go with it." In support, one teacher stated,

Before the conversion, those people who failed to be selected were sure of being taken to DEC's. But because of this conversion, there is a block. Students have nowhere to go. As a result, if someone decides to place a private school under a tree, children are just flocking there. This is not healthy at all.

Participants indicated that the conversion has also forced some students to attend poor private secondary schools in their longing for secondary education. Even students concurred with this, and one of them said, “Many of us are just getting passes but we do not know what to do with them. Even when you go to private school, they just eat our money.” This student said that many students in rural private secondary schools never pass examinations despite the exorbitant fees they pay. Most students stated that private secondary schools that are in the rural area are so poor that the teachers are unqualified, facilities are not available, and most children who go there do not even get a pass in PSLCE but they are being accepted because the schools just want money. I also observed this problem of private secondary schools in rural areas. The one I saw was not as attractive as a secondary school. The school was an old and dirty grocery building, which was situated too close to the road. The inside was poorly lit, and I was told the teachers were secondary school graduates who did not attend any college of teacher education.

Parents were also concerned about private schools in rural areas. One of them said, “The problem is that if a child goes to private secondary schools, they do not pass national examinations.” Other parents said that, because they were poor, they could not even afford sending their children to private secondary schools. When their children get a pass but fail to be selected, “we do not know what to do with them.” Teachers were also concerned with private schools in the rural areas. They said the Malawi government must monitor the situation in private schools in rural areas because most of them “do not even have toilets for the students.” This is a serious allegation because students can easily spread and catch diseases if they are made to help themselves anywhere, and many studies have also indicated that lack of toilets affects the education of girls. Some

students further indicated that many of them were discouraged to continue with school because they felt that “once I get just a pass, where will I go with it?” Students said that the Ministry of Education should find a way that those who get passes at standard eight should be able to participate in secondary education. “When we get a pass, they should let us go to secondary school. If it is failing, we should fail there,” one student emphasized.

Parents also echoed similar sentiments that the Ministry should find a way of making those who pass examinations enter secondary education. Participants suggested that instead of “killing” DECs and introducing CDSSs, it would be helpful if these two systems ran simultaneously. As said by one parent, “CDSSs should be there and DECs should also be there so that if a child fails to be selected, he/she should access secondary education through DECs.” In support another parent said, “We, parents, our main cry is that DECs should come back so that our children who just get passes should find where to go so that they should also continue with education.” Parents stated that when the Malawi government said they would open CDSSs, they did not know that the government meant converting DECs to CDSSs. “Now today, when they have established CDSSs, they have ‘killed’ the DECs,” complained one parent. Teachers also felt that the DEC system should be reintroduced to allow more students in rural areas to continue with their education.

Moreover, some participants were very worried that in CDSSs, students just move about during school times instead of learning. For instance one teacher said, “To me, I think children do not receive good education in CDSSs. I always see them move about when they are supposed to be in class. Something is wrong there.” Students also had

similar observations. For instance one of them felt that students go to CDSS just to play, not to learn. According to him, “when students go to CDSS in the morning, they come back the same morning. They just rumble about in the streets during school time.” Students felt that teachers in CDSSs do not encourage students to work hard at school. Maybe their failure to encourage students is attributed to their being unqualified for secondary school teaching and management. One parent gave an example of his child who was in one of the CDSSs saying, “My child always complains that she does not learn at the CDSS where she is. So in brief, even if they planned that DEC’s should be secondary schools, children don’t learn.” Participants felt that the Ministry of Education must regularly inspect CDSSs as they do with primary schools so that they should eliminate “childishness” in CDSSs.

Some participants felt that CDSSs do not allow rural students as much time to study as in other conventional secondary schools. For instance, students said most of the CDSS students’ time is wasted because of walking a long distance to and from school everyday. They said their friends who are selected to conventional secondary schools, which are also boarding secondary schools, have enough time to study. According to them, if CDSSs were boarding, the time spent walking would be used for study. Teachers had also the same observation. They said because of long distance, some students rent houses in the villages surrounding the CDSS they are selected to. However, since teachers cannot look after these children in the villages as they did with those who were on boarding, most students fail to continue with school because they start drinking beer and using drugs. “As for girls, they take those houses as rest houses. Once they do not have money, they become involved in sexual activities with sugar dads who take

advantage of their poverty,” one teacher complained. Teachers were worried that this practice will not help reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people who are expected to be future leaders in the country.

In addition, participants felt rural students who go to CDSSs do not have enough time to study because their parents and guardians expect them to work when they go back home. For instance, one female student worriedly said, “here in the rural area, once you come from school you start washing plates, drawing water from the well and do other domestic work and you do not think of studying.” Furthermore, students said that most of their friends in the rural areas do not go to school. So if they operated from home to CDSS, these friends who would be coming to play with them would disturb them. It would be difficult to ignore such friends because the rural culture requires everybody to entertain visitors. It might be interpreted as rudeness or pride if one tells a friend to go because one wants to study.

Some participants felt that when students in the villages have been selected to a CDSS, which was also in the village, their lifestyle never changes. Students did not like to be selected to CDSS because it could not change their status as rural children. As stated by one student, “If you are selected at the CDSS, your life does not change and those in the primary school where you were, do not see you as different.” To a rural child, doing his/her secondary education away from his/her village helps change his/her status because he/she would not be seen in the village during school time. When he/she comes back from school, people in the village see him/her as a new person because of the new lifestyle he/she has acquired as a result of being away to a boarding secondary school.

Furthermore, participants compared previous DECs and the present CDSSs and stated that education was at least better, though not best, in DECs than the present CDSSs. As stated by some parents, while teaching and learning materials are now very scarce in CDSSs, in DECs there were teaching and learning modules, which were called “sets”, and these helped many students to do well in DECs. “In the DECs there were sets, but now those sets have run away,” complained one parent. Parents said that even people who were just staying in the community could study the sets at home and then went to write examinations in DECs and passed. “People could pass examinations because a set was a teacher in itself,” said another parent. In addition, some participants said that when students went to DEC, if they did well at Junior Certificate examinations (JCE - taken after two years of secondary education), they were selected to national or district secondary schools that offer good quality education. Such students had also chances of going to university. However in CDSSs, “even if a student does well at JCE, he/she is not promoted to a good secondary school,” complained one teacher. In support, one parent said, “previously, to avoid that children would rot in the villages, we could send them to DECs and there they sometimes had chances of being selected to good secondary schools. But now, that chance has been removed from us. Things are not good now.”

In short, participants felt that even though the conversion of DECs to CDSSs has increased the number of students to be selected to secondary school, the number of students participating in secondary education has decreased. In addition, they felt the conversion was done in a hurry as such, CDSSs lack a lot of things like teaching and learning materials, qualified teachers, laboratories, electricity and so on, hence the people who attend CDSSs, who are mostly from rural areas, are more disadvantaged than those

who attend conventional secondary schools. Furthermore, participants indicated that because of the conversion, students who fail to be selected to secondary school have been blocked from further participating in secondary education. Moreover, participants felt teachers in CDSSs never control the students; as such, they are found roaming about during the time when they are supposed to be in class. Consequently, there is no learning that takes place in CDSSs. Finally, participants felt that most CDSSs are very far, so many students walk long distances to school or rent their own houses in the nearby villages, which makes them more vulnerable to sorts of bad behavior and abuse.

Introduction of Selection to CDSSs

When participants assessed the introduction of selection to CDSSs, they indicated that there are some advantages and disadvantages of the selection. On the advantages, participants indicated that selection encourages students to work hard so that they should be among those people selected. For instance, students indicated that, because they knew that if they got passes they would have nowhere to go, they worked hard so that they should be selected. Furthermore, some participants felt that selection helps students to feel that they have done something during examination. For instance one teacher said, “when a pupil is selected, he/she feels excited and exclaims, ‘ooh! So it means I did well, didn’t I?’” Another teacher also concurred that selection makes students feel proud that they have performed better. One student said the introduction of selection is good because, “if you were studying very hard so that you should go to a good secondary school, and then you fail to be selected there and instead get selected to CDSS, you still say, ‘at least I have tried on my part’.” According to one district education official, selection to CDSS is advantageous because if it were not used to identify students to

CDSSs, places would be given to children on friendship and corruption bases. So selection has reduced this practice because students who go to CDSSs are those who perform well.

However, participants also felt that the introduction of selection to CDSS is disadvantageous. For instance, one teacher indicated that selection leaves out other children who were doing well in class, hence making good students drop out. Teachers said that if the government trusted them, it would be asking the teachers to provide names of students who were doing well in class so that they should be taken to CDSSs. "We know better than that examination paper," said one teacher. Other participants also agreed that introducing selection meant cutting down the chances of those children who would not be selected to participate in secondary education.

