Second Chances: A Study of Rural Malawian Youth in a Complementary Basic Education Programme

By

Alison Malcolm

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Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

In Malawi, an estimated 202,000 children are out of school and of those in school, less than 50 percent reach grade five. Increasingly, alternatives to the formal school system are gaining traction as a means to reach these excluded children. Recognizing the necessity, the Malawian government recently stipulated a non-formal provision in its education plan.

As demand increases, it is important to consider what makes these programmes appealing and sustainable. Using qualitative interview methods, this study explores the lives of ten rural Malawian youth who are participating in an alternative initiative and investigates factors that have influenced the students to initially join and remain in the programme.

The study sheds light on experience with alternative education initiatives as seen from the student perspective and provides insight into influences, motivation and successful non-formal programming by linking the theoretical framework to the findings.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Article 26 of the Global Declaration for Human Rights states that everyone has the right to an Education. Yet it is well known that exclusion is a major concern in many formal school systems and not every child gets to exercise this right. A recently published UNESCO report notes that: “Primary education must be inclusive and accessible to all, in law as well as in fact” (2008), however in 2006 it was estimated that one hundred and fifteen million school-age children worldwide were not in school and the majority of this number are rural girls in developing countries (UNESCO 2006).

Debates about problems with the formal school system and how they can be improved are numerous, but less common is the turn away from the traditional model of schooling towards successful alternative education initiatives. There is some evidence of alternative education projects cropping up in developing contexts where excluded and marginalised children are most commonly found. Such initiatives “provide us with examples of successfully delivering opportunities for high-quality learning to the most disadvantaged children that do not depend on the eroding fiscal and managerial capacity of “fragile states”” (Farrell, 2003, p. 168). This research focuses on a select group of rural Malawian youths who are participating in an alternative education initiative for out-of-school youth. Accompanied by countless challenges, these youths have fought to learn how to read and write after being excluded from the formal primary system. This study inquires as to why, despite being excluded, these individuals have returned to some form of “school” and continue to remain in the programme. The overarching question my
study addresses is: What factors influenced the youths to return to school, and stay in the programme?

Outline

Chapter one, this current chapter, introduces the reader to the study, provides a brief overview of the geographical and cultural context and theoretical framework and explains the organisation of the remaining sections of the paper. Chapter two explores the conceptual foundations upon which the research is built: access and non-formal education. This chapter discusses each of these concepts, gives a brief overview of the historical use and defines how they are used in the study.

The chapter following has four functions: to provide a review of the literature pertaining to education in Malawi, to relate the literature to the concepts discussed in chapter two, access and non-formal education, to identify the gaps in this body of literature and to make conclusions in light of the review that emphasize the framework for the study.

Chapter four covers the study’s methodology. This includes the methods used and rationale behind them, the participants, research site, ethical considerations, data recording and analysis and limitations of the study.

Chapter five presents the data, which is organised by participant. Each section of this chapter focuses on re-creating aspects of the participant’s life, schooling experiences and thoughts, dreams and opinions surrounding her/his education. This chapter is told from my point of view, as I felt that this was the closest I could come to presenting actual events.
Chapter six presents the findings of the study which are categorised into four main themes and then further sub-divided. Discussion of these findings, implications and suggestions for future research are examined in the final concluding chapter.

**Rationale**

In 2004/2005 I travelled to, lived in, and worked in Malawi. As a teacher in both a formal international school and a volunteer in a local non-governmental setting, I observed the dichotomies between the forms of education and the inequalities of who was learning what. I became interested in exploring different forms of education in a Malawian context and the relation to access and equality.

Although it was apparent to me that multi-lateral organisations, local groups and various international funding bