New Investment Policy Impact: Girls' Underperformance in Boys Boarding Facilities Secondary Schools in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

There seems to be a gap in the literature between access to schooling and learning outcomes among girls learning in boys boarding facilities secondary schools in Malawi. This study looks at how the new investment policy relates to Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations pass rate and public university selection for girls selected in boys boarding facilities schools from 2010-2019.

This study adopted a multi-method approach utilizing formal interviews, official statistical records, focus group discussions, and questionnaires. There were 102 participants comprising female students, teachers, head teachers, and policy makers. The study collected and analyzed descriptive and inferential statistics to map a broad trend in girls' academic achievement. It compared MSCE pass rate and public university selection rate between girls in district boarding schools and girls in boys boarding facilities schools.

The results of this study showed that 67.38 % of the girls in district boarding facilities schools passed the Malawi School Certificate of Education Examinations, compared to 60.4 % of the female students enrolled as day students in boys boarding facilities schools. Additionally district boarding schools had 11.3 % public university selection rate compared to 7.3 % for boys boarding facility schools. This was attributed to the new investment policy impact as the policy lack student centric approach, hence raising equity concerns.

Further studies are required to investigate additional educational outcomes, including employment and other areas of the students' lives, after they have gone through the two school systems.

Keywords: Girls' under-performance, boys boarding facilities school, new investment policy, secondary school selection, public university selection.

INTRODUCTION

Background information

According to the Malawi Education Sector Analysis [1] efforts to increase girls' secondary school access at the entry-level and retain them in the education system have worked across the nation. It is worth noting that some of the interventions to increase access and retention of the girls include affirmative action on girls' education such as the new investment policy, the 50-50 selection criteria in secondary, construction of girls' hostels, girl-friendly infrastructure, provision of bursaries, role models for girls and provision of school health, nutrition, physical education, and sports as well as psychosocial support provided to them. Along with these actions, government also got rid of the quota system for selecting students not only for secondary schools but also public universities and. Students are selected for admission to these institutions based on merit. The development of new schools, the growth of already-existing secondary schools, the modernization of Community Day Secondary Schools, and the expansion of Open Secondary Schools all contribute to the continued access into the secondary education sector.

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Nonetheless, a low transition rate from primary to secondary school, which has remained at 38% over the years, is one of the important factors that characterizes the sub-sector [1]. A lack of additional form one places in boarding schools proportional to the number of girls has resulted in a low secondary school enrollment rate. Instead, the majority of learners attend community day secondary schools. Without losing focus on the need for the realization of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Malawi has scaled up girls' access to secondary school education. The secondary school sector, through the National Education Sector Investment Plan (NESIP) 2020-2030 has set ambitious plans that are expected to bring forth the much-needed results in the education system. Although the Ministry of Education seems to have been registering significant improvement in enrollment across the sub-sector, some critics have argued about poor academic results, especially among females. This study examines the policy impact of the new investment policy on girls' academic performance in boys boarding facilities schools.

In Malawi, secondary education is typically delivered through boarding schools, where students are given housing to live in dorms on the school site during the academic year, and day secondary schools, where students do not reside on the school campus. Boarding schools are either full boarding or a mixture of both boarders and day students as the case is in boys boarding facilities schools. The boarding secondary schools are further classified as either full boarding facilities (+++) or boys boarding facilities (++) secondary schools. The schools have further been differentiated as single-sex national schools (for boys or girls) and as co-education schools (either boarding or day schools). These further increase secondary school facilities disparities, making boarding schools more prestigious than day secondary schools.

Statement of the problem

Although Malawi has increased girls' access to secondary school education through the implementation of the new investment policy, there seem to be a significant gap between access and learning outcomes among the girls selected as day scholar in boys boarding facilities schools. As a result, there have been calls from the educationists, parents and students themselves for the need to align education policies with unique sociocultural norms, school environment, teacher attitudes, student characteristic and economic context to scale up effective support for girls' education. As pointed out by [2], the critical need to align education policies with unique contexts are not properly being addressed in boys boarding facilities secondary schools in Malawi. This makes the issue of girls' academic performance in schools complex due to these influences. Given the status of boys boarding facilities school, a single new policy such as the new investment policy might address one or two issues, and fail to address other issues that impede girls' success in boys boarding facilities schools. Therefore, the lack of more comprehensive and holistic education policy frameworks that deliberately target support mechanisms, create significant barriers to girls' success in boys boarding facilities schools. This results in girls' underperformance when placed in such school settings. In addition, the government has limited funding making it difficult to build more boarding schools for girls. Consequently, maintaining the current boarding schools has also become a great challenge. Noting that there are few boarding places for girls, [3] argues that despite national and international conventions to eradicate inequalities, gender inequalities continue to exist in most parts of the world. The new investment policy introduced around early 1990s, aiming at increasing girls' access to secondary school education. The policy new investment policy allows the selection of girls from primary schools around the boys boarding facilities schools to attend lessons as day scholars. The absence of girls boarding facilities in boys boarding facilities secondary schools makes these secondary schools unique and these schools belong to a special secondary school category hence the name "boys boarding facilities secondary school". These boys boarding facilities secondary schools are different from the Community Day Secondary Schools; schools more localized than all other secondary school categories. Therefore, the new investment policy fairly and squarely increases girls' access to secondary school education specifically in boys boarding facilities school. This is a policy believed to address the issue of access without necessarily addressing the issue of quality grades during national examinations.

Poor grades at national examinations imply that girls gain insufficient skills and knowledge. According to [4], girls and women that lack the necessary skills and knowledge fail to rise above societal oppression and continue living below their standards. In addition, the girls find it hard to enter university and other

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institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, the girls cannot easily get employment because they have not obtained the required certification which is the Malawi School Certificate of Education. According to the [5] a high failure rate among girls has increased school dropout and child marriages resulting in increased population growth due to early childbearing.

1.3 Specific objectives

1. To evaluate the impact of the new investment policy on girl's academic performance in boys boarding facilities, when compared to girls in district boarding school.

2. To identify the factors contributing to girls underperformance in boys boarding facilities schools related to the new investment policy.

3. To develop strategies to support girls' academic performance in boys boarding facilities schools.

1.4 Specific questions

1. Is there academic performance differences between girls in boys boarding facilities schools and girls in district boarding schools?

2. What are the factors contributing to girls' academic performance in boys boarding facilities schools?.

3. What strategies can be implemented to support girls' academic performance in boys boarding facilities schools in the context of the new investment policy?.

1.5 Significance of the study

The study examines the impact of new investment policy on girls' academic performance in boys boarding facilities school, highlighting challenges and informing policy decisions to advance gender equality and improve educational outcomes for the achievement of Malawi 2063 goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Secondary school access

Even though Government of Malawi clearly established the importance of secondary education in enhancing learning outcomes, there seem to be a persistent gap between access to schooling and the actualization of improved academic achievement. This disproportion is complex, coming from factors such as inadequate educational infrastructure development, insufficient teacher numbers and training, and socioeconomic barriers that hinder effective learning processes, even where access has been provided. [6] note that there is clear access-quality gap is most education systems. This implies that access to schools only does not automatically translate into improved learning outcomes.

Besides, [7] expounds that this gap is predominantly evident especially in low-income countries, where access to secondary education has often led to a compromise with the quality learning environments. This creates a situation where increased access does not equitably yield improved learning outcomes, underlining the necessity for concomitant investments in educational quality to address the mismatch.

