



An Assessment of the Impact of Girl Education Projects Interventions on Reducing Child Marriage, Teen Pregnancy and School Drop Out in Dedza, Malawi: The Case of Traditional Authorities Kachindamoto and Kaphuka

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of girl education project interventions on reducing child marriage, teen pregnancy and school drop out in the area of Traditional Authorities Kachindamoto and Kaphuka in Dedza District in Malawi. The study contributes to knowledge and literature of girl education and the interventions that can be adopted in order to reduce child marriage, teen pregnancy and school dropout in the area under study. The study also provides a framework to policy makers on the improvement of girl education and reduction of girl school drop-out rate. Using both quantitative and qualitative approach the study findings indicate that there are many negative educational outcomes for girls are a result of complex contextual factors such as poverty, cultural practices and gender inequalities; attitudes and behaviours of boys and men, parents, teachers and other community members; as well as negative attitudes and behaviours by the girls themselves hence need for more efforts and interventions from the Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Intergovernmental Organizations, and Development partners with new approaches that can be adopted in order to win this battle.

1. INTRODUCTION

This is an outline of the study on the assessment on the impact of girl child education projects on reducing child marriage, teen pregnancy and school dropout in Dedza. The study was carried out in Traditional authority Kachindamoto and Kaphuka. Several approaches have been made to strive to improve the situation of girls' education and reduce child marriages, teen pregnancies and drop out in Malawi. This study took an in depth look at the factors that make girls' education so critical to development and how the various approaches taken have or have not been' effective in reducing child marriage, teen pregnancy and school dropout. Malawi has the 12th highest child marriage prevalence rate in the world, although marriage below the age of 18 is now illegal. The country has committed to eliminate child, early and forced marriage by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, (Bennet 2020). The lack of girls being educated has contributed to child marriages, teen pregnancies, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health rights, sexual and physical violence as well as harmful social and traditional practices, resulting in high dropout

1.1. Main aim of the study

The study wanted to assess the impact of girl education project interventions on reducing child marriage, teen pregnancy and school drop out in the area of Traditional Authorities Kachindamoto and Kaphuka in Dedza District.

1.2. Specific objectives

- To examine key aspects that lead to teen pregnancies in the areas of TA Kachindamoto and TA Kaphuka in Dedza
- To investigate key cultural practices that have led to child marriages in the TA Kachindamoto and TA Kaphuka areas.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions by JPGE and CAMPED on ending child marriage in the study area
- To investigate how interventions through JPGE and CAMPED have helped to reduce girl learner drop-out rate in the study area

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents literature on the impact of girl education project interventions on reducing child marriage, teen pregnancy and school dropout. The literature was reviewed in line with the objectives of the study.

On key aspects that lead to teen pregnancies Several factors contribute to adolescent pregnancies and births. Contraceptives are not easily accessible to adolescents in many places. Even when adolescents can obtain contraceptives, they may lack the agency or the resources to pay for them, knowledge on where to obtain them and how to correctly use them. They may face stigma when trying to obtain contraceptives, (Biddlecom et al. 2020) Teenage pregnancy is influenced by cultural factors, poverty and resulting desire for financial gains may lead to a desire to improve the socioeconomic status. The lack of primary needs might generate exploitation. The lack of primary needs and materialism also result in prostitution, teen pregnancies, (Urassa, 2017; Lindert et al. 2021). School dropout contributes to the occurrence of teenage pregnancy. Girls will be deprived of reproductive health education when girls drop out there is lack of useful or amusing activities. As a result, they engage in sexual activities, (Rosenberg et al. 2015). Lack of community support also leads to teen pregnancies. Generally, teenage girls live in uncontrolled, unsupportive environments. Therefore, they depend on *themselves* and are prone to teenage pregnancy. Parents frequently ignore their responsibility to carry out reproductive health education, (Chung et al. 2018). Family disruption, dysfunctional family, and poor parenting are also risk factors for adolescent pregnancy in Africa and other low-and middle-income countries (Chung et al. 2018; Kassa et al. 2018).