Furthermore, some students felt that introducing selection to CDSSs is just a waste of time because the schools already offer poor quality education and most of the children who are selected to these schools never like them. According to the students, it is better to let those children who want to go to CDSSs go instead of wasting time selecting those who do not like CDSSs. One of the district education officials also agreed, noting that some students who are selected to CDSSs do not like the schools. According to him, "Some of those who are selected to these schools are not interested and they drop out. So we ask some students to apply for a place." In this case the government spends money twice in order to have a child to fill one CDSS place per year. Most students also indicated that they had negative attitude towards CDSSs. For instance, one of them said, "If I am selected to a CDSS I will repeat standard eight because in CDSSs, there are teachers who do not know their job." Another said she would not be happy if she were

selected to CDSS because “students go there just to play and flirt with boys.” Some students said they did not like to be selected to CDSSs because most of the students fail at form four and none goes to university. Even teachers agreed that students were not happy to be selected to CDSSs because “they do not feel that they are at secondary school because what happens in CDSSs is different from what happens in real secondary schools.” It was interesting that this teacher did not think that CDSSs are “real” secondary schools. Asked if, as a teacher, he would be happy to hear that his students were selected to CDSSs, he said, “Sir, we cannot be happy. But if we hear that students have gone to national and district secondary schools, it’s when we say selection has gone on well.” Another teacher said he would not be happy for his students to go to CDSSs because “it is an inferior secondary school.” Teachers said, when they ask each other about the number of students who have been selected from their schools to secondary school, they do not include those who go to CDSSs. As said by one teacher, “If you ask a teacher how many students have been selected to secondary school, and he/she says ten, know that those are the ones who have gone to either national or district secondary schools.” Those who go to CDSSs are not regarded to have been selected.

In brief, even though participants said selection encourages children to work hard, the position of most participants was that introducing selection to CDSSs is just a waste of resources because most of the students who are selected there are not happy to go. In addition, selection is a disadvantage to those who get passes and are willing to go to CDSSs but are not selected.

The Notion of a Good School

Through out this study, participants had been mentioning that they wanted children to go to good secondary schools. Even students themselves said they were working hard in order to go to good secondary schools. Then I wanted to investigate what “good school” meant to the people in rural areas. The first school that I visited was an LSR school and when I got there, I learnt that all standard eight students were put on boarding though there were no boarding facilities at the school. Boys were accommodated in one of the classes that was assigned to them as their dormitory and girls were accommodated in one of the teachers’ houses which was made vacant to let the girls come in. When I started interviews, it was when I first learnt that students wanted to go to a good secondary school. When I inquired what they meant by that, they said a good secondary school is the school where students are accommodated there and have good teachers. That was why this school had also put standard eight students on boarding in order to make a “good school” for them so that they should also be selected to good secondary schools. In Malawi, most secondary schools which have good facilities and qualified teachers and that are closer to rural areas are boarding. Mostly, these are district secondary schools. Those schools that do not have boarding facilities, and are as good as boarding schools in terms of teachers and learning resources, are mostly in towns and all national secondary schools are boarding. However, though district secondary schools are the closest boarding schools to rural areas, they are closer to towns than they are to rural areas. As stated by the Malawi Government (1999, p. 340):

While primary education is provided as close to the students as possible, secondary education has often been provided nearer urban areas that are easily provided with infrastructure to support the teaching of science subjects. As a result, secondary education has ... been associated with boarding schools.

Secondary schools that do not have boarding facilities and are right in rural areas are community day, which were not valued by the participants as good. For instance, one student said if he failed to be selected, he would repeat standard eight so that he should go to a good secondary school. When he was asked what he meant by good secondary school, he said, "Where students sleep there." Asked the same question, another student said, "for example national and district secondary schools where people sleep there and have good teachers." Even those students from HSR schools had the same concept of good school. For example, when one of the students in HSR school was asked what she meant by good secondary school, she said, "For example to go to a district or national secondary school where students sleep there other than CDSS." Another student from HSR school stated that he wanted to go to a good secondary school such as a national secondary school because "I will be able to have a chance to read." So students felt that boarding secondary schools are also good because they provide a chance to study as opposed to attending a CDSS where they may fail to study because of many disturbances at home.

In addition, teachers from both HSR and LSR schools shared that good schools are those that are boarding. They said all boarding secondary schools have also good school facilities and qualified teachers. They wanted their students to go to such schools so that they should have "a good future." One of them said, "We cannot think of sending our students to these CDSSs. They should go to good schools that have boarding facilities." When asked why teachers did not want their students to go to a day secondary school, one of them, emotionally charged, said:

When you talk of day secondary schools in the rural area are CDSSs. Even if district secondary schools are called day, they have got boarding facilities so they aren't as fully day as CDSSs. The only secondary schools that are day and have good learning facilities and qualified teachers are those in town but a rural child is not allowed to go there because those schools are for children in town. These schools are well equipped because children of top people in the Ministry and the rich go there and leave poor CDSSs for the rural poor. This is pathetic. That's why we encourage our students to go to boarding secondary schools because those are the only good schools they can access if they work extra hard.

Teachers felt that children in rural areas are disadvantaged because there are not many good secondary schools for them. "If CDSSs were as good as these boarding schools, we would say at least a rural child would be helped," said another teacher. Even the Government of Malawi (1999, p. 340) agreed that the geographical distribution of secondary schools had meant, "Rural masses have been denied equal opportunities to secondary education."

Furthermore, parents also wanted their children to go to boarding secondary schools because boarding schools are good. According to them, they believed that a child could only go to university if he/she is selected to a good secondary school. However, they were worried that their children are only going to CDSSs and at form four' they do not pass to go to university. "We also want our children to go to good secondary schools like those national secondary schools so that they should have a good future," said one parent. Parents felt that when a child is selected to a CDSS, his/her future is doomed. They also felt that if their children are selected to schools that are far away from their villages and are boarding, they would be changed because they will not be required to work after school. "As you know here in the villages children do a lot of work that makes them fail to study. So our plea to the government is that we also want our children to attend good schools so that they should learn well," said another parent. Parents said they

did not have power to encourage their children to study at home and they just tell them to work. Another parent emphatically said:

Whether the government wants it or not, we cannot stop telling our children to work when they get home because we are poor. We depend on their labor for our survival. So the only way to make them learn is to send them to boarding schools. There, they will have enough time to read and do well in examinations.

Parents complained that they fail to educate their children further because they are just sent to nearby CDSSs, which do not offer them good education. They also complained that when CDSSs were DECs, parents tried to build boarding facilities so that their children should not be coming home but when CDSSs were introduced, those boarding facilities were “killed.” In support another parent complained, “At (mentioned a name of one CDSS) there was boarding but the government closed it. At (mentioned another CDSS) there was boarding but the boarders were chased away.” Parents said, if children are sent away to school that are far from home and are boarding, they become clever and responsible. They learn how to take care of themselves and their belongings. They also learn how to budget the money that their parents give them.

Briefly, all participants felt that for the students to do well they need to be sent to good secondary schools. According to them, a good secondary school is the one that has boarding facilities in addition to having qualified teachers and good learning and teaching materials. They felt also that for a rural student, boarding schools are better because they allow them time to study. If they are selected to schools where they commute from home, they fail to study because they are involved in many domestic activities. However, the belief in boarding schools contradicts the government’s intention to phase out boarding facilities in secondary schools, and it is not clear to what extent the Malawi government discussed this issue with teachers, students and parents in rural areas who have strong

positive feelings about boarding schools. According to Malawi Government (1999, p. 347), “the recent move to phase out boarding facilities where possible is good in that more financial resources can be channeled into teaching and learning materials.”

Students’ Aspirations and Parents’ Expectations for Education

The study found that even though rural students have hard time accessing secondary education, students’ aspirations for secondary and further education is very high. According to the responses given on the questionnaire, about 96% of the respondents said they wanted to go to secondary school. That is, according to table 20, about 83% strongly agreed and about 13% agreed that they wanted to go to secondary school.

Table 20: I want to go to secondary school

<u>Students’ Response</u>	<u>Frequeney</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly Agree	288	83
Agree	46	13
Moderately Agree	10	3
Disagree	1	.3
<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	3	.9
<u>Total</u>	<u>348</u>	<u>100</u>

In addition, in table 21, about 94% of the respondents thought they would be selected after taking examinations in the year 2003. That is, about 73% of the respondents strongly agree and about 21% agreed that they would be selected to secondary school.

Table 21: I will be selected this year

<u>Students' Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly Agree	253	73
Agree	74	21
Moderately Agree	19	6
Moderately Disagree	1	.3
<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>.3</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>348</u>	<u>100</u>

Moreover, students felt that if they got primary education only they would not be able to live a good basic life in rural areas. For instance, in table 21, about 92% did not believe that primary education was enough for them to live in rural areas. That is about 78% strongly disagreed and about 14% of the respondents disagreed that primary education only was enough for them to live in the rural areas.

Table 22: Primary Education is Enough for Rural Living

<u>Students' Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Strongly Agree	9	3
Agree	9	3
Moderately Agree	5	1
Moderately Disagree	7	2
Disagree	47	14
<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>270</u>	<u>78</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>347</u>	<u>100</u>

Even in interviews, all students indicated that they wanted to go to secondary school. However, they gave different reasons why they wanted to go to secondary school. One student said she wanted to go to secondary school because “when you go to secondary school, your behavior changes and even your parents see that you have been changed.” Another child concurred that if they went to secondary school, they would have “good behavior.” Other students said they wanted to go secondary school so that they should be able to be employed and help their parents in the villages. Some said they wanted to go to secondary school so that they should go to university and get good jobs in future.