Literature on the classification of secondary schools in Malawi is a clear reflection of the varying levels of excellence and resources found within the country's secondary school education system. There are several types of secondary schools in Malawi, including grant aided boarding secondary schools, government national boarding secondary schools, government district boarding-secondary schools, government day secondary schools, community day secondary schools and private secondary schools. Grant Aided boarding schools are considered top-notch, offering excellent education and boarding facilities, and often achieving high grades and reputations for academic excellence. In contrast, community day secondary schools, which

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are part of the government's effort to expand access to secondary education, often face significant challenges in terms of resources, infrastructure, and quality.

Malawi School Certificate of Education grading system,

The final national examinations in the secondary school education system in Malawi are administered by the Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) at the closure of year four. The terminal academic performance of secondary schools in Malawi is evaluated based on the Malawi School Certificate of Education grading system, which ranges from 1, indicating excellence, to 9, indicating failure. Top-notch schools, such as grant aided boarding schools and some private schools, typically achieve high grades, ranging from 1 to 3 and are schools that attract attention to the populace. On the other hand, community day secondary schools often struggle to meet minimum standards, achieving lower grades that range from 6 to 9 and are school that are highly rejected by most populace. Unfortunately, there are many secondary schools of this type in Malawi, prompting most students and parents to resent these schools due to their poor academic performance and absence of befitting learning environment.

2.3 The disparities between different types of secondary schools

The disparities between different types of schools in Malawi in resources and quality, pose significant challenges in students' success. Boys boarding facilities schools which form part of the government district secondary schools and the Community Day secondary schools, in particular, face inadequate infrastructure, such as boarding facilities, including a lack of classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. They also experience limited resources, such as insufficient textbooks, technology, and human resources. Moreover, these types of secondary schools often experience teacher shortages, making it difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers [8]. These challenges can have a negative impact on academic performance and perpetuate inequalities in education.

The existing body of research unswervingly highlights the crucial role of school infrastructure in determining the quality of education. Recent studies by [9] and [10] underline that insufficient infrastructure is one of the significant barriers to effective teaching and learning, resulting in compromised access to essential resources and students' safety.

Resource provisioning is as another critical factor that influence educational quality. [11] are aware of the myriad challenges especially in rural schools where there are hardly relevant and adequate resources for curriculum delivery; [12] as well as [13] echoed the same sentiments. These studies collectively propose the domineering of apportioning relevant and sufficient resources in any type of schools, including textbooks, technology, and human resources, to support the delivery of quality education

Furthermore, infrastructure challenges in most of the African schools, particularly in rural areas where development is in infant stages, are well-documented in the literature. [14] and [15] note that inadequate facilities, such as classrooms, laboratories, and libraries, significantly hinder the provision of quality education. School administrators, particularly head teacher, must navigate these infrastructural challenges to make conducive learning environments that foster students' success.

In addition to infrastructural concerns, recent studies by [16] and [17] emphasize the need for effective curriculum management and policy reforms to address the systemic issues undermining educational quality. These studies advocate for the implementation of robust curriculum management strategies and policy initiatives aimed at bridging the gaps in resource provisioning and infrastructure.

2.4 Theoretical frameworks

Theoretical frameworks such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) theory and the Systems Theory (ST)

provide valuable lenses through which to examine the interplay between infrastructure, resource provisioning, and curriculum management. The RBV theory, as suggested by [18], recommends that schools

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can utilize their resources to gain a competitive advantage, while the Systems Theory, according to [19], offers insights into how these components interact within the broader educational ecosystem. Therefore, these two theories offer a coercive framework for strategic analysis and decision making.

RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research methods and design

This is an action research case study using multi approaches, integrating both quantitative and qualitative components [20]. The approach was chosen to investigate the girl's needs in boarding facilities school. [21] argues that a case study allows for an in-depth study within a limited time scale. In addition, a case study is useful to draw patterns and make comparisons from the data gathered.

This comprehensive approach allowed for the triangulation of data from multiple sources, including questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The study adopted a cross-sectional design, in which data was collected at a single point in time to compare the academic performance outcomes of girls enrolled in district boarding schools and those in boys boarding facilities schools in the sampled school in Central West Education Division. Additionally, the research was also characterized by having case study elements, given its in-depth examination of specific cases, namely the district boarding schools and boys boarding facilities schools, to provide a rich, contextual understanding of the academic experiences and performance of girls in these settings. The combination of a mixed-methods approach, cross-sectional design, and case study elements enabled a robust and multifaceted analysis of the research problem, ultimately providing a detailed and clear understanding of the disparities in academic outcomes between girls in different boarding school environments in Malawi.

3.2 Population and Sample of the Research Study

The study attracted 102 participants comprising four head teachers, 24 teachers, 72 Form four female learners from the four sampled secondary school and two policymakers from Education Division Office and Ministry of Education Headquarters respectively. Convenience sampling was favored because it is inexpensive and an easy option compared to other sampling techniques. According to [22], a convenience sample is described as the use of subjects that are deemed convenient to the researcher. Therefore, both convenience sampling, and purposeful sampling techniques were useful in reflecting the characteristics of the target population [23].

3.3 Data Collection and Data analysis

The study gathered data through the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and records was triangulated until saturation was reached. Data concerning factors contributing to low academic achievement come from multiple sources including news reports from the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organizations, other academic studies, and site visits. To facilitate interpretation of the data, the researcher identified emerging themes that are reported in this study.

Key variables analyzed included MSCE pass rates, public university selection rates, and school type, which were district boarding versus boys boarding facilities schools. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the key metrics, while inferential statistics, specifically independent samples t-tests, were conducted to compare the mean outcomes between the two groups and assess the statistical significance of observed differences. This methodological approach enabled a systematic comparison of academic performance outcomes for girls in different boarding school settings in the Central West Education Division.

The integration of descriptive and inferential statistics was pivotal in shaping the conclusions of the research on girls' education in Malawi. Descriptive statistics provided a clear snapshot of the academic performance metrics, such as MSCE pass rates and public university selection rates, for girls in district boarding schools compared to those in boys boarding facilities schools. This type of analysis effectively highlighted the

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disparities in academic outcomes between the two groups. The use of inferential statistics, specifically t-tests, allowed for the determination of whether the observed differences in academic performance were statistically significant. This provided robust evidence to support the conclusion that girls in district boarding schools outperform their counterparts in boys' boarding schools. The combination of these statistical approaches strengthened the validity of the research conclusions by offering both a detailed description of the specific data and a statistically grounded basis for generalizing the findings.

As discussed above, the study employed triangulation. This enhanced validity and reliability of the results presented in chapter four. This study on educational policy and girls' academic achievement in boys boarding facilities involved data, methodological and theoretical triangulation which must have increased confidence in the research findings.

The School of Doctoral Studies at UNICAF-Malawi gave ethical clearance to have this research conducted.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research study was to gain a better understanding of how girls in boys boarding facilities secondary schools perform at national examinations when compared with their counterparts who are selected as boarders in district boarding facilities schools.

4.1 Results

This section states the findings without bias and is arranged in a logical sequence following the methodologies as discussed in chapter three.