On key cultural practices that have led to child marriages According to (MoGCDSW and UNICEF 2019), addressing child marriages requires recognition of the factors that enable it. While the roots of the practice vary across countries and cultures, poverty, lack of educational opportunities and limited access to health care perpetuate it. Some families marry off their daughters to reduce their economic burden or earn income. Others may do so because they believe it will secure their daughters' futures or protect them. Norms and gender stereotypes around gender roles and marriage age, as well as socio-economic risk of pregnancy outside of marriage also uphold the practice. The high prevalence of child marriage in Malawi is driven by deep cultural and religious tradition, as well as poverty. According to UNICEF, some 46 percent of girls are married before they are 18, and nine percent before they are 15. Adolescents are also commonly exposed to harmful initiation ceremonies, intended to inform girls and boys about sex and sexuality. The desire to start a family is one of the top reasons for child marriage in Malawi, (University of Zurich et al. 2018). Some key underlying drivers of high child marriage rates in Malawi include Children from more impoverished families are twice as much likely to marry early than their counterparts from households which are not monetarily poor, (NSO, 2018). Child marriage is more prevalent amongst girls and families with less education than those with a good education. In addition to poverty, recurrent droughts and floods also increase the vulnerability of girls to child marriage. Due to food insecurity, child marriage often becomes a more likely coping mechanism, as families seek to reduce the burden of feeding the family. Climatic challenges, such as droughts and floods, have become more frequent and catastrophic, (MoGCDSW and UNICEF 2019)

In communities or societies where discussion of sex is treated as a taboo, adolescents are likely to deny access to essential knowledge and information regarding sexuality which may predispose them to pregnancy (Muftugil et al. 2020). Lindert et al. 2021 indicates that poverty and a resulting desire for financial gains may lead to a desire to improve the socioeconomic status. Lack of primary needs and materialism also result in prostitution, teen pregnancies or in early marriage because marriage includes the payment of dowry and men being responsible for livelihood. Outdated cultural beliefs and practices such as women inheritance, early marriages, female genital mutilation, and the belief to consider any female person as a "breeding machine" has changed the perception of men towards women. In such societies, girls do not make their own informed decision especially regarding to sexuality, which contributes largely to increased cases of teenage pregnancy, (Chung et al. 2018; Urassa 2017). Parents are likewise prompted to plan early marriages for little girls because of an apparent need to save girls' pre-marriage virginity and to shield her and her family from the danger of disgrace or disrespect appended to the "indecent" or "wrong" conduct of sex outside marriage, (Cameron 2020; Chung et al. 2018; Urassa 2017).

Under the effectiveness of the interventions on ending child marriage firstly, there are a list of all possible interventions to prevent and respond to child marriage are drawn through a consultative process. A range of initiatives, services, institutions and programmes across sectors (education, health, justice, agriculture, etc.) work together in ending child marriages, Several Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) including, but not limited to, ministries of education, justice, home affairs, gender, local Government and health. Quasi-Government agencies such as the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC) are also linked to certain interventions. The interventions combine empowerment, social protection to most deprived children and their families, community sensitisation and engagement as well as legal assistance and advocacy. Empowerment programmes comprise of interventions that improve resilience, skills and knowledge of communities and children themselves as a prerequisite for fighting child marriage. Other programmes include GBV campaigns, children's corners, safe schools' programmes, primary child protection services and sexual and reproductive health services.

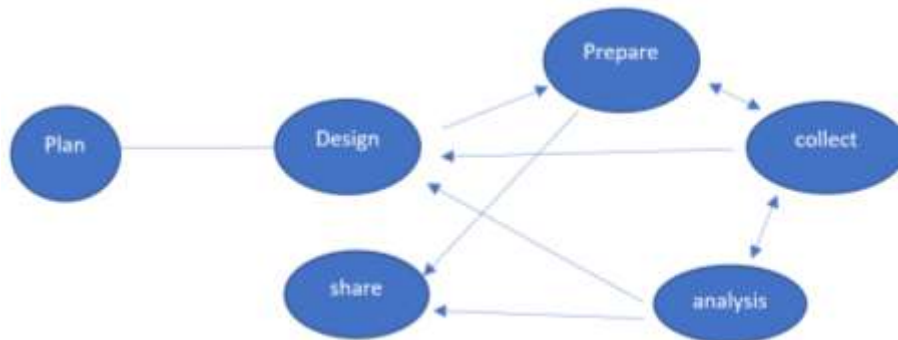
on interventions have helped to reduce girl learner drop-out rate, according to (Wilson 2011), there is strong evidence that dropout prevention programs reduce dropout rates. There are many types of dropout prevention programs; most types significantly improve outcomes when well implemented. Dropout prevention programs provide at-risk students with specific supports such as mentoring, counseling, vocational or social-emotional skills training, college preparation, supplemental academic services, or case management. Such programs are frequently multi-service interventions and may include attendance monitoring, sometimes with financial rewards or sanctions. Dropout prevention programs can undertake comprehensive changes to high school environments such as restructuring schools into smaller learning communities, or offering alternative schools. Such programs can be delivered in school or community settings and can focus on individual at-risk students or on entire schools with low graduation rates, (Rumberger et al, 2017; US Census-Education 2014). Many variations of dropout prevention programs are effective. Vocational training and alternative schools have been shown to increase high school completion rates by just over 15%. Social-emotional skills training and college-oriented programming increase rates by at least 10%. Mentoring and counseling, supplemental academic services, school and class restructuring, multiservice efforts, attendance monitoring, and community