In addition, parents had some expectations for the education of their children. Some parents said they wanted their children to go to secondary school so that they should contribute to the development of the country and also help them when they grow old. As said by one parent, “our aim is that the children should help us when we are old and helpless.” Another parent said they wanted children to be able to help themselves and “have good life on this earth.” Some parents said they did not understand some of the things that happen in their country because their education is low. They wanted their children to go up to secondary school and beyond so that they should not be like them.

However, apart from saying that their access to good education is limited, some of the participants said many rural children fail to continue with education and realize their dreams because of the issue of school fees. For instance, one student said fees in secondary schools are too high for the rural people: “even if children are selected, parents in rural area fail to pay school fees for them.” Another student concurred with his friend and said, “In fact there are so many children here in rural area that fail to go to secondary school, not even to CDSSs, because of lack of school fees. So we request that school fees

should be reduced because some of us our parents are poor.” Parents also said they were worried because sometimes when their children get a chance of being selected to, for example, national secondary school, and they fail to pay school fees, the child is sent back home and another is put in his/her place because he/she has money. They asked why the government could not do anything to such children whose parents have nothing.

“Can’t the government help us poor people to pay school fees for our children?” one parent asked. Parents said that they get very worried when children are sent home because they start stealing, prostituting and other bad habits because of frustrations. “For example some of us are old and are keeping grandchildren who are orphans. What will we do if these children are selected since we do not have anything?” one old parent asked. Many parents said because of the problem of HIV/AIDS, there are so many children in the villages who have no parents and are being kept by their grandparents.

However, with the issue of school fees, they doubted if those children would be able to attend secondary education. They said that even though primary education is free, these children fail to go to school because they have no clothes, no food and no good shelter.

One grandparent who kept orphans stated:

Orphanage in the rural area is a little bit different from orphanage in town. Most parents in urban areas have jobs and when they die, their children are helped by the companies where the parents were working. But in the villages, parents have no steady jobs and when they die, they leave their children with their poor grand parents. This becomes a very big problem.

Even in the questionnaire, table 23 shows that about 10% of the students who responded said they lived with their grandparents and about 22% lived with mother only. It was only 39.7% of the students who indicated that they lived with both natural parents.

Table 23: Guardians Students Lived With

<u>Guardian Live With</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Both Natural Parents	138	39.7
Mother Only	75	21.6
Father Only	6	1.7
Grandparents	36	10.3
Mother and Stepfather	34	9.8
Father and Stepmother	10	2.9
Extended Family Member	40	11.5
Other	9	2.6
<u>Total</u>	<u>348</u>	<u>100</u>

Furthermore, they said parents sometimes struggle to get money for secondary school but once the children are selected to university, parents give up because they cannot afford university fees even if they “stop eating for a year.” Because of lack of communication, rural parents do not even know that, if a child is selected to university, there is a chance for him or her to apply for a study loan. Consequently, some children in rural areas do not even attempt to go to university after being selected. They feel they cannot afford because they do not have money. So parents suggested that the government can help them by providing bursaries to the children, finding organizations that are willing to pay fees for the children or creating more technical schools so that after acquiring some skills, children should be able to work so that they get money and pay for their schooling. Parents said the government can establish technical schools in the same schools where their children go so that after finishing standard eight in primary schools or

form four in CDSSs, they should be invited back for an extra year to learn technical skills. In addition, one parent stated:

In the villages there are some people who have technical skills and if the government made arrangements with these people and buy them equipment, they would help to train our children in schools. There are carpenters, tinsmiths, basket weavers, mechanics, builders, tailors and the like in the villages that the government could use.

Parents felt that because taking children to technical schools is expensive, the cheaper way is to make arrangements with local skilled people to train children in their schools. "For example in these primary schools, after children knock off at 1.00pm, the buildings just remain unused. That is the time the buildings could be used for training our children technical skills," one parent said. Parents agreed that if children were involved in the afternoon in these technical activities, they would be saved from acquiring bad habits such as using drugs, drinking beer, prostituting and so on because they would be kept busy. Another parent supported the idea of teaching students technical skills and said, "I also get my soap in tailoring." The parents brought in an idea of school based enterprise whereby children would be selling the things that they would be making in their training and in turn use the money to pay trainers and buy materials. "The government should help by just adding more materials and equipment but trainers will be paid by selling what students will be making," said one parent.

In general, both students and their parents wanted the children to go to secondary school and others wanted them to go up to university. These participants saw education as an investment in their children so that in the future they should be able to help themselves, their parents and the country as a whole. However, according to the way education is provided in rural areas, it is questionable that the dreams of rural children

and their parents will be realized. Rural parents and children are challenged by the issues of lack of quality education in rural schools and lack of school fees for the children to continue with education.

Chapter Summary

According to the participants, the concept of CDSS means a secondary school that has all the necessary teaching and learning facilities and is run by and intends to serve the community. However, they felt that the students in CDSSs are those who are not as intelligent as those who go to district and national secondary schools. Nevertheless, the participants felt that CDSSs in Malawi do not suit the name because the community has not been empowered to run them and also that they do not adequately serve the community because of the low quality of education and the low number of students enrolled in these schools.

On the conversion of DECS to CDSSs, participants felt that even though the conversion has increased the number of students selected to secondary school, it has decreased the number of rural students who participate in secondary education. Participants also felt that though the idea is good, the conversion was made in a hurry, hence it does not solve the inequalities that existed between the DECs and conventional secondary school. The conversion also has led to dropping out of some students who fail to be selected to secondary school and again, it never changed the life style of rural students for the better.

The participants further felt that the idea of CDSS that removed boarding facilities is not good for rural children because they will not be able to adequately study if they operate from home due to the high demand of their labor at home and also that their time

and energy will be wasted walking long distance to and from school. The removing of boarding facilities was also seen as one of the contributing factors to renting houses in the villages that makes students vulnerable to abuse and bad behavior. According to the participants, a good school for a rural child is a boarding school that has all the necessary teaching and learning facilities available.

In addition, participants felt that, though the introduction of selection to CDSSs is good in that it encourages students to work hard and also reduces corruption, it has cut down the chances of the children who fail to be selected to participate in secondary education. And again, the selection was felt to be a waste of time and resources because some of the children who are selected are not interested in CDSSs and they either drop out or never attend the schools.

Finally, it has been shown that students have higher aspiration for secondary and further education and their parents have higher expectations for the education of their children. However, some parents and guardians fail to send their children for further education because they cannot afford school fees.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to better understand the problems of repetition, selection and community day secondary school (CDSS) policies and their impact on rural students' access to secondary education. The two grand tour questions that were used to achieve the purpose were: (1) what do standard eight repetition and selection policies and the issue of CDSS mean to teachers, students and parents in rural primary schools? And (2) what is the relationship between standard eight repetition, knowledge of policies and students' aspirations for secondary education? These questions were explored through a mixed method research design. That is, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to answer the research questions. However, qualitative method was considered to be the dominant method. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present a summary and implications of results and some policy recommendations.

To begin with, the study's results have shown that participants felt that there are some problems in standard eight selection to secondary schools. In the responses, there were no differences between participants from HSR and LSR schools. According to the participants, it was felt that problems in selection result from having fewer places in secondary schools that do not accommodate a large number of students who write and pass examinations at standard eight. This problem, therefore, makes teachers, students and parents worry about the future of rural children and their communities. Lack of secondary spaces for primary graduates is the main problem that affects selection in standard eight and as a result, other problems follow as students struggle to enter secondary schools. If this problem were solved, most of the problems that follow would

be naturally eliminated. It is therefore imperative that the Malawi government should put a lot of resources to develop secondary education so that children who graduate from primary schools should be able to continue with education at secondary level. In addition, apart from just concentrating on primary education, donors should also gear their financial support to expand secondary education, hence making the development of primary education meaningful for the development of Malawi as a nation. This is consistent with one of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)'s objectives, which urges developed countries to make massive investments in the development of the continent of Africa (Conference on the Financing of NEPAD, 2002). Failure to develop secondary education in relation to primary education will result into wastage of potential human resources that would be educated and contribute to the development of Malawi as a nation.

In addition, it was felt that there is a very big gap in the way students are being selected to secondary schools from different primary schools. In some primary schools, more students are consistently being selected to secondary schools than in other schools, despite the fact that students' grades do not significantly differ. If those students who were left out with high grades were only repeaters, it could be concluded that it was because of the implementation of the selection and repetition policies. However, participants indicated that the problem happens to both repeaters and beginners. Therefore, this is a problem that Ministry of Education needs to look into and find out its cause and possible solution. The method and officials used to select students need to be assessed and see where the loopholes are.

Furthermore, participants indicated that standard eight selection to secondary school is affected by corruption that leads to unequal access to secondary education between students of the rich and poor. Participants felt that the rich use resources at their disposal to corrupt officers that are entrusted with selection to push their children into secondary schools, a tendency that disadvantage the poor because of lack of such resources. Consequently, since the majority of the poor are in rural areas, most students in rural schools fail to participate in secondary education. This allegation needs to be investigated so that all the children must be given suitable opportunities to participate in secondary and further education.

Moreover, participants indicated that problems in standard eight selection emanate from cheating that is rampant during examinations in some schools. Cheating disadvantages intelligent children who write examinations on their own without being helped by anybody. It was felt that one of the reasons why teachers cheat with students during examinations is that they fail to complete studying the standard eight syllabuses on which examinations are based. It is important therefore to investigate why teachers do not complete the syllabuses and other reasons that motivate teachers to ignore their professional ethics and cheat in examinations. These will help to find solutions to the problem of cheating. Many teachers, students and parents in this study detested cheating but they are also the ones who are known for cheating. So this means that if Ministry of Education and MANEB work cooperatively with these people, they may be able to find ways and means of curbing cheating in schools.

Apart from selection, participants indicated that even the process itself is not clearly understood. They observed that the selection process leaves some equally

intelligent children unselected in addition to pushing more rural children to low quality CDSSs. This makes the access to and participation of rural students in secondary education problematic.

On the issue of participants' knowledge of standard eight selection and repetition policies, the study has established that the majority of teachers, students and parents from rural areas are ignorant of the policies. However, there were some differences observed between HSR and LSR schools. On one hand, headmasters in HSR schools had some knowledge of the policies and as such, they refused their students to repeat at their schools and encouraged them to go to private secondary schools if they failed to be selected. Even though these headmasters had some knowledge of the policies, it was surprising that they did not communicate to teachers, students and parents who were associated with their schools. Consequently, these other players did not know about the standard eight selection and repetition policies. Nevertheless, because of the headmasters' influence, teachers in HSR schools also encouraged students to go to private secondary schools if they fail to be selected apart from encouraging them to repeat. All the parents, however, encouraged their children to repeat. So students in HSR schools receive mixed messages from teachers, headmasters and parents. However, students and parents were worried because they did not know why the headmasters did not allow children to repeat standard eight in their schools.

On the other hand, there were only two teachers in LSR schools who had scanty knowledge of the standard eight repetition and selection policies but the rest of the teachers, headmasters included, were not aware of the policies. As a result, all teachers, students and parents from LSR schools encouraged children to repeat in standard eight if

they fail to be selected. This implies that there might be more students repeating in LSR schools than HSR schools. If so, standard eight repetition and selection policies might have negatively affected more students in LSR schools than their counterparts in HSR schools. Nonetheless, in general, the study has shown that students in rural schools are negatively affected by the standard eight selection and repetition policies because of lack of knowledge of the policies in teachers, students and parents. So if the grassroots stakeholders are ignorant of the policies that they are supposed to implement, it means that the Malawi government will not be able to successfully achieve the goals of education. Lack of knowledge may lead to lack of value, support and ownership of the policies for proper implementation.

Next, this study acted as a learning process for those participants who were not aware of the standard eight repetition and selection policies. When they indicated that they did not know about the standard eight repetition and selection policies, the policies were revealed to them. Participants then assessed the policies and indicated that the policies have both good and bad effects. Even those who were at least aware of the policies indicated the same. On the good part, participants said the policies are beneficial to a beginner in standard eight and as such, they encourage students to work hard in their first year in standard eight otherwise their chance of being selected would be reduced if they repeat the following year.

However, participants indicated that there are more bad effects of the policies than good ones. They said that many children are not selected to secondary school not because they have failed examinations but because there are fewer places in secondary schools. Therefore, it is not fair to victimize students who fail to be selected and decide to

repeat the following year for the problems that are not created by them. They said the policies would be welcomed if there were as many places in secondary schools as there are in standard eight in primary schools. This comes back to the main problem of selection at standard eight as lack of enough secondary school places.

In addition, participants said the policies encourage or will encourage cheating. They said those teachers who know about the policies and those who will know the policies will not register students as repeaters, even when they are repeating so that they should have many children selected to secondary school. Besides, other students change their names and also change their schools and register as beginners so that they should be selected. So with a full knowledge of the policies by teachers, students and parents, the implementation of the policies will be heavily affected. Each player will find ways and means of beating the system so that students should have all the chances of being selected. This however complicates the idea of whether stakeholders should know the policies or not. Nevertheless, the problem of cheating can be eliminated not by hiding the policies but making them known to the stakeholders through participation. Once stakeholders put in their inputs in the policies, they will be able to identify themselves with the policies and struggle to work towards their achievement. Stakeholders need to understand and share rationale for policies for them to yield support.

Furthermore, participants felt that implementing these policies means denying the rights of repeaters to continue with education. They felt that repeaters need not be discriminated against in the education system because there are so many problems that contribute to slow learning of children in rural areas, and as such, it is difficult for them to perform very well in their first year in standard eight. Unless rural problems are

alleviated, one can learn from this study that it is difficult for teachers, students and parents in rural areas to honor the standard eight repetition and selection policies with commitment. Rural schools need to be provided with adequate teaching and learning resources, qualified teachers and good school infrastructure. Therefore, the participants' position was that these policies should not be implemented at all. Following the reaction of the participants, one can learn that implementing policies that are suitable for perfect education systems into imperfect system must be done with care otherwise a lot of unintended consequences that are not desirable may result. The Malawi education system is pyramidal as one moves from the bottom level to the top and implementing policies that are suitable for a perfect system, which allows everybody to move upwards provided they have fulfilled the basic requirements for one level, may cause a lot of problems.

On the issue of tracking students for easy implementation of the standard eight repetition and selection policies, the study has shown that students are tracked using two major methods. The first one is the use of Nominal Rolls that indicate the year a child started standard eight and the second one is the PPS (Pupils' Promotion Status) form. The PPS is a form that a transfer student carries to another school and it indicates whether the student is promoted from a lower class, is repeating because of absence or is repeating because of failure. However, the problem with the transfer form is that it does not indicate how long a student has been in standard eight. In addition, because of the issues of changing names, repeating as a beginner, and changing schools and registering in another school as a beginner, the tracking of students seems to be problematic. So if some students are not easily tracked in the system, it means that the implementation of the standard eight repetition and selection policies is affected, hence they cannot achieve the

intended purpose. Some students may still enjoy the privileges of beginners while they are repeaters, thus defeating the policies' objective of reducing standard eight repetition.

Coming to the relationship between repetition, knowledge of policies and aspirations for secondary education, the study has indicated that students' aspirations for secondary school selection become stronger the more they repeat standard eight. Even though the statistical data were not significant, these results were supported by students' interviews, which indicated that students wanted to repeat in order to be selected. They are also supported by statistical data in HSR schools that were at least significant when HSR and LSR schools were compared. Therefore, these results further confirm that rural students are ignorant of the repetition and selection policies.

In addition, the study has found that more beginners in standard eight are being selected than repeaters. From these results, one can conclude that probably the standard eight repetition and selection policies are being implemented. However, the study has also shown that more beginners than repeaters are selected to CDSSs. This confirms teachers' worries that students in rural areas do not perform well in their first year due to problems associated with rural areas and schools. So, since national and district secondary schools take students that perform better, it is only repeaters who have a higher chance of being selected to such secondary schools. This also implies that more repeaters have a higher chance of continuing with their education up to university than beginners because they are selected to "good schools", as observed by participants in this study. Once again, because of change of names and schools and registering as beginners, it is still possible that among those students who go to district and national secondary schools

as beginners, some of them may also be repeaters. So the actual number of beginners selected to district and national secondary schools might be smaller than observed.

Furthermore, the study has found that there are more students from LSR schools who go to CDSSs than their counterparts in HSR schools who are more frequently selected to district and national secondary schools. Moreover, there are more boys going to good schools of district and national secondary than girls who largely patronize CDSSs. The implication is therefore that, if a student is a boy attending HSR school and a repeater, he is more likely to go to district and national secondary school as opposed to a girl who is a beginner attending LSR school who is more likely to go to CDSS. So girls in rural areas are more disadvantaged than boys.

Another issue that emerged is about policy formation and implementation process. The study has revealed that there is lack of grassroots stakeholder participation in the formation process of most educational policies in Malawi. Consequently, the implementation of policies such as the standard eight selection and repetition policies becomes a problem. For instance, there is no common understanding between policy makers and teachers, students and parents on how and why standard eight repetition should be avoided. This lack of agreement can in part be attributed to lack of grassroots stakeholders' participation in the policy formation process, which then leads to lack of knowledge of and support for the policies. Therefore, this negatively affects the implementation of the policies.

Apart from lack of involvement, it has also been established that policy communication to rural schools is still a problem, despite the study of Wolf et al. (1999) who pointed out the same. According to participants, policies are communicated to rural

schools through circulars, radio, PEAs, DEM's offices and headmasters. However, the participants felt that these are not effective means of communicating policies to them for a number of reasons. One reason is that it is difficult for them to interpret policies that are sent to them through circulars and that there is nobody to answer their questions about the policies. As a result, policies still remain unclear to them. In addition, they indicated that PEAs who are used to carry policies to schools are not conversant with the policies so they fail to explain the gist of the policies to the teachers. Moreover, because of long distance to DEM's offices and lack of equipment to reproduce policy documents, most policies do not reach rural schools. This implies that most rural schools operate outside the demands of most of educational policies and therefore behave contrary to the demands of the policies, hence affecting students' participation in education in one way or another.