4.1.1 Demographic Data

thorough description of participants allows readers and researchers to determine to whom research

findings generalize and allow for comparisons to be made across replications of studies. It also provides information needed for research syntheses and secondary data analyses [24]. As a result of these analyses, gaps in existing bodies of research can be identified as well as universals and variations that occur within and between populations thorough description of participants allows readers and researchers to determine to whom research findings generalize and allows for comparisons to be made across replications of studies. It also provides information needed for research syntheses and secondary data analyses that can help bodies of research to identify universals and variations that occur within and between populations.

The inclusion of this portion of demographic information enables readers and researchers to assess the scope of the study's generalizability and to compare the results of its replications. In addition, this section supplies the data needed for study synthesis and secondary data analysis [24].

4.1.2 Secondary results

Table 4.1 Head Teachers' Gender

Gender	Male	Female
Head teachers	4	0
Percentage	100 %	0 %

The table shows that all the four head teachers were males and no females. This points to the fact that there is less participation among females in secondary school leadership roles. Probably, affirmative education policy on women leadership empowerment may be necessary from now on.

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TABLE 4.2 Policy Makers' Gender

Gender	Male	Female
Policy makers	1	1
Percentage	50 %	50 %

The table shows that there was one male policy maker and one female policy maker. This was well achieved because the researcher purposively targeted a male and a female policy maker in the Ministry of Education

TABLE 4.3 Teachers' Gender

Gender	Male	Female
Teachers	16	8
Percentage	66.66 %	33.33 %

Out of the 24 teacher participants, 16 (66.66 %) were males and 8 (33.33 %) were females. The gender numbers still point to female teacher representation in the sampled secondary schools. This is also another area where the Ministry of Education and entire government machinery need to start addressing so that secondary schools have more role models to improve girls' academic performance.

TABLE 4.4 Teacher Specialization

Area of specialization	Language	Sciences	Humanities
Boys boarding facilities school	2	3	7
District boarding school	3	5	4
Percentage	20.8	33.3	45.8

Teaching specialization in this study refers to a teacher's level of subject-matter expertise. Thus, subject-area specialization has the potential to improve teacher and school effectiveness by utilizing and fostering teachers' subject-matter expertise [25]. Therefore, as mentioned before, there are three main areas of expertise in secondary school. According to the quantitative data, 11 (45.8%) of the instructors are from the humanities department, 8 (33.3%) are from the sciences, and 5 (20%) are from the language department.

TABLE 4.5 Specialist Teachers

School model	Number of special teachers
School A	2
School B	2
School C	1
School D	1

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The table above shows distribution of certified special teachers who are responsible for assisting students that have learning difficulties such as blind and deaf.

TABLE 4.6 Teachers' Educational Qualification in District Boarding Schools

Qualification	Diploma	Degree	Masters
Teachers	2	9	1
Percentage	16.6 %	75 %	8.3 %

Generally, the School of Education or Department of Education in a university provides training for secondary school teachers. This institution or department grants three different professional degrees: the University Certificate of Education, the Bachelor of Education, and the Diploma in Education. According to the qualitative data, 1 (8.3%) teacher possessed a post-degree certificate, 9 (75%) teachers were qualified for the teaching role with a degree certificate, and 2 (16.6%) instructors were qualified for teaching role with a diploma in education. According to the data, the teachers had the necessary credentials to instruct in secondary schools in Malawi [26].

TABLE 4. 7 Teachers' Educational Qualification in Boys Boarding Facilities Schools

Qualification	Diploma	Degree	Masters
Teachers	3	9	0
Percentage	25 %	75 %	0

The quantitative date shows that 3 (25%) teachers were qualified to a diploma certificate and 9 (75 %) were degree certificate holders. The data re-affirm that that the teachers were adequately qualified for the task of teaching the learners in the school.

TABLE 4. 8 Years of Teaching Experience (District Boarding Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
Teachers	0	1	5	3	3
Percentage	0	8.3 %	41.66 %	25 %	25 %

Teachers' years of experience in the district boarding schools show that out the 12 teachers, 1 (8.3 %) the ranged in the 5-9 yrs., 5 (41.66 %) were ranged in the 10-14 yrs., 3 (25 %) were ranged in the 15-19yrs., and 3 (25 %) were ranged 20 years plus. The majority of the teacher participants in the district boarding schools were well experienced in the range of 10-14 years of teaching experience.

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TABLE 4. 9 Years of Teaching Experience (Boys Boarding Facilities Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
Teachers	0	1	5	2	4
Percentage	0	8.3	41.66	16.66	33.33

The quantitative data shows that out of the 12 teachers, 1 (8.33 %) ranged from 5-9 years of teaching, 5 (41.66 %) ranged from 10-14 years of teaching, 2 (16.66 %), and 4 (33.33 %) were 20 years and above. The majority of the teacher participants in the boarding facilities schools were well experienced in the range of 10-14 years of teaching experience.

TABLE 4. 10 Years Taught At the Current Station (District Boarding Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
Teachers	3	9	0	0	0
Percentage	25 %	75 %	0	0	0

Years of teaching at the district boarding school indicate that 3 (25 %) of the teachers had taught at the schools in the 0-4 yrs. ranges. The majority of the teachers had taught at the school in the 5-9 yrs. ranges. Therefore, they provided adequate information in relation to academic achievement in the MSCE and public university examinations and were also well versed with issues affecting academic achievement in district boarding school.

TABLE 4. 11 Years Taught At Current School (Boys Boarding Facilities Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
Teachers	4	8	0	0	0
Percentage	33.33 %	66.66 %	0	0	0

The quantitative data above shows that out of the 12 teachers 4 (33.33%) of the teachers were at the school in the range of 0-4 years and 8 (66.66 %) of the teachers were at the school in the range of 5-9 years. The majority of the teachers had taught at the school in the 5-9 years ranges Therefore, they provided adequate information in relation to academic achievement in the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations and public university education and were also well versed with issues affecting girls' academic achievement in boys boarding facilities school.

4.1.3 Primary data

When asked about the secondary school admissions process, the policy makers inclined to think that there is no difference between the girls selected to district boarding schools and girls selected to boys boarding facilities school. The same criteria are applied, including distance, catchment area, and test score. One policy maker [1] who responded to the survey made notice of a discrepancy in public's perceptions of the selection process:

"I think that in the whole selection policy, public gives more attention to boarding facilities secondary schools, than to day secondary schools." (policy maker 1)

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Policy maker [2] indicated that one female student in one of the boys boarding facilities school obtained 6 points which is the last highest score one can get at Malawi School Certificate of Education. The policy makers concurred that all students that are selected from primary school to secondary school have equal opportunity to excel.

When asked about the secondary school admissions process, female students in boys boarding facilities schools inclined to think that there is a difference between the girls selected to district boarding schools and girls selected to boys boarding facilities school. The female students believed that the ranking of candidates from the highest scoring students to low scoring students implies that girls in boys boarding facilities school are not better than those in district boarding school. Female student in school [C] who responded to the survey deduced as follows:

"Those of us who were not selected to boarding schools feel that we did not score better marks than our friends in boarding schools"

Another female student in school [D] still felt that selection criteria is not well known to the students but what they know is that there is sometimes bias in allocating students to boarding schools. She remarked the following words;

"I wonder how my friends who were not doing well in our class were selected to boarding school while some of us who were doing extremely well were all selected as day scholar in boys boarding facilities schools." (Participant School C)

When the girls were asked to choose between a district boarding facilities secondary school and boys boarding facilities secondary school, they all chose a boarding school for reasons from prestige to academic benefits. One female student in school [D] reported the following:

"I was not happy when my teachers sent me a message that I was among the seven girls from my primary school who were selected to boys boarding facilities school…. after working hard, I have ended up a day scholar…this wasn't my expectation". (Participant School D)

Another student in school [C] stated that:

"Our teachers encouraged us to work hard so that we go to national secondary schools…. coming here boys boarding facilities school…...is something not pleasing" (Participant School C)

A visit at one of the study sites (school D) showed that a borehole was completely broken and clogged and was not working.