service programs demonstrate increases of at least 5%, and case management efforts yield increases of 3.6%, (Christenson 2014). Dropout prevention programs may also help reduce absenteeism, especially among younger students and males; however, additional research is needed to confirm effects on absenteeism (Smith 2013).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The study used case study design; According to Crowe et.al (2011) case study is a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. This design was used as it captures a range of perspectives, as opposed to the single view of an individual. It gives an opportunity to gain greater understanding of the subject at hand and reduces the potential for any bias. Further the study needed to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event in its natural real-life context. The figure below shows how the case study was used to carry out the study



Source: self

3.4. study Population

The population comprised of beneficiaries of JPGE/CAMFED that include teenage girls who studied and those who are studying from six primary schools, teachers and parents totaling 442

3.5 Sample procedure

3.5.1 Sample size

The sample size was determined using Solving's formula indicated below:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

n = sample size

N = Population (442)

e = error tolerance (5%)

$$n = 442 / (1 + 442 \times 0.05 \times 0.05)$$

n = 210

3.6 Sources of data collections

The study used questionnaires and focus group discussions. Data collection consisted of surveys, observations and interviews. Initially, a questionnaire was administered to the participants to get their views on the assessment of the two projects on girl education impact and their contribution and intervention in reducing teen pregnancy, child marriages and drop out.

The researcher also got views from the Parents, Quality Assurance Officers and District Education Youth and Sports officers of the district understudy and other district stakeholders that included social welfare officers, project coordinators for JPGE, CAMFED and Non-Governmental Organizations for them to provide their input.

Multiple interviews were carried out with participants in order to provide more in-depth data collection and opportunities for follow-up. The goal was to interview approximately 210 participants who embody a range of identity positions and had different educational and social status in the district.

A qualitative and quantitative evaluation was utilized for this research project leveraging subjective methods such as interviews and observations to collect substantive and relevant data. Such a combined qualitative and quantitative approach is valuable due to the varying experiences that school going girls of the three traditional authorities have had with the two projects. Upon collecting qualitative data derived from the said interviews, a careful content and thematic analysis was done

3.8 Theoretical framework

The study was aligned with the following theories of learning, child development and needs theories. The study mostly based on Behavioral Child Development and education theories because according to the behavioral perspective, all human behavior can be described in terms of environmental influences. Some behaviorists, such as John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner insisted that learning occurs purely through processes of association and reinforcement. The benefits of ensuring that girls have access to high-quality education are broad reaching. Enhancing girls' education has well-documented benefits for girls' health, social and economic outcomes. Improving educational outcomes for girls not only benefits the girls themselves, but also their families, communities and wider society.

3.8.1. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The framework guided this study was Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory. The social learning theory emphasizes "the mutual interaction between cognitive, behavioral and environmental determinants of human behavior" (Bandura, 1977). People learn new behaviors by watching others in a social situation, absorb it and then imitate that behavior. The theory is based on four principles that include differential association, definitions, differential reinforcements and imitation. Individuals copy and imitate behavior from those within their social circle or those whose influence matter socially and are within the same age cohort. Based on this study, first teens tend to identify with groups, which determine norms and practices to be adopted including engaging in unprotected sex. Another Theory was the Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of needs. Maslow's (1970) Maslow spots love before self-esteem in his hierarchy of needs. He expressed that people develop and accomplish a degree of self-completion in particular if natural conditions empower certain essential should be met first. Maslow focused on that people endeavor to initially meet their physiological endurance needs, at that point their requirement for adoration and having a place, confidence needs, lastly their craving to get learning to know and get it. Self-actualization is the best you can be. Relative to this study, teens whose families are unable to meet basic needs are vulnerable to sexual exploitation from older men who can afford and avail basic needs to them. For instance, school going girls who are unable to afford sanitary pads, or even food tend to rely on older men for provision hence exchange the services offered or goods bought with sexual intercourse, resulting to an unintended teen pregnancies as well as dropping out of school.