Despite the fact that some policies are not communicated to rural schools, grassroots stakeholders indicated that they have no chance of communicating back to policy makers the effects of those policies that manage to hit the ground. Teachers said PEAs fear to deliver their messages to policy authorities, as teachers themselves do, for fear of losing their jobs. Parents also said that because it is only the government that makes policies, they fear to bring contradictory issues about them. Parents felt the government does not see the reason why it should communicate policies to them because the government thinks that they are rural people and uneducated. As such, parents do not have any motivation to communicate policy effects back to the policy makers.

As for students, they do not know that they are supposed to communicate policy effects back to policy makers and also they fear even to do that because some policies are

communicated to them threateningly. Others felt that communicating policy effects back to policy makers, especially if the effects are not beneficial, might be interpreted as rudeness. So they do not want to lose their schooling by communicating contradictory messages to the authorities.

Therefore, failure of grassroots stakeholders to communicate back to policy makers the effects of policies on the ground means that the Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, does not get enough information that would help them improve the implementation of educational policies in order to yield intended results.

In suggesting the best ways of communicating policies to rural schools, teachers felt that the best way is for Ministry officials to assemble teachers zone by zone and communicate policies to them before circulars are sent. In such a forum, participants will be able to ask questions. Others suggested holding workshops where policies can be communicated and scrutinized. If PEAs are to be used, teachers stated that the Ministry of Education should see to it that they are conversant with the policies so that they should be able to explain the policies and answer questions. Similarly, students said policies should be communicated to them through Ministry officials and headmasters but not with threats so that they should be able to say something about them. Parents mentioned school PTAs, school committees and headmasters as the best ways through which policies can be communicated to them. The most important factor here is that policies should be able to reach grassroots stakeholders in ways that will enable them to ask questions and be clear about the policies before they start implementing them.

On the issue of power to influence policy change, participants felt that they have no power. Teachers said they felt powerless because the policies start from top authorities

and no open channel is given for them to participate. And again, they lack enough information about policies to be able to influence change. The only power they felt they have is to ignore the implementation of some policies that are not closely monitored by the Ministry. Similarly, students felt powerless to influence policy change because they have no resources such as phones and electricity. They also indicated that they did not know how to get to policy makers and believed they were not as intelligent as policy makers so as to influence policy change. However, there were two students who said they could use the court and discuss with teachers in order to influence policy change.

Parents also said they did not have power to influence policy change because they have not been involved in the policy formation processes, they feared the government, and had no proper channel to follow. Even district education officials agreed that rural grassroots stakeholders in education have no power to influence policy change. There is no law that protects them from unwanted policies. Although there is a constitution, the rural majority is not aware of its contents that they can use to protect themselves from undesirable educational policies. It is therefore true that rural people “suffer in silence” as far as educational policies that affect them are concerned. Accordingly, if grassroots stakeholders feel powerless to influence policy change, it means they become detached from the policies and they cannot make much effort to look at the policies with a critical eye or even support them. As a result, it is difficult for the Ministry of Education to get real feedback about the successes and failures of implemented policies. Policies may also fail to be well implemented and produce intended outcomes.

Furthermore, because of the many problems that rural schools face, most of which are not of their own making, participants felt that the Malawi government should

formulate special policies that will take into account the disadvantaged conditions in the rural areas. They said that most of what rural children learn in school is not within their immediate experience. This is coupled with lack of resources, involvement in domestic activities at home, lack of interaction between schools to share knowledge and resources, lack of qualified teachers and high teacher/pupil ratio. Consequently, student learning in rural areas is slow and rural students cannot compete with urban students in examinations. They therefore suggested that the Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, should introduce policies that should allow rural students to compete among themselves for secondary places. In addition, they said a quota system should be introduced so that rural students and urban students should have their own quota to fill in secondary schools. The quota should be determined according to student population in these areas.

Turning to the policy of cluster system that had just been implemented for the first time when the study was being conducted, participants felt disappointed because they were not involved in its formulation process, apart from just being informed that students would write examinations in clusters. Despite the fact that the system is intended to curtail cheating, participants felt that there are some problems that could be assessed together with concerned stakeholders before implementation. As seen by students, because candidates from LSR schools peeped on the work of candidates from HSR schools and because some teachers cheated with students when a similar system was used during mock examinations, students were skeptical of the system and said it would disturb students from HSR schools. Students also said they would not feel comfortable writing examinations with other people they did not know and at a place they were not

familiar with. Moreover, participants felt that since schools in rural areas are far apart, most students will walk long distances to a cluster center to write examinations. Consequently, their performance will be affected because they will reach the center tired. Furthermore, participants stated that only those candidates from the cluster center will be advantaged to get lunch from their homes during examination break-time, while those from other schools will remain hungry throughout examination sessions everyday because they cannot go home for lunch and also cannot afford to buy lunch because most of the children in rural areas come from poor families. This will further affect their performance in examinations. However, I propose further studies on the cluster system since it is the first time to be implemented. Nevertheless, I feel it would be better if the cluster system were implemented incrementally to allow some modifications and improvements. Implementing it holistically across the whole primary education sector for the first time as was done in 2003 could cause many problems that would lead to strong resistance from many people. As said by Professor Hartwell in our informal chat, implementing newly made policies holistically is “one way of killing a good idea.”

On another note, participants defined CDSS as a school that is not boarding, is established and looked after by the community and intended to serve the immediate community. However, they felt that the way CDSSs are run in Malawi does not fit the definition. They stated that even though CDSSs enroll children from the immediate community, there are some issues that make them detached from the community. For instance, they said that the schools do not adequately serve the community because they lack qualified teachers, teaching/learning resources, and enroll very few students that do not represent the number of children in the community who are hungry for secondary

education. They also said that the CDSSs do not give chance to some members of the community who want to upgrade themselves academically since to be in CDSS one has to be young and selected there. In addition, they said CDSSs are detached from the community because the community does not even participate in the selection process. So, if the community does not feel to be part of CDSSs, it means that it is difficult for the schools to be owned, receive support and be valued by the concerned community.

In relation to the issue of converting DECs to CDSSs, participants felt that the conversion was made in a hurry before adequate resources were put in place to allow smooth running of the system. Even though the idea is good and the conversion increased the number of students selected to secondary schools, the participants said there are so many problems with the system. According to them, the conversion does not close the wide gap that previously existed between DECs and conventional secondary schools hence students in CDSSs and conventional secondary schools still receive educations of unequal quality. This inequality is also further taken into the job market where CDSS graduates fail to get good jobs. Since the majority of rural children go to CDSSs, it means that they are the ones who are more disadvantaged in the job market too.

In addition, participants said the conversion has decreased the number of rural children to participate in secondary education. Before the conversion, DECs could enroll more than fifty students per class but after the conversion, most CDSSs were required to enroll a maximum of fifty students per class. Therefore, many children are left with nowhere to go. As a result, some children who have some money are forced to enroll in poor private secondary schools in rural areas while the majorities who are poor drop out.

Participants felt that if DECs and CDSSs operated simultaneously, a lot of students from rural areas would have chance of participating in secondary education.

Furthermore, participants felt rural students walk long distance to CDSSs and this affects their concentration in education. Much of their time is wasted moving to and from school; they do not have enough time to study. Participants regretted the removal of boarding facilities in DECs, now CDSSs, which helped rural students be closer to school and ran away from rural environment disturbances. The removal of boarding facilities also leads to more students being abused because they rent houses in the surrounding villages where teachers cannot supervise them. Moreover, participants felt that if rural students commute from their homes to CDSSs, their status as rural children is never changed and they never learn to be responsible. To continue, participants felt the study modules called “sets” that were being provided to students in DECs helped students to do well in examinations but the conversion has also made the sets to disappear, hence making study through CDSSs difficult. In general, participants felt that there is no learning taking place in CDSSs, as a result, most rural children are academically handicapped.

The other issue concerned the introduction of selection to CDSSs. The participants felt that the introduction of selection to CDSSs is good because it encourages students to work hard so that they should be among those to be selected. Selection also makes students proud because it indicates that they had been working hard in school and examinations. In addition, participants felt that using selection to take students to CDSSs helps to eliminate corruption.

However, participants felt there are some disadvantages with the introduction of selection to CDSSs. They felt selection makes some good students drop out of school because of not being selected. Furthermore, they felt it is a waste of time and resources to introduce selection to CDSSs because some of the students who are selected there are not interested to be in CDSSs and they either drop out or never go to the schools. According to them, it is better to let those children who are interested in CDSSs go instead of wasting resources to select those who cannot attend.

Touching on the notion of a good school, rural participants felt that a good school is the one that has boarding facilities apart from having adequate teaching/learning facilities and qualified teachers. Rural people value boarding facilities because they save a rural child from problems of the rural home. However, the belief in boarding school contradicts the Malawi government's plan to phase out boarding facilities in secondary schools. I therefore feel it is important to critically assess this plan before it is holistically implemented to avoid disadvantaging the rural group, who also do not favor the plan. As far as rural areas are concerned, boarding facilities are cost effective because they help students to have enough time to study instead of walking long distance to and from school; they save rural students from being involved in domestic work at home that negatively influence their concentrating on education; they save children from renting houses in villages near CDSSs where they are sexually exploited and are involved in drug abuse.