During the focus discussion, I paused a question to find out why the borehole was in that state of appearance. The responses were;

"It requires more money to have it repaired." (FGD Participant 17)

One member added that

"Even if there were money, we have been told it is beyond repair" (FGD Participant 19)

The situation sounded hopeless for the girls to have the bore hole supplying water in the school. This should be an aggravating factor for girls not like studying in boys boarding facilities secondary school.

It was vehemently indicated during the focus group discussions that

"…going to toilets here at school is absolutely uncalled for, because after using the toilet there is no water nearby to use…." (FGD Participant 21)

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Another girl commented that

"It is so painful especially during menstruation when girls need to use the toilets more often….. this is more the reason that girls just stay at home when experiencing periods because the nature of the toilets and unavailability of water" (FGD Participant 18)

For instance, showed me a non-habitable pit latrine, which the girls described as a source of embarrassment for girls in modern society. Actually, pit latrines are popular in rural primary schools, but they are not to be seen in secondary schools. The difficulty with pit latrines is that they retain odors since they are constructed without openings for the polluted air to escape. Pit latrines are particularly dangerous during the wet season. During the wet season, most pit latrines collapse due to unstable terrain. Some of the females stated that they do not use the pit latrines while it is raining, but instead try to prepare as much as possible at home.

The state of affairs in boys boarding schools seem to point to the fact that resources gaps are there in almost all Malawian Schools. In this regard one learner lamented that "There are no resources available. We do have a little contribution of money which is called parents' teachers funds by every student but we are told it is not enough to provide any kind of meaningful or any special services for girls.**" (**Participant 13)

When female students in district boarding schools were asked if ever, they experienced any challenges while staying in the hostels that affect their academic performance, they responded that they do not encounter major challenges for instance, one respondent had this to say;

"I am happy to be selected at this school where there are girls' hostels because this was my dream not to go to a community day school" **(**Participant 3)

Other students reported that;

"Boarding school has trained me to be myself and plan for my studies ……Of course with the help of teachers, I am assured of improved academic achievement" **(**Participant 1)

In addition, the respondents alluded to the fact that, they are safe from the insecurity that happens outside the school campus and that they have ample time to study notes. They further indicated that being selected to a district boarding school was a motivating factor for them to work hard in their studies.

The following data illustrates the academic gaps that exist between the two school models.

Research Question one: Is there academic achievement gaps between the two school categories?

TABLE 4. 1 Girls' Pass Rate in the Two Sampled District Boarding Schools

District Boarding Secondary Schools	School A	School B	Total
No. of students who sat for examination	744	494	1438
No. of students who passed the examination	512	457	969
Pass %	68.81	65.85	67.38
No. of students who didn't pass the examination	232	237	470
Failure %	31.18	34.15	32.62

As it has been seen in table 4.12 above a total of 744 girls who sat for the examination in School A, 512 girls passed the examination which represented 68.8 % whereas out of a total of 695 girls in School B who sat for the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations, 457 girls passed the examination which

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represented 65.7%. The average pass percent for the two schools was 67.38 %. This means that 32.62 % of the girls from the two schools failed the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations.

TABLE 4.13 Girls' Examination Pass Rate in the Two Sampled Boys Boarding Facilities Schools

Boys boarding facilities secondary schools	School C	School D	Total
No. of students who sat for examination	450	520	970
No. of students who passed the examination	289	297	586
Pass %	64.22	57.11	60.4
No. of students who didn't pass the examination	161	223	424
Failure %	35.77	42.88	39.6

As it has been seen in table 4.13 above, a total of 450 girls who sat for the examination in School C, 289 girls passed the examination which represented 64.22 % whereas out of a total of 521 girls in School D who sat for the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations, 297 girls passed the examination which represented 57 %. The average pass percent for the two schools was 60.4 %. This means that 39.6 % of the girls from the two schools failed the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations.

Table 4.12 shows higher examination pass rate 67.28 % and a lower failure rate at 32.72 % in district boarding facilities schools and table 4.13 shows lower examination pass rate at 60.4 % and higher failure rate at 39.6 % in boys boarding facilities schools. The result indicates existence of academic gap between the two school models. The academic gaps among the four sampled schools in the two school models are illustrated in the sections that follow below.

In order to check statistical significance of the academic gaps between the two school models, a null hypothesis "there is no academic difference between girls selected in boys boarding facilities schools and the girls selected in district boarding schools" was tested as below.

Ho…. hypothesis

Malawi School Certificate of Education examination pass rate among girls in boys boarding facilities schools is not the same as girls' performance in district boarding schools.

Ha…. hypothesis

Malawi School Certificate of Education examination pass rate among girls in boys boarding facilities schools is the same as girls in district boarding schools.

TABLE 4.14 T-Test MSCE Pass Rate between the two school models

	A and B	**C and D**					
	107	40		t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances			
	102	45					
	81	66			*A and B*	*C and D*	

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	91	68		Mean	96.9	58.6	
	82	68		Variance	464.1	162.9333	
	147	43		Observations	10	10	
	113	72		Pooled Variance	313.5167		
	80	74		Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		
	76	58		Df	18		
	90	52		t Stat	4.836748		
				P(T<=t) one-tail	6.62E-05		
				t Critical one-tail	1.734064		
				P(T<=t) two-tail	**0.000132**		
				t Critical two-tail	2.100922		

The p value at 0.000132 is less than 0.05 indicating that the MSCE pass rate is statistically significant between district boarding facilities schools and boys boarding facilities schools.

The section below shows research findings on the schools' status in public university selection among girls in district boarding schools.

TABLE 4.15 Girls' Public University Selection Rate from District Boarding Schools

Boys boarding facilities secondary schools	School A	School B	Total
No. of students who passed the examination	512	457	969
No. of students who were selected	49	58	107
Selection %	9.57	12.69	11.13
No. of students who were not selected	463	399	860
University selection failure %	90.42	86.87	88.87

A total of 969 girls who passed the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations 107 representing 11.13 % were selected into public university while 862 representing 88.87 % were not selected for public university education.

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TABLE 4. 2Students' Status on Public University Selection from 2010-2019 In Boys Boarding Facilities Schools

Boys boarding facilities secondary schools	School C	School D	Total
No. of students who passed the examination	289	297	586
No. of students who were selected	22	21	43
Selection %	7.61	7.07	7.14
No. of students who were not selected	267	276	534
University selection failure %	92.39	92.93	92.86

A total of 586 girls who passed the Malawi School Certificate of Education examinations 43 representing 7.14 % passed the examination while 543 representing 92.86 % were not selected for public university education.

Comparatively, more girls from district boarding schools were selected for public university education than girls in boys boarding facilities schools.

In order to check statistical significance of the public university selection gap between the two school models, a null hypothesis "there is no public university selection gap between girls selected in boys boarding facilities schools and the girls selected in district boarding schools" was tested as below.