3.8.2. Child Development Theories

The study also looked at a number of child development theories. An understanding of child development and at the same time girl child education intervention is essential because it allows us to fully appreciate the cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and educational growth that children go through from birth and into early adulthood.

3.8.3. Freud's Psychosexual Developmental Theory

Psychoanalytic theory originated with the work of Sigmund Freud, (1905). Freud came to believe that childhood experiences and unconscious desires influenced behavior. According to Freud, conflicts that occur during each of these stages can have a lifelong influence on personality and behavior. According to Freud's psychosexual theory, child development occurs in a series of stages focused on different pleasure areas of the body. During each stage, the child encounters conflicts that play a significant role in the course of development. Successfully completing each stage leads to the development of a healthy adult personality. Failing to resolve the conflicts of a particular stage can result in fixations that can then have an influence on adult behavior. Freud's psychosexual theory emphasizes the importance of basic needs and biological forces, while Erikson's psychosocial theory is more focused upon social and environmental factors. Erikson also expands his theory into adulthood, while Freud's theory ends at an earlier period. This theory fits well in the current study considering the interventions of JPGE and CAMFED in reducing teen pregnancies, child marriages and drop out through the provision of basic needs to the girls in schools

3.8.4. Bowlby's Attachment Theory

It is a theory of social development, Bowlby believed that early relationships with caregivers play a major role in child development and continue to influence social relationships throughout life. Bowlby's attachment theory suggested that children are born with an innate need to form attachments. Such attachments aid in survival by ensuring that the child receives care and protection. Not only that, but these attachments are characterized by clear behavioral and motivational patterns. In other words, both children and caregivers engage in behaviors designed to ensure proximity. Children strive to stay close and connected to their caregivers who in turn provide a safe haven and a secure base for exploration. Children who receive consistent support and care are more likely to develop a secure attachment style, while those who receive less reliable care may develop an ambivalent, avoidant, or disorganized style (Cherry, K, 2020). The theory is applied to the current study in the sense that, JPGE and CAMFED acts as caregivers to the girls, and this results to strong attachment.

3.8.5. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

A seminal learning theory that has gone on to become very influential, especially in the field of education. His sociocultural theory also suggested that parents, caregivers, peers and the culture at large are responsible for developing higher-order functions. Through interacting with others, learning becomes integrated into an individual's understanding of the world. This theory also introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development, which is the gap between what a person can do with help and what they can do on their own. It is with the help of more knowledgeable others that people are able to progressively learn and increase their skills and scope of understanding the theory is in line with the current study, considering that JPGE and CAMFED provide only the basic need to the girls, hence through this interaction learning for the girls becomes integrated into individual understanding of the world

3.8.6. Behaviorism Or Behavioral Learning Theory

Behaviorism or the behavioral learning theory is a popular concept that focuses on how students learn. Behaviorism focuses on the idea that all behaviors are learned through interaction with the environment. Behaviorism is key for educators because it impacts how students react and behave in the classroom, and suggests that teachers can directly influence how their students behave. It also helps teachers understand that a student's home environment and lifestyle can be impacting their behavior, helping them see it objectively and work to assist with improvement. It is an area of psychological study that focuses on observing and analyzing how controlled environmental changes affect behavior. The Behavioral Approach brings psychological, social, and contextual explanations of human behavior to policy design and provides innovative, complementary and usually inexpensive solutions for policy improvement, (Koblin 2021). Through the JPGE and CAMFED interventions in the study area creates a controlled environment and this eventually affects or bring in changes in the girl's behavior.

3.8.7. Humanism A Learner-Centric Approach

Humanism A learner-centric approach in which the potential is the focus rather than the method or materials. With the understanding that people are inherently good, humanism focuses on creating an environment conducive to self-actualization. In doing so, learners' needs are met and they are then free to determine their own goals while the teacher assists in meeting those learning goals. It is an outlook or system of thought that focuses on human beings rather than supernatural or divine insight. This system stresses that human beings are inherently good, and that basic needs are vital to human behaviors. Humanistic psychology also focuses on finding rational ways to solve these human problems (Western Governors University, 2020). JPGE and CAMFED intervention focusses on solving the challenges that affect girls' education hence thrive in creating an environment condusive for learning

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.2.1 Demographics of Girl Child

This subsection provides information of JPGE and CAMFED girl child beneficiaries between 2015 and 2022 in Dedza. Over 45 percent attended school between 2015 and 2019 while 42.5 percent attended school between 2019 and 2022. Beneficiaries of JPGE and CAMFED comprise of girls and boys on basis of past performance and economic status.

4.2.1.1 Age

Mean age was 19.69 years, maximum age was 26 years while minimum age was 17 years.

Figure 1 represents Education level of respondents

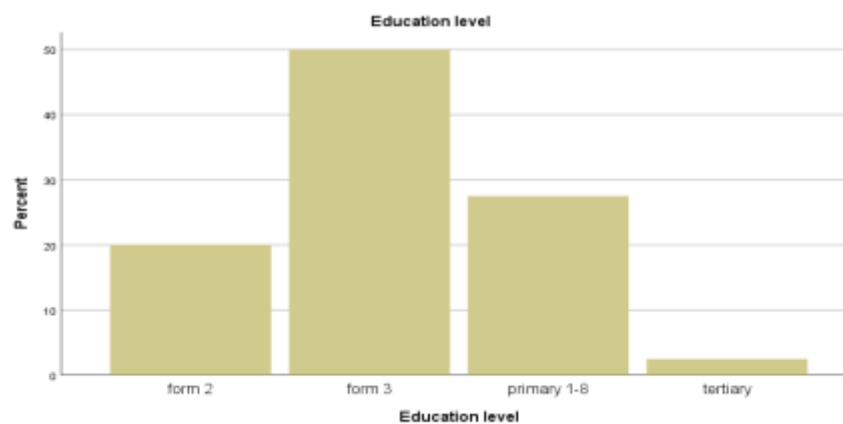


Figure 4-1 – Education of respondents Source: field data 2023

Fifty percent (n = 80) reached form 3, while, 27.5 percent did primary school, 20 percent went up to form two and 2.5 percent did tertiary education.

4.3 Quantitative Analysis and Findings

This section presents an analysis of data from a structured interview beneficiaries of the JPGE/CAMFED interventions. Only 6.3 percent of the girls interviewed were not JPGE and CAMFED beneficiaries. JPGE and CAMFED support girls' education, through provision sanitary pads, school uniform, school fees and text books.

Table 1 shows Reasons for leaving

Reason for leaving school

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	lack of school fees	1	1.3	25.0	25.0
	lack of school uniform	2	2.5	50.0	75.0
	Pregnancy	1	1.3	25.0	100.0
	Total	4	5.0	100.0	
Missing	System	76	95.0		
Total		80	100.0		

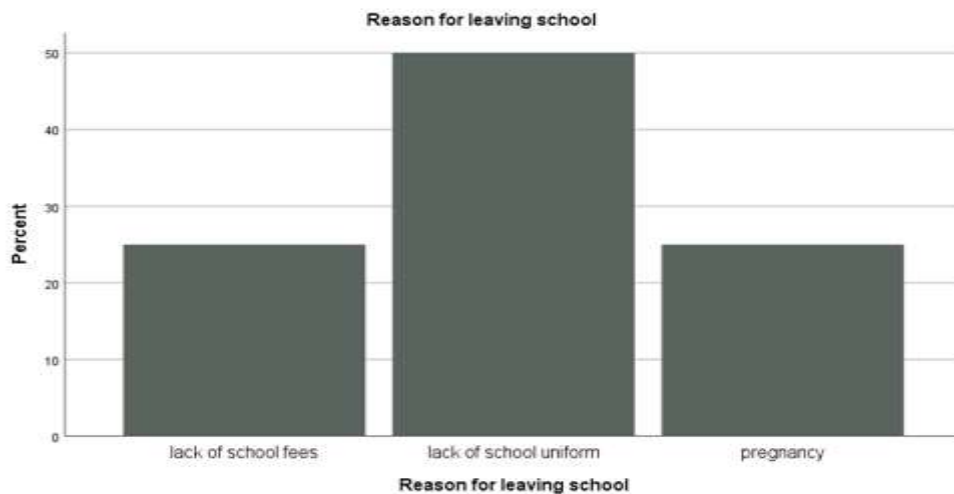
Source: field data 2023

Over 1 percent (n = 80) left school because they lacked school fees, 2.5 percent (n = 80) percent quit school due to lack of uniform, over a percentage (n = 80) discontinued learning owing to pregnancy. Another 5 percent (n = 80) left school over unexplained reasons.