Finally, the study showed that rural standard eight students have high aspirations for secondary education and parents have high expectations for the education of their children. The Malawi government should then take advantage of this high aspiration and

expectation for education to invest in human resource capacity building. The capacity building can only be successful if the barriers that rural students, teachers and parents face are removed for children to easily move through the education ladder. For instance, students felt that if they go to secondary school, their behavior will be changed. They also felt that secondary education would help them secure jobs that would enable them help their parents in the villages. In addition, they saw secondary education as the only gateway to university and good future. Similarly, parents wanted their children to go to secondary school so that they should have good jobs that would enable them to have money to help themselves and their parents. They also felt that with education, children would be able to understand issues that happen in the country hence help to contribute to the development of the Malawi nation. All these consequences make rural children wanting education and if the Malawi government makes the rural environment conducive to learning, many children will be educated; hence contributing to human capacity building in Malawi that will lead to the nation's development.

However, among other things, participants stated that many rural children fail to continue with education because of lack of school fees. They felt that if the government helped them with bursaries, technical schools or identify organizations that could pay fees; the future of rural students would be brightened.

In general, the way education is provided in rural areas suggests that many rural children, parents and teachers do not realize their dreams. Secondary selection in rural areas is a problem and educational policies are not adequately communicated to rural students, teachers and parents. They are also denied active participation in the policy formation process that renders them powerless to influence policy change. Consequently,

they behave contrary to the demands of the policies, contributing to rural children's failure to continue with education. In addition, CDSSs where most rural children go offer poor quality education and do not even provide good facilities for science subjects that are prerequisite for most of the jobs. Furthermore, rural children's chances of seeking alternative secondary education were closed by converting DEC's to CDSSs and limiting the number of enrollees in addition to introducing selection policies. And again, rural parents' attempt to provide boarding facilities in DEC's so that their children should have enough time to study and run away from disturbances in the rural home and avoid walking long distances was discouraged. Therefore, rural children are educationally disadvantaged and education in this case helps to reproduce social inequalities in Malawi. That is to say, rural children who also come from poor families do not have access to good quality education that can ensure them good job opportunities hence remain poor in the society as opposed to urban children who most of them come from high socio-economic backgrounds and attend good schools in towns which take them either straight to good jobs or to university and later on acquire higher status jobs. Tables 24 and 25 briefly summarize grassroots stakeholder analysis as far as standard eight selection and repetition policies, and issues of DEC's and CDSS respectively are concerned. The tables give the feelings of stakeholders in relation to policies in question and not necessarily what I feel is the position of the stakeholders in relation to the policies.

Table 24: Stakeholder Analysis: Repetition and Selection Policy

Policy Issue	Group	Group's interest in the issue	Resource available	Resource mobilization capacity	Position on the issue
Repetition and Selection Policies	Students	To be selected and have a bright future so disliked the policies because wanted to repeat to increase selection chances.	Lacked adequate information but could use courts and teachers and also change names and schools.	Felt powerless to mobilize resources because not empowered. But could affect policy implementation	Negative
	Teachers	To make many children get selected and be popular and satisfy employers and parents even if it means making some students repeat, hence avoid implementation of the policies.	Lacked adequate information about the policies, however had power to twist or ignore policies and register repeaters as beginners	Felt powerless to mobilize resources but if empowered they would. Feared to use own resources but could affect policy implementation	Negative
	Parents	To have their children selected to secondary school and have good jobs. Hence making them repeat if they fail to be selected hence avoid policy implementation	Lacked adequate information about the policies, however power to change children's names and school	Felt powerless to mobilize resources but if empowered they would. Fear to use own resources. But could affect policy implementation	Negative

Table 25: Stakeholder Analysis: DEC's and CDSS Policies

Policy Issue	Group	Group's interest in the issue	Resource available	Resource mobilization capacity	Position on the issue
DECs and CDSS Policies	Students	To attend good schools, hence try to avoid being selected to CDSSs	Some power to cheat in exams especially when teachers and invigilators are bribed to cooperate.	Low	Negative, unless quality in CDSSs is improved.
	Teachers	To send children to renown schools and avoid CDSSs	Power to cheat in examinations so that students do extremely well to go to good schools other than CDSSs.	Medium, especially when there is a cordial agreement among teachers and invigilators.	Negative, unless quality of CDSSs improved and reintroduce DEC system to run concurrently with CDSSs.
	Parents	To have children sent to good secondary schools apart from CDSSs	Buy exam scripts for their children in order for them to pass very well to go to good schools.	Very low	Negative, unless schools improved and have both DECs and CDSSs run concurrently.

Policy Recommendations

If the issues of standard eight selection and repetition policies and CDSSs are to be improved and help children in rural areas access secondary and further education, the Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, should consider the following alternative recommendations. Note that implementing some of these recommendations automatically cancels out the implementation of others, though many of them may be implemented together.

Selection and Repetition Policy Issues

The first recommendation is that the Malawi Government, through its Ministry of Education, should consider abolishing primary school leaving certificate examinations (PSLCE) at standard eight that is used for selection and certification purposes and instead, teachers must examine students through continuous assessment. Beginning from standard six, students' performance in every subject, including those that are not examined now, should be assessed and results should be kept in portfolios which will be used to determine students' readiness for secondary education after standard eight. Standard six is chosen as a cut off point because senior section at primary level begins with this class. After standard eight, every student must be given a school report that spells out their performance in every subject in each class and thereafter, teachers and parents/guardians must help students apply for a place in secondary schools of their choice. Students must be encouraged to submit three applications: one to a national secondary school of their choice, another to a district secondary school, and another to a CDSS. The application letters must be accompanied with students' performance in every subject in each class from standard six, their position in each class, headmaster's letter of recommendation and signature, and the school's stamp and date.

At secondary school level, every school must set an entrance examination that will be used to select students who have applied for a place. After receiving application letters, a school examination committee, which will include teachers, headmasters, Ministry official representatives and representative members of the community, must scrutinize the letters and all the accompanied documents and invite a limited number of students, according to the school's capacity, for an entrance examination. The committee

should also set policies that would help to avoid discriminating against students based on gender, region, for instance: rural and urban, and so on. To achieve all this, primary school and secondary school teachers need to be specially trained in setting, administering and scoring tests and examinations and this policy recommendation must be planned in advance for its successful implementation.

Implementing this recommendation will significantly reduce repetition at standard eight because students will not see any reason for repeating if their portfolios indicate that they are fit for secondary education. In addition, this recommendation will save the Malawi government a huge amount of money that goes into setting, administering, invigilating, managing and marking primary school leaving certificate examinations. The saved money can be used to buy teaching/learning materials, train teachers in assessment, help assessment committees in their management of entrance examinations or improve conditions in CDSSs. The duty of MANEB at primary education level will be to train teachers in education assessment. Furthermore, this recommendation will be cost effective because secondary schools will administer entrance exams to a limited number of students instead of subjecting every standard eight student in the country to examinations and select only 23% to 30% of them to secondary schools.

Related Policy Issues

Secondly, the Malawi government, through the Ministry of Education, should improve grassroots stakeholder participation in educational policy formation process in order to enhance support, ownership, value and understanding of policies. Grassroots stakeholder participation in educational issues will also be able to empower and make them responsible for the education of their children. Coupled with this, policy

communication to rural primary schools needs to be improved and grassroots stakeholders must be empowered to give feedback about the policy effects on the ground to policy makers for purposes of improving the policies. Methods of explaining policies to teachers, students and parents need to be considered so that their behavior in relation to policies must be made with a full understanding of what policies say.

Thirdly, as suggested by participants, the Malawi government should consider formulating special policies that would take into account the disadvantaged situation in rural areas so that rural children should have opportunities of excelling and continuing with education. For example, the idea of a quota system between urban and rural students for secondary places is an excellent one. Coupled with this, all available assistance for students to continue with education needs to be adequately communicated to rural schools so that rural students should be aware of all the opportunities available to them to continue with their education.

Fourthly, since there are so many children finishing primary education who do not find places in secondary schools, the Malawi government should consider the idea of introducing after school vocational education in primary schools as suggested by participants to provide employable or self employed skills to standard eight graduates. Mechanisms should be worked out to use local skilled people in the villages as trainers of these children. Each school and the concerned community should identify the type of skills they want children to acquire for their survival. As said by Hamilton (1990), appeared in Persing (1997), this type of education should be able to exploit work place and community settings as learning environments. In German for example, they offer the type of education they call 'Dual System for Vocational Education', which has a closer

link with industries. In the Dual System model, companies and schools share responsibilities for quality education. This model can be adapted in Malawi to improve quality of education and at the same time make it relevant to the needs of the Malawi society.

The fifth recommendation is that policies in education sector need to be seriously evaluated so that they must be in line with the Malawi constitution and the democratic atmosphere in the country and not discriminate against any groups in the society of Malawi.

Secondary School Related Issues

The sixth recommendation is that the move to phase out boarding facilities in secondary schools must be critically examined because this study has shown that this critically disadvantages children in the rural areas who cannot study at home because of poor environment; cannot easily access schools because of long distance and lack of transport in rural areas; and that children are being exploited because they rent houses in the villages in order to be near the schools. Since most parents in this study showed willingness to construct boarding facilities in CDSSs, instead of completely phasing out boarding facilities, the Malawi government should consider making boarding optional.