Ho…. hypothesis

Girls' public university selection rate in boys boarding facilities schools is not the same as girls' performance in district boarding schools.

Ha…...hypothesis

Girls' public university selection rate in boys boarding facilities schools is the same as girls in district boarding schools.

TABLE 4.17 T-Test of Public University Selection Rate

	A and B	**C and D**						
	5	3		t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances				
	5	4						
	5	3			*A and B*	*C and D*		
	8	2		Mean	10.7	4.3		
	8	2		Variance	37.78889	3.344444		
	12	4		Observations	10	10		
	15	7		Pooled Variance	20.56667			

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	16	6		Hypothesized Mean Difference	0			
	9	6		Df	18			
	24	6		t Stat	3.155608			
				P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002735			
				t Critical one-tail	1.734064			
				P(T<=t) two-tail	**0.005471**			
				t Critical two-tail	2.100922			

The p value at 0.005471 is less than 0.05 indicating that the public university selection rate is statistically significant between schools in the district boarding facilities schools and boys boarding facilities schools. Question one indicates the academic gap between boys boarding facilities schools and district boarding facilities schools.

TABLE 4.18 Teachers' Educational Qualification in District Boarding Schools

Qualification	Diploma	Degree	Masters
Teachers	2	9	1
Percentage	16.6 %	75 %	8.3 %

The data in the table shows that 2 (16.6 %) teachers were qualified for the teaching position with a diploma certificate, 9 (75 %) were qualified to a degree certificate and 1 (8.3 %) had a post degree certificate. The data show low level of impact of lack of qualified teachers on female students' academic performance and therefore, girls' academic performance cannot be negatively impacted. As per Malawi's standard the teachers were duly qualified to teach in the secondary schools [26]. With this available data, it is expected that teacher's qualification cannot be attributed to poor academic performance among the girls.

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TABLE 4. 19 Teachers' Educational Qualification in Boys Boarding Facilities Schools

Qualification	Diploma	Degree	Masters
Teachers	3	9	0
Percentage	25 %	75 %	0

The quantitative date shows that 3 (25%) teachers were qualified to a diploma certificate and 9 (75 %) were degree certificate holders. The data re-affirm that that the teachers were adequately qualified for the task of teaching the learners in the school.

Ho…. hypothesis

Teachers in boys boarding facilities schools do not hold the same educational qualification as teachers in district boarding schools.

Ha…...hypothesis

Teachers in boys boarding facilities schools hold the same educational qualifications as teachers in district boarding schools.

TABLE 4.20 T-Test on Educational Qualification

	Boys Boarding school teachers		District boarding school		t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances				
	3	2							
	9	9					*Boys Boarding school teachers*	*District boarding school*	
	0	1				Mean	4	4	
						Variance	21	19	
						Observations	3	3	
						Pooled Variance	20		
						Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		
						Df	4		

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						P(T<=t) one tail	0.5			
						t Critical one tail	2.131847			
						P(T<=t) two-tail	1			
						t Critical two-tail	2.776445			

With a two tailed value of 2.776445 and a p value of 1.0 which is above p value of 0.05, the conclusion is that there is no statistically significant difference in teachers' academic qualification in the two school models

The second factor is the teaching experience of the teachers. The teaching experience of teachers is one of the crucial factors that promotes and improves student performance [27]. This is complemented by [28] who stated that teaching experience is a global phenomenon that affects how students perform in school.

TABLE 4. 21 Years of Teaching Experience (District Boarding Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
# of teachers	0	1	5	3	3
Percentage	0	8.3 %	41.66 %	25 %	25 %

Teachers' years of experience in the district boarding schools show that out the 12 teachers, 1 (8.3 %) the ranged in the 5-9 yrs., 5 (41.66 %) were ranged in the 10-14 yrs., 3 (25 %) were ranged in the 15-19yrs., and 3 (25 %) were ranged 20 years plus. The majority of the teacher participants in the district boarding schools were well experienced in the range of 10-14 years of teaching experience.

TABLE 4. 22 Years of Teaching Experience (Boys Boarding Facilities Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
# of teachers	0	1	5	2	4
Percentage	0	8.3	41.66	16.66	33.33

The quantitative data shows that out of the 12 teachers, 1 (8.33 %) ranged from 5-9 years of teaching, 5 (41.66 %) ranged from 10-14 years of teaching, 2 (16.66 %), and 4 (33.33 %) were 20 years and above. The majority of the teacher participants in the boarding facilities schools were well experienced in the range of 10-14 years of teaching experience. The findings suggest that the girls were consistently taught by the same teachers and that there were no interruptions in the teaching and learning processes.

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Teachers' experience

Ho…. hypothesis

Teachers in boys boarding facilities schools do not hold the same teaching experiences as teachers in district boarding schools.

Ha…...hypothesis

Teachers in boys boarding facilities schools hold the same teaching experience as teachers in district boarding schools.

TABLE 4. 23 T- Test on Teachers' Years of Experience

	Boys Boarding school teachers	District boarding school						
	0	0						
	0	1				*Boys Boarding facilities school*	*District boarding school*	
	7	6			Mean	2.4	2.4	
	1	5			Variance	9.3	8.3	
	4	0			Observations	5	5	
					Pooled Variance	8.8		
					Hypothesized Mean Difference	0		
					Df	8		
					t Stat	0		
					P(T<=t) one-tail	0.5		
					t Critical one-tail	1.859548		
					P(T<=t) two-tail	1		
					t Critical two-tail	2.306004		

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With a two tailed value of 2.306004 and a p value of 1.0 which is above p value of 0.05, the conclusion is that there is no statistically significant difference in teachers' teaching experience in the two school models.

TABLE 4. 24 Years Taught At the Current Station (District Boarding Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
# of Teachers	3	9	0	0	0
Percentage	25 %	75 %	0	0	0

Years of teaching at the district boarding school indicate that 3 (25 %) of the teachers had taught at the schools in the 0-4 yrs. ranges. The majority of the teachers had taught at the school in the 5-9 yrs. ranges. Therefore, they provided adequate information in relation to academic achievement in the MSCE and public university examinations and were also well versed with issues affecting academic achievement in district boarding school.

TABLE 4. 25 Years Taught At Current School (Boys Boarding Facilities Schools)

Years	0-4 yr.	5-9 yr.	10-14 yr.	15-20 yr.	21yr +
# of teachers	4	8	0	0	0
Percentage	33.33 %	66.66 %	0	0	0

The quantitative data above shows that out of the 12 teachers 4 (33.33%) of the teachers were at the school in the range of 0-4 years and 8 (66.66 %) of the teachers were at the school in the range of 5-9 years. The majority of the teachers had taught at the school in the 5-9 years ranges which gives advantage to the learners to have been consistently taught by the same teachers. According to research by [29], frequent teacher movement affects the consistency and continuity of instruction in schools.