But over 75 percentage (n = 80) remained in school. The high number of retentions in school reflected the observation by Teachers and parents who reported that the community attitudes has totally changed positively, girls project are more valued and supported.

Focus Group Discussion established that girls' leaves school due to peer pressure, poverty, lack of support from parents, pregnancy, hunger, lack of vision considering that there are coming from families where their parents are not educated.

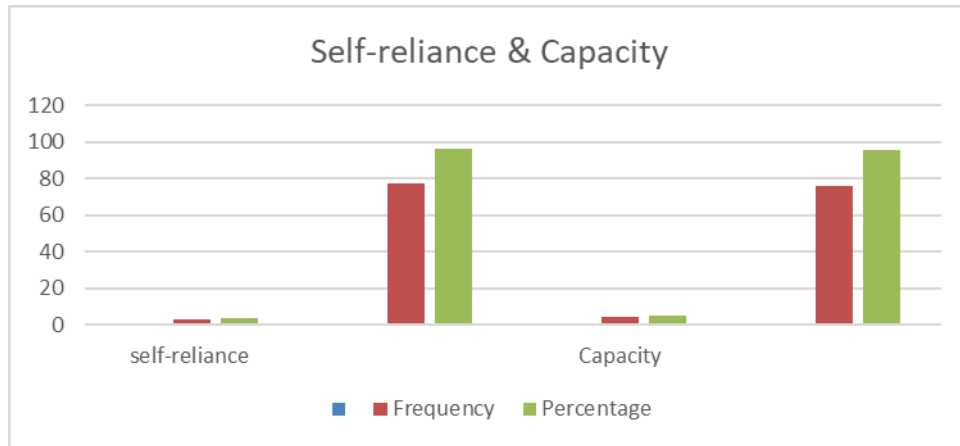
Figure 2: reasons for dropping out of school



Source: field data 2023

Lack of school uniform is the major reason for quitting school.

Figure 3: Self-reliance and Capacity



Source: field data 2023

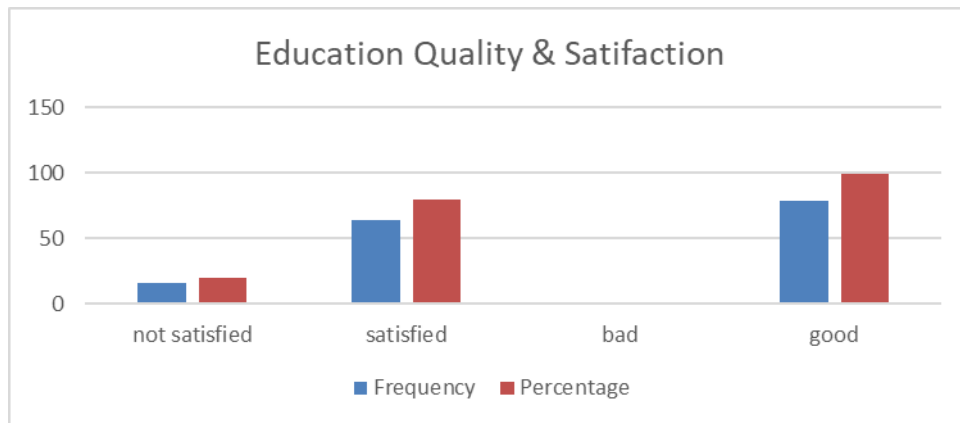
Table 2: Self-reliance and Capacity

Descriptive stats	Self-reliance		Capacity	
	FALSE	TRUE	No	Yes
Frequency	3	77	4	76
Percentage	3.8	96.3	5	95.5

Source: field data 2023

Only 3 percent reported that JPGE/CAMFED project did not contribute to self-reliance for the beneficiaries and 4 percent of the respondents said the project does not capacitate the beneficiaries.

Figure 4 shows Quality of education and satisfaction with teaching



Source: field data 2023

Just over a percentage felt quality of education was bad. Twenty percent were not satisfied with teaching.