Let boarding facilities in schools be run by a separate committee or private institution, and students who secure a place in a secondary school must choose whether to apply for boarding or to commute from home. The funding for boarding facilities must not come from the school budget but the schools and the boarding proprietors must discuss how these boarding facilities can be funded so that the fee that students pay should not be exorbitant. The Government can also consider providing subsidies to make

boarding fees low and affordable to rural children. Acceptance at a secondary school should be a prerequisite for securing a boarding space.

Failing which, the other alternative will be to have conventional secondary schools, CDSSs, and of course DEC's built closer to the students in rural areas to reduce long walking distances to school and prevent students from renting houses in villages that render them susceptible to abuse and unacceptable behavior. Related to this option, instead of knocking off at 1.00 pm, students must be able to remain in schools at least up to 5.00 pm so that they use the time between 1.00 and 5.00 pm to study before going back home. This can only be possible if distance from home to schools is short to allow students to safely walk home after 5.00 pm.

In addition, the Malawi government should consider reintroducing DEC system to run in parallel with CDSSs so that those rural students who pass PSLCE but fail to be selected to secondary school should access secondary education through DEC's. This will also give chance to older members of the rural community to academically upgrade themselves through DEC's. This also implies that more teachers need to be trained in order to cater for the education needs of most of the people who are hungry for education in Malawi.

Furthermore, for the policy of free primary education, which led to an increase of students needing secondary education, to be meaningful, the Malawi government should seriously expand secondary education so that many students who are fit for secondary education should easily access it. Since it has also been found that pupils felt that primary education alone is not sufficient for them to live in rural areas, more secondary school places are required to accommodate the huge number of rural children aspiring for

secondary education. If secondary schools are not expanded, there will be a serious lack of future educational opportunities in Malawi and this is likely to lead to the reduction of the demand for primary education despite it being free.

The final recommendation is that the role of the community in CDSSs must be clearly defined and communities must be empowered to participate in all important issues, such as selection, in these schools.

APPENDIX A

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

REPETITION AND SELECTION POLICY STUDY

Introduction and Directions

The intention of this questionnaire is to find out the relationship between standard eight repetition, knowledge of related policies and your aspirations for secondary education. The information that you will provide will be vital and valuable and will be kept confidential. To further keep the confidentiality, do not write your name or the name of your school on this questionnaire. Because this study is important, please answer each question honestly and carefully by simply ticking or checking the number or box that represents your response. However, you have a right not to respond to this questionnaire or those items that you may feel uncomfortable with. In addition, this is not an examination, so there is no right or wrong answer. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

PART ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. What is your sex? Male Female
2. What is your age? _____ Years
3. Which guardian(s) do you live with?
 - Both natural parents
 - Mother only
 - Father only
 - Grand parents
 - Mother and stepfather
 - Father and stepmother
 - Extended family members (uncle, aunt, sister, brother)
 - Other (specify) _____
4. How many brothers do you have? None 1-2 3-4 5-6 more than 6.
5. How many of your brothers are in school? None 1-2 3-4 5-6 over 6
6. How many sisters do you have? None 1-2 3-4 5-6 more than 6

7. How many of your sisters are in school?

None one two three four more than four

8. What is the level of education of the guardian you live with? (Tick in appropriate box/es)

Highest Educational Level	Father	Mother	Grand Mother	Grand father	Extended family member (e.g. sister, brother, uncle, aunt etc)	Other
Never been to school						
Some primary education						
Completed primary						
Some secondary edu.						
Completes sec, edu.						
University Education						
Other (specify)						

9. What is the occupation of the guardian you live with? (Tick in appropriate box/es)

Occupation	Father	Mother	Grand Mother	Grand father	Extended family member (e.g. sister, brother, uncle, aunt etc)	Other
Professional (teacher, doctor, lawyer etc)						
Business						
Farming or farm related activities						
Skilled worker (carpenter, plumber etc)						
Home maker/house wife						
Other (specify the type of occupation)						

PART TWO: REPETITION

10. How long have you been in standard 8? (tick in one box)
- This is my first year
- This is my second year
- This is my third year
- More than three years

PART THREE: ASPIRATIONS FOR SELECTION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The statements that follow in this part and part four require you to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with them. Tick in the appropriate box that represent SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), MA (Moderately Agree), MD (Moderately Disagree), D (Disagree), SD (Strongly Disagree).

- | | SA | A | MA | MD | D | SD |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 11. This year I will be selected to
Secondary School. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. I want to go to secondary school. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Primary education will be enough
for me to live in the rural area. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

PART FOUR: KNOWLEDGE OF REPETITION AND SELECTION POLICIES

- | | SA | A | MA | MD | D | SD |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14. Repeating standard 8 can give me
high chance of being selected to
secondary school. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

		SA	A	MA	MD	D	SD
15.	If I fail to be selected to secondary school I will repeat std 8 next year.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16.	If I write examinations again next year, I stand a high chance of being selected to secondary school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	The Ministry of Education wants students who fail to be selected to secondary to repeat standard eight.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18.	Teachers encourage students who fail to be selected to repeat std 8.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	My parents/Guardians encourage me to repeat standard eight if I fail to get selected to secondary school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20.	New comers in standard 8 have little chance of being selected to secondary school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

THE END

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY

APPENDIX B

SELECTION AND REPETITION DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

School District: _____

Date Data Collected: _____

Selection Rate: _____

Student's Sex	Year entered Std 8	Year selected	No. of years repeated	Secondary School Type Selected to		
				CDSS	District Sec. School.	National Sec. School.

Year	No. of students wrote exam	No. Passed	No. Selected	Number Not Selected	Pass Rate	Selection Rate
1998						
1999						
2000						
2001						
2002						

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR STUDENTS

Research Question 1: Repetition and Selection Policies

- How long have you been in standard 8? If you are repeating, why do you repeat?
- If you fail to go to secondary this year, will you repeat next year? Why?
- What do teachers tell you to do when you fail to go to secondary school? Why?
- What do your parents/guardian tell you to do if you fail to go to secondary school? Why?
- What do your fellow students say they will do when they fail to be selected? What do you think about what they say?
- Do you think if you repeat you will have more chance of going to secondary school than those who do not repeat? Why?
- What can you say about standard eight selection issue?
- What do you know about standard 8 repetition and selection policies?
- How did you know about these policies?
- What do these policies mean to you?
- Why did the ministry of Education introduce these policies?
- Do you agree with them? Why?
- Do you think these policies have any effect on your chances of going to secondary school? What are these effects? Why are you saying so?
- Did you ever have a chance to say any thing to the Government or Ministry of Education about these policies? If yes, how did you communicate to the Ministry? What did you say and what was the response? If no, why?

- Do you wish you had said something to the Government or Ministry of Education about these policies? What would you say? Why?
- Do you think the Ministry of Education does implement these policies? Why do you say so?
- Do your parents/guardians know about the standard 8 repetition and selection policies? If yes, how did they know about them? If no, why?

Research Question 2: Conversion of DEC's to CDSS's

- What can you say about the conversion of DEC's to CDSS's? Why?
- Do you think the conversion has increased your chance of participating in secondary education? How or why?
- What can you say about the introduction of selection to community secondary school? Why? How did your parents/guardians feel about this?
- How will you feel if you are selected to community day secondary school? Will Why?
- What does community day secondary school mean to you? Does that relate to how community day secondary schools operate now? Why?
- If you were asked to advise the government about CDSS's what would you say? Why?
- Do you have any other thing you want to say that I have not asked you? Say it.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR TEACHERS

Research Question 1: Repetition and Selection Policies

- How long have you been a teacher?
- If students fail to go to secondary school, what advice do you give them? Why?
- What do parents/guardian say if their children fail to go to secondary school? Why?
- What do your fellow teachers say students should do when they fail to be selected? Why? What do you think about what they say? Why?
- What can you say about selection at standard eight?
- What do you know about standard 8 repetition and selection policies?
- How did you know about these policies?
- What do these policies mean to you?
- Why did the ministry of Education introduce these policies?
- Do you agree with them? Why?
- Do you think these policies have any effect on student's chances of going to secondary school? What are these effects? Why are you saying so?
- Did you ever have a chance to say any thing to the Government or Ministry of Education about these policies? If yes, how did you communicate to the Ministry? What did you say and what was the response? If no, why?
- Do you wish you had said something to the Government or Ministry of Education about these policies? What would you say? Why?
- Do you think the Ministry of Education does implement these policies? Why do you say so?

- How does the Ministry communicate policies to this school? Do you think their way of communicating the policies to this school is efficient? Why?
- How do you want the Ministry to communicate policies to this school? Is that efficient? Why?
- Do students' parents/guardians know about the standard 8 repetition and selection policies? If yes, how did they know about them? If no, why?
- Do you think parents should know about school policies? Why? How can they know about them?
- How do you keep track of students who have repeated standard 8 or not? Does the ministry ask for these names?
- How do you communicate to the Ministry about these names? How often?
- Did you participate in the formulation of these policies? How? What was your input? If you did not participate why? How do you feel about that? Do you think if you participated the policies would be different? How different would they be? Why are you saying so?
- What would you say to the government about these policies?
- Do you think rural schools should have special policies different from urban schools? Why? What are the policy issues you think of? How will these help rural schools?
- Do you sometimes fail to implement policies from the Ministry of education at this school? Why? How can this be solved?
- Do you think students in rural schools are selected to secondary school just like students in urban schools? Why is it so? What is your suggestion?