Teachers number of years at the current schools

Ho…. hypothesis

Teachers' number of years teaching at the current boys boarding facilities school is not the same as those in district boarding school

Ha…. hypothesis

Teachers' number of years teaching at the current boys boarding facilities school is the same as those in district boarding school.

						t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Equal Variances				

TABLE 4.26 T-Test on Number of Years at the Current School

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	Boys Boarding school teachers		District boarding school				*Boys Boarding school teachers*	*District boarding school*			
	4		3			Mean	2.4	2.4			
	8		9			Variance	12.8	15.3			
	0		0			Observations	5	5			
	0		0			Pooled Variance	14.05				
	0		0			Hypothesized Mean Difference	0				
						Df	8				
						t Stat	0				
						P(T<=t) one-tail	0.5				
						t Critical one-tail	1.859548				
						P(T<=t) two-tail	1				
						t Critical two-tail	2.306004				

With a two tailed value of 2.306004 and a p value of 1.0 which is above p value of 0.05, the conclusion is that there is no statistically significant difference in teachers' years at the current schools they were teaching during the time the study was undertaken in the two school models.

Research question 2: What are the contributing factors for the academic achievement gaps

Militating factors

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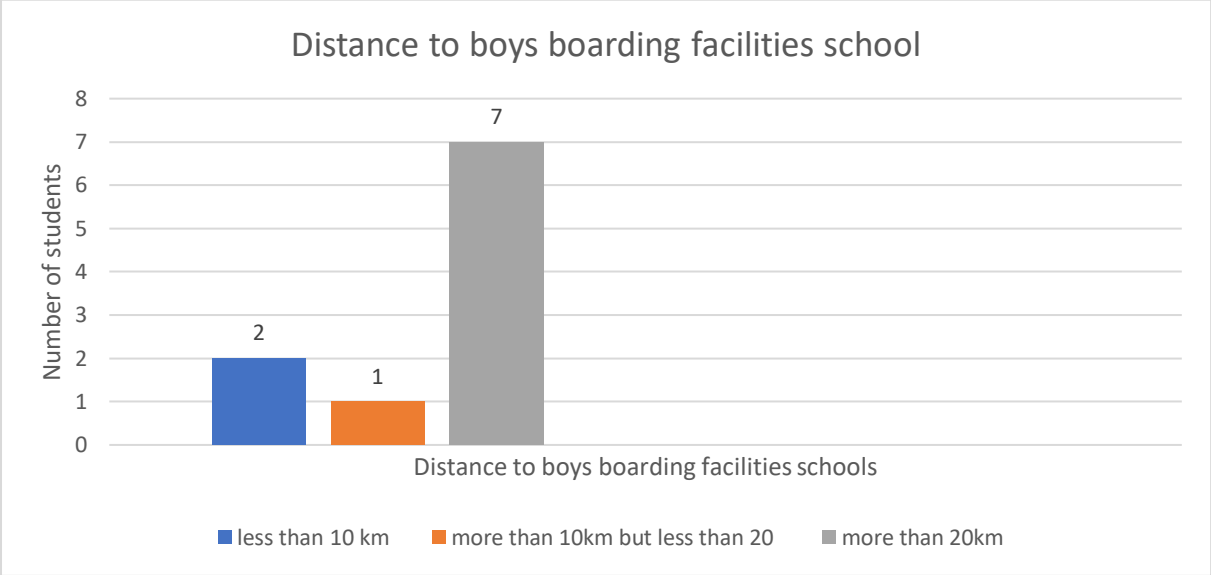
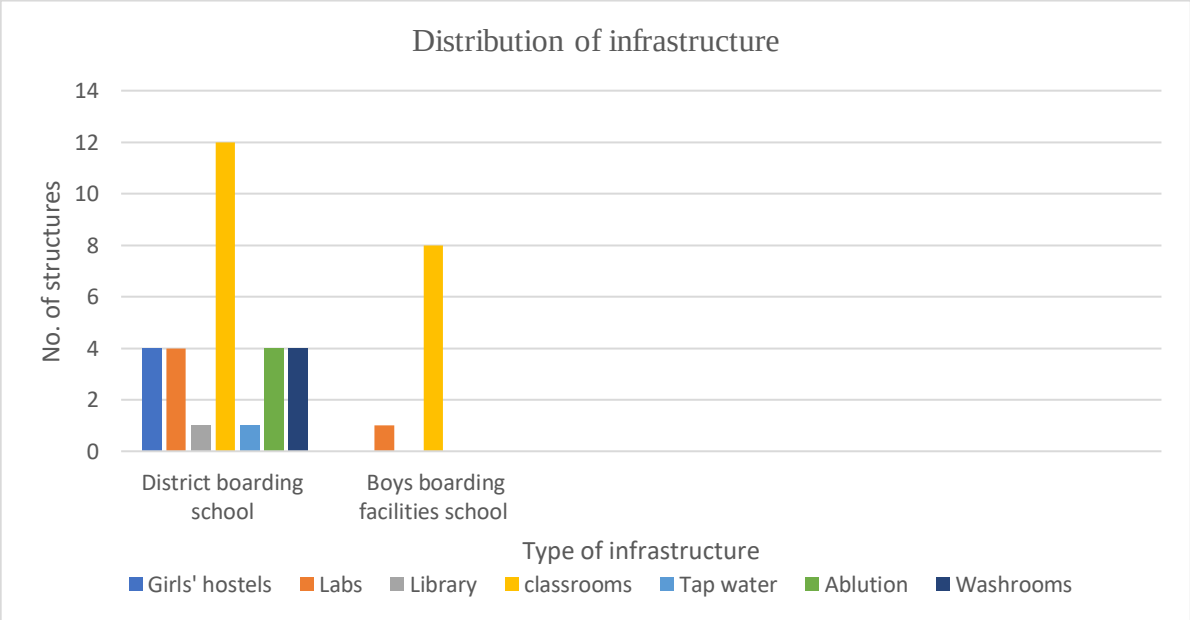
FIGURE 4.1 *Distance to Boys Boarding Facilities Schools*



Only two (20%) of the ten female students in the two boys boarding schools who replied to the question about their homes' location said they lived less than 10 kilometers away. Seven students (70%) came from households more than 20 kilometers away, compared to one student (10%) who came from a home more than 10 kilometers away but less than 20 kilometers. The results indicate that more girls were chosen from outside the specified household regions. These are the females who reside in hostels built by the community and in rented houses near the schools. Typically, the hostels built by the communities do not conform to government standard and designs as a result they lack amenities like tap water, good beds and mattresses, and functional lavatories.

The selection of girls to boys boarding facilities schools as day scholars indicate the mismatch between policy and practice. Therefore, the absence of girls boarding facilities in boys boarding facilities contributed to the girls' low academic performance.