Table 3 Impact of JPGE/CAMFED

Nature of stats	Difference		Improved performance			Made improvement	
	don't Know	Yes	don't Know	no	yes	Agree	disagree
Frequency	1	79	1	3	76	77	3
Percentage	1.3	98.8	1.3	3.8	95.5	96.3	3.8

Source: field data 2023

Only 1.3 percent of the girls said JPGE/CAMFED did not make a difference, a 3.8 percentage said the project did not improve performance while 1.3 percent said they didn't know if the project improved their performance. Of the 80 girl's 3.8 percent said JPGE/CAMFED did not make any improvement.

Table 4 is the relationship between JPGE/CAMFED and Quality of Education

Correlations		Impact of JPGE CAMFED	Impact of Education
Impact of JPGE CAMFED	Pearson Correlation	1	.459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
Impact of Education	Pearson Correlation	.459**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: field data 2023

Relationship between JPGE/CMFED and Quality of Education is positive statistically significantly correlated $r = 0.459$, P-value = 0.01, critical value = 5%, $n = 80$). JPGE/CMFED beneficiaries reported that quality of

4.4 Teen pregnancies

A number of issues emerged from KII, semi-structured interviews and FDGs that indicate that are the major sources of teenage pregnancies in Dedza for school girls between 2015 and 2022. Parents and teachers reported that peer pressure is one of the contributing factors to teen age pregnancies. Among the girls it has emerged that it is now becoming fashionable and trendy to conceive and bear children. According to Bandura (1977) the environment is a determining factor that guides an individual. The peer pressure and admiration of having babies is an indication of how the environment out school impacts on girl child decision on teenage pregnancies.

4.4.1 Interventions to reduce teen pregnancies

A number of interventions have been implemented and these include: Provision of bursaries to girls training teacher mentors who offer guidance and counselling to girls, utilization of role modeling and career guidance in both secondary and primary schools, this acts as a way of motivating them to work hard at school. This help in reducing teen pregnancies at the same time brings in the element of attachment between the teachers, role models and the project implementors who provide support to the girls. According to Bowlby attachment theory believed that early relationships with caregivers play a major role in child development and continue to influence social relationships throughout life, as children are born with an innate need to form attachments. Such attachments aid in survival by ensuring that the child receives care and protection.

4.4.2 Key cultural practices that have led to child marriages in the TA Kachindamoto and TA Kaphuka areas.

There are several factors contributing to child marriages in the area of study, these include social, economic as well as Harmful cultural practices. These include: Initiation ceremonies where girls are taught certain sexual activities for example how to satisfy a husband in bed, this pushes them to start practicing what they were taught and the end result are teen pregnancies and child marriages. Other culture practices that expose girls to sexual activities like overnight cultural activities. According to Bandura (1977) the environment is a determining factor that guides an individual. An environment full of harmful cultural practices would not spare the girls from child marriages and this does not spare the act of polygamy which women and children in misery as they are more dependent on men. resulting in Gender Based Violence and children are neglected and girls tend to go out with men for money.

4.4.3 The effectiveness of the interventions by JPGE and CAMPED on reducing drop out in the study area

The study established that there are different interventions implemented to reduce drop out. One of such interventions include meetings with chiefs and come up with ways and modify some cultural practices that perpetuate sexual behaviour among children but also encourage them to enforce child marriage prevention by-laws. This is in line with the Humanism A [learner-centric approach](#) in which the potential is the focus rather than the method or materials as humanism focuses on creating an environment conducive to self-actualization. Humanistic psychology also focuses on finding rational ways to solve these human problems (Western Governors University, 2020). Modifying the harmful cultural practices is one way of resolving such kind of these human problems

5. CONCLUSION

Girls in Malawi continue to face a number of interrelated challenges in attaining quality education ranging from social, economic, protective and health. It is recognized that the many negative educational outcomes for girls are a result of complex contextual factors such as poverty, cultural practices and gender inequalities; attitudes and behaviours of boys and men, parents, teachers and other community members; as well as negative attitudes and behaviours by the girls themselves. The objectives of the study indicate that there is need for more efforts and interventions from the Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Intergovernmental Organizations, and Development partners with new approaches that can be adopted in order to win this battle.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the project to target parents directly on the issues and dangers of child marriages, teen pregnancies and drop out

The project to support school completion and transitions throughout the system particularly in secondary school and learners not to be withdrawn from support and consider coming up with infrastructure at the school environment and not only soft projects

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