Research Question 2: Conversion of DEC to CDSSs

- What can you say about the conversion of DEC to CDSSs? Why?
- Do you think the conversion has increased the chance of rural students' participating in secondary education? How or why?
- Do you think the conversion has helped to improve quality of education in CDSSs? Why do you say so?
- What can you say about the introduction of selection to community day secondary school? Why?
- How do you feel if your students are selected to community day secondary school? Why?
- Which system, between DEC and CDSSS, helped rural children to have easy access to secondary education? Why?
- What are the reactions of parents to the conversion of DEC to CDSSs?
- What does community day secondary school mean to you? Does that relate to how community day secondary schools operate now? Why?
- If you had a chance of advising the government about CDSSs in relation to primary school, what would you say?
- Do you have any other thing you want to say that I have not asked you? Say it.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR PARENTS

Research Question 1: Repetition and Selection Policies

- Why do you send your children to school?
- How far do you want them to go with their school? Why?
- If your children fail to go to secondary school, what advise do you give them? Why?
Do you tell them to repeat? Why?
- What can you say about selection at standard eight?
- What do you know about standard 8 repetition and selection policies?
- How did you know about these policies? How do you know about school policies?
- What do these policies mean to you?
- Why did the ministry of Education introduce these policies? What benefit do these policies have? Who benefits from these policies?
- Do you agree with these policies? Why? What is your position?
- Why are you interested in these policies?
- Do you think these policies have any effect on student's chances of going to secondary school? What are these effects? Why are you saying so?
- Did you ever have a chance to say any thing to the Government or Ministry of Education about these policies? If yes, how did you communicate to the Ministry? What did you say and what was the response? If no, why? How about to schools?
- Do you wish you had said something to the Government or Ministry of Education about these policies? What would you say? Why?

- Do you think the Ministry of Education does implement these policies? Why do you say so?
- How does the Ministry communicate policies to you? Do you think their way of communicating the policies to you is efficient? Why?
- How do you want the Ministry to communicate policies to you? Is that efficient? Why?
- Did you participate in the formulation of these policies? How? What was your input? If you did not participate why? How do you feel about that? Do you think if you participated the policies would be different? How different would they be? Why are you saying so?
- Do you think you have interests in these policies? What are your interests and why are you interested in these policies?
- Do you think you as parents have power to change such policies if you are not interested in them? How or why? What resources do you have to influence these policies?
- What are the benefits of these policies? Who benefits?
- What is your position in these policies?
- What would you say to the government about these policies?
- Do you think rural schools should have special policies different from urban schools? Why? What are the policy issues you think of? How will these help rural schools?
- Do you think students in rural schools are selected to secondary school just like students in urban schools? Why is it so? What is your suggestion?

Research Question 2: Conversion of DEC to CDSSs

- What can you say about the conversion of DEC to CDSSs? Why?
- Do you think the conversion has increased the chance of rural students' participating in secondary education? How or why?
- What can you say about the introduction of selection to community day secondary school? Why?
- How do you feel if your children are selected to community day secondary school? Why?
- Which system, between DEC and CDSSS, helped rural children to have easy access to secondary education? Why?
- What are the reactions of parents to the conversion of DEC to CDSSs?
- What does community day secondary school mean to you? Does that relate to how community day secondary schools operate now? Why?
- If you had a chance of advising the government about CDSSs in relation to primary school, what would you say?
- Do you have any other thing you want to say that I have not asked you? Say it.

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW GUIDES FOR DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICIALS

- I want to know about standard eight selection and repetition policies in relation to rural schools. What can you say about these policies?
- Why were these policies introduced?
- Who introduced them?
- What are the benefits of these policies? Who benefit and how?
- How are they implemented? How do you track students who either have repeated or not?
- Who does the selection? Do they consider these policies when doing selection?
- How do you make sure that the information that schools give you is correct?
- Who has power to change these policies?
- Can students, parents, teachers change these policies?
- How do you communicate policies to schools? To parents?
- What are your interests in these policies?
- Are there any laws to protect stakeholders like students from educational policies?
- What resources do you use to make sure that these policies are effective?
- Do you have anything to say about these policies as they impact standard eight students in rural areas?
- What can you say about the conversion of DEC's to CDSS's? Why?
- Do you think the conversion has increased the chance of rural students' participating in secondary education? How or why?

- What can you say about the introduction of selection to community day secondary school? Why?
- Which system, between DEC and CDSSS, helped rural children to have easy access to secondary education? Why?
- Do you have any other thing you want to say that I have not asked you? Say it.

APPENDIX G

PERMISSION LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR OF BASIC EDUCATION

Universities of Malawi-Massachusetts UPIC project,
Chancellor College,
P.O. Box 280,
Zomba, Malawi.

June 3, 2003

The Director for Basic Education
Ministry of Education Headquarters,
Lilongwe, Malawi.

Dear Sir or Madam,

PERMISSION TO USE RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTHERN REGION FOR A STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY ISSUES.

I write to seek your permission to use rural primary schools in the southern region for my doctoral study on educational policy issues in Malawi. The purpose of my study is to understand the impact of repetition, selection and community day secondary school policies on standard eight students. As such, teachers, students and parents from rural schools will be asked to participate in this study and the names or schools of the participants will be kept private and confidential in the final report.

I am a student studying at the University of Massachusetts under the University of Malawi: Chancellor College – University of Massachusetts UPIC project supported by the Ministry of Education and USAID-Malawi.

If you have any questions you can contact me at 524 222 (Chancellor College).

Your urgent response will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Samson MacJessie-Mbewe

APPENDIX H

PERMISSION LETTER TO DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGERS

Universities of Malawi-Massachusetts UPIC project,
Chancellor College,
P.O. Box 280,
Zomba, Malawi.

June 5, 2003

The District Education Manager
Ministry of Education,
Malawi.

Dear Sir or Madam,

**PERMISSION TO USE RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN YOUR DISTRICT
FOR A STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY ISSUES.**

I write to seek your permission to use rural primary schools in your district for my doctoral study on educational policy issues in Malawi. The purpose of my study is to understand the impact of repetition, selection and community day secondary school policies on standard eight students. As such, teachers and students will be asked to participate in this study and the names or schools of the participants will be kept private and confidential in the final report.

I am a student studying at University of Massachusetts under the University of Malawi: Chancellor College – University of Massachusetts UPIC project supported by the Ministry of Education and USAID-Malawi.

If you have any questions you can contact me at 524 222 (Chancellor College).

Your urgent response will be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Samson MacJessie-Mbewe

APPENDIX I

LETTER TO PARENTS

Universities of Malawi-Massachusetts UPIC project,
Chancellor College,
P.O. Box 280,
Zomba, Malawi.

June 15, 2003

KWA Bambo/Mai

Kuchokera kwa: Samson MacJessie-Mbewe – Chancellor College, Box 280, Zomba
mogwirizana ndi a Headmaster a _____ School.

Date: _____

Okondeka Bambo kapena mayi,

Popeza kuti muli ndi mwana mu sitandadi 8, mwasankhidwa kuti muzapereke maganizo anu pa kafukufuku yemwe ndikupanga kuti tidziwe maganizo anu pa malamulo a kubwereza kwa ana mu sitandadi 8 ndi kusankhidwa kwa ana kupita ku sekondale sukulu.

Tsono, ndikukupemphani ngati kungakhale kotheka kuti mudzabwere pa sukulu ya

_____ komwe

mwana wanu amaphunzira patsiku la _____ nthawi

ya _____.

Panthawi yomwe tizizakambirana, tizapereka zokumwa zoziziritisa kukhosi. Dziwani kuti muli ndi ufulu okana kubwera. Tsono ngati mwavomereza kubwera, muchonge mmusimu momwe mwalembedwa kuti ndibwera ndipo mumpasire mwana wanu kuti abweretse ku sukulu kuno kuti tidziwe kuti abwera anthu angati.

Ine ndine mmodzi mwa anthu amene a unduna wa zamaphunziro anatitumiza kuti tikaphunzire za malamulo a maphunziro ku Ameleka ndipo ndabwera kuti ndipange

kafukufuku ameneyi yemwe mtsogolo muno angathe kuzathandiza ana a pa sukulu, makolo, aunduna wazamaphunziro ndi inenso pamaphunziro anga. Komanso ndimagwira ntchito ku Chancellor College ku Zomba.

Zikomo

Ine, Samson MacJessie-Mbewe

→..... ng'ambani apa ndipo mutumize kapepala kali pansipa. Musayiwale kuchonga poti "ndibwera".

Ine Bambo/Mayi

Ndavomera kubwera *chongani apa ngati mubwere.*

Sindibwera *chongani apa ngati simubwera.*

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