Figure 4. 2 *Infrastructures Distribution in the Schools*



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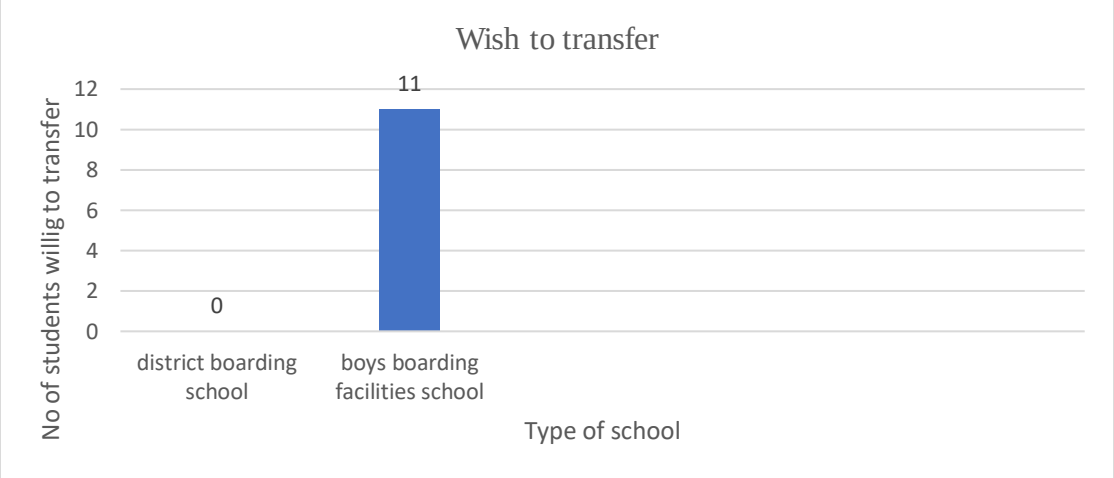
As seen in figure above, district boarding schools have adequate laboratories, library, tap water, ablution, and washrooms for the use of the girls in addition to having girls' hostels, whereas boys boarding facilities schools do not have any girls' hostels and have subpar laboratories, tap water, ablution, and washrooms. Ministry of Education re-affirmed that up to date it does not have a set standard for school infrastructure that outlines the minimal needs and standards for a secondary school. For example, the **school** improvement grants do not have clear guidelines related to inclusive education [1]. Furthermore, some of the structure in boys boarding facilities schools are subpar and do not even meet the various needs of the boys themselves. Due to this, the girls claim that the boys boarding facilities schools do not run effectively and efficiently, which has a negative impact on girls' academic performance.

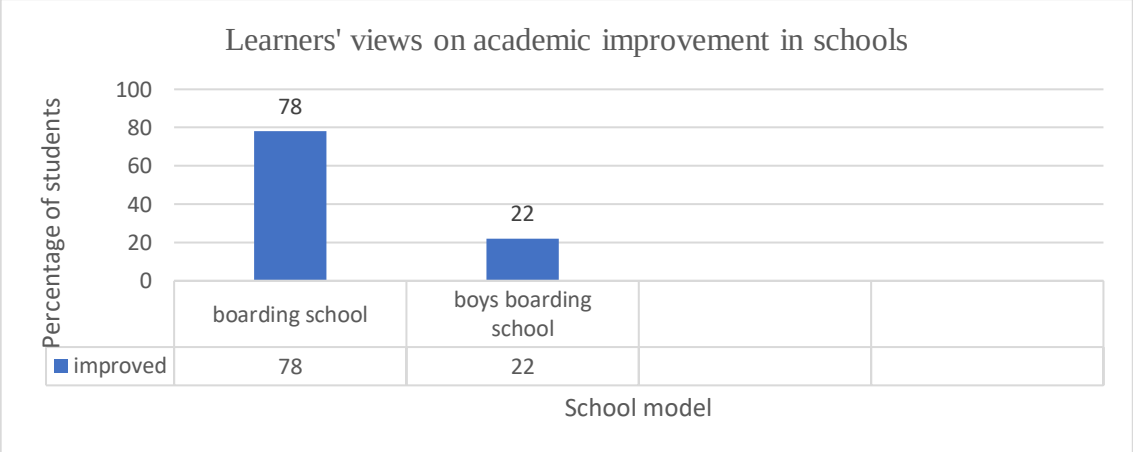
Figure 4.3 Willingness to Transfer to District Boarding Facilities Schools



As seen from the figure above, eleven students from boys boarding facilities schools preferred to move from the boys boarding facilities schools to either a national secondary school or a district boarding school, but no student from a district boarding school wanted to leave their school. According to the statistics, the majority of female students in boys boarding facilities schools choose boarding schools since travelling from their homes reduces the amount of time they spend interacting with their peers and teachers, which ultimately affects their academic status. These findings support the notion that female students accepted into institutions with males' residential facilities are less inclined to stay there. This confirms the resentment that students have against Day Secondary Schools on the performance at the national examinations [30].

Figure 4.4

Learners' Views on Academic Improvement in the Schools



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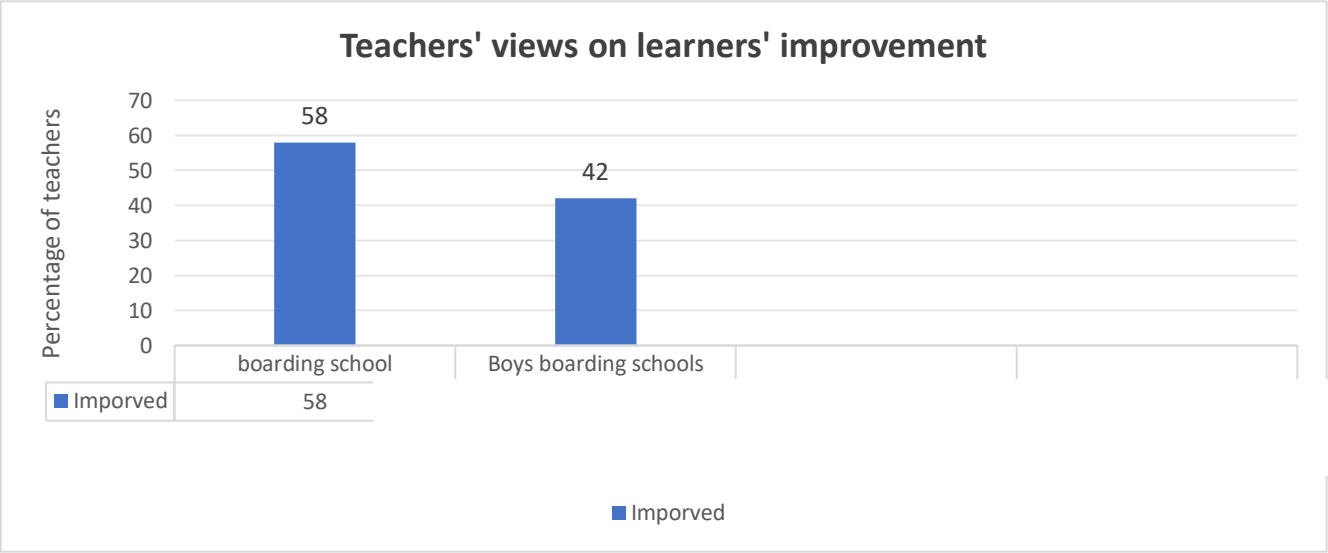
As presented in figure above, 78% of the students in district boarding facilities schools responded that their academic performance improved upon joining the school. While, 22% of the students in boys boarding facilities schools responded that their educational performance did not improve. From this, one can understand that academic performance is more effective in district boarding facilities schools than in boys boarding facilities schools. According to [31] boarding schools are more efficient than day schools in improving learners' academic performance.

Figure 4.5

Teachers' views on Learner's Academic Improvement



As presented in figure 4.5 above, 58% of the teachers in district boarding facilities schools responded that there was academic performance improvement among the girls upon joining the school. While, 42% of the teachers in boys boarding facilities schools responded that there was no educational performance improvement upon the girls joining the school. From this, one can understand that there were was a higher percentage among teachers in district boarding facilities schools that indicated girls' academic improvement. The results support those of [32], who found that boarding students and day students exhibit distinct academic performance differences due to unequal and incomparable learning environments. According to [33], day students are more likely to be distracted at home than boarding school students who are under the supervision of teachers for their academic performance.

Thus, the results of the data obtained from students, teachers including head teachers and policy makers vary from type of respondents regarding the levels of militating factors. This suggests that there are numerous causes for subpar academic achievement from numerous angles.

Findings show that Ministry of Education fairly distributes teachers according to gender, qualifications and areas of subject specialization.

TABLE 4.27 Teachers' Gender

Gender	Male	Female
Teachers	16	8
Percentage	66.66	33.33

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Out of the 24 teacher participants, 16 (66.66 %) were males and 8 (33.33 %) were females. The gender numbers still point to the fact that there is less female teacher representation in the sampled secondary schools. This is also another area where the Ministry of Education and entire government machinery start addressing so that secondary schools have more role models to improve their academic performance.

Table 4. 3 Teacher Specialization per School Category

Area of specialization	Language	Sciences	Humanities
Boys boarding facilities school	2	3	7
District boarding school	3	5	4
Percentage	20.8	33.3	45.8

In this study, teaching specialization refers to a teacher being an expert in the respective field. So, in secondary school, there are three major areas of specialization as indicated above. The quantitative data shows that 5 (20 %) of the teachers belong to languages department, 8 (33.3 %) belong to sciences department and 11 (45.8 %) belong to humanities department.

The qualitative data that was gathered from the open-ended interviews with policy makers show that there are no special provisions made to girls in boys boarding facilities schools in relation to girls boarding facilities which also encamps all sanitary provisions. The policy makers alluded to the fact that a good school environment for the girls need to have good sanitary facilities like clean toilets, washing facilities and shower rooms." In this regard, in order to address this issue, policy maker [1] affirmed, "It is vital to offer enough of these amenities and maintain their cleanliness"

The policy maker [1] went further to observe that, "Because girls are most vulnerable, they are more likely to be absent, from school when there is absence of clean facilities to aid to learning processes in schools."

Policy maker [2] hinted that in principle, boys boarding facilities schools were meant to offer secondary school education to the less privileged girls who learn in primary schools that are within the 7 km radius to boys boarding facilities schools at a low cost by making the girls day scholars. Therefore, the lack of girls boarding facilities in boys boarding facilities schools does not arise from the policy point of view."

The policy maker [2] further mentioned that "until now, the Ministry of Education does not have a teaching and learning materials (TLM) policy for guiding the availability of learning resources in the schools and there are also no clear budgets for the same." Further sentiment indicates that there is also inadequate infrastructure for the girls to use and extended to report that the condition is worse in most Community Development Secondary Schools as they do not have the science laboratories to offer more science subjects to the learners.

The state of affairs in boys boarding schools seem to point to the fact that resources gaps are there in almost all Malawian Schools. In this regard one learner lamented that "There are no resources available. We do have a little contribution of money which is called parents' teachers funds by every student but we are told it is not enough to provide any kind of meaningful or any special services for girls.**"**

The challenge of girls' infrastructural provision also extended to learning support facilities such as laboratories and girls' hostels. Girl children themselves acknowledge that their poor academic is because of the lack of these facilities. They argued that "there are some subjects like Home Economics and Cookery that were not offered at boys boarding facilities due to lack of Home Economics Laboratory".

"Without a clear policy on TLM, we're just patching things together. It's like putting a band-aid on a big wound." (Participant T10)

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"We've been asking for girls' accommodation for years, but without a policy backing us, it's like talking to a wall." (Participant T 13)

"Some schools have proper classrooms and libraries, while others are still under trees. How can we expect the same outcomes?" (Participant HM 3)

"Infrastructure should be a given, but without standards, it's a lottery which schools get what they need." (Participant HM 4)

"For instance, there are schools with broken roofs, window pane and no proper toilets especially for the girl. How can we call this a learning environment?" (Participant T11)

"It is problematic to assess all students the same way when their learning environments are worlds apart. We're not testing their potential; we're testing their circumstances." (Participant HM 2)

"It appears that standardized assessments are like a one-size-fits-all solution for a problem that clearly needs tailored approaches." (Participant HM 4)

"The playing field needs to be leveled, before we insist on the same finish line for every student" (Participant HM 1)

"As a Ministry we just need to put polices together at once without ignoring other aspects of the foundation." (Participant Policy maker 1)

"Policies need to talk to each other at any education level in order to create a conducive learning environment in schools." (Participant Maker 2)

Research Question three: What strategies are needed in supporting girls' education in boys boarding facilities schools

Themes identified as follows:

The participants identified themes within this research context that encompass several critical areas of concern.

Firstly, is the lack of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM) Policy as reported by the policy maker in the Ministry of Education. This critically emerged as a pivotal theme, highlighting the absence of a coherent framework at the Ministry of Education guiding the provision and effective utilization of educational resources in the secondary school education.

Secondly is the lack of Standardized Infrastructure Development Policy as evidenced by the inconsistencies in the quality and availability of physical learning environments between the two secondary school models with much improved infrastructure in district boarding schools.

Thirdly, are the consequent inequities in standardized assessment, revealing the challenges arising from assessing students across these diverse environments through a uniform examination standard, which is being suggested inadvertently as another factor responsible for poor performance other than innate capabilities among the girls.

Lastly, the participants agreed on the overarching theme which is the need or call for a holistic policy approach at the Ministry of Education, emphasizing the imperative of adopting a comprehensive and synchronized strategy for policy implementation. Participants suggested this approach as appropriate for aligning policies on teaching materials, infrastructure, and assessment to cultivate an equitable and effective educational landscape across the two secondary school models.

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IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

Latest studies have highlighted the importance of tailored policies in supporting the academic achievement of girls in unique educational settings such as boys boarding facilities schools [34; 35]. The current research reveals substantial academic differences between girls selected in boys boarding facilities schools and those in district boarding schools. The lack of a Teaching and Learning Materials (TLM) policy, inadequate Infrastructure policy, and the absence of a holistic policy approach are identified as key contributors to these differences [36;37].

5.2 Implications and Recommendations

The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions in the education sector. To bridge the academic gap and support girls that are selected in boys boarding facilities schools, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Ministry of Education and each respective schools should develop and implement a comprehensive TLM policy, ensuring girls have access to relevant and engaging learning materials [38].

2. The Ministry of Education and each respective schools should precise develop and implement standardized infrastructure development policy in order to prioritize safe, secure, and conducive learning environments tailored to girls' needs [39].

3. The Ministry of Education and each respective schools should develop a holistic approach to address social, emotional, and extracurricular needs in providing comprehensive support to girls [40].

5.3 Future research should explore

1. Through a longitudinal study, researchers can examine the long-term impact of targeted policies on girls' academic achievement.

2. Researchers can conduct a study to compare different policy approaches and their effects in various contexts.

3. Researchers can further investigate the experiences and perspectives of girls in boys boarding facilities schools.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the importance of tailored policies for girls in boys boarding facilities schools. There is a strong believe that implementing TLM, Infrastructure, and holistic policies, schools can foster an environment conducive to girls' academic success. The findings aim to inform policy and practice, enhancing educational outcomes for girls in these settings where girls are not provided with boarding facilities.

Declaration

I declare that this part of doctoral thesis has been composed solely by myself and the full thesis appear in the Unicaf University repository for the award of Doctor of Education. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Data

Ministry data is retrieved from the "Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2018/19/20). *Malawi Education sector Analysis,* Lilongwe, Malawi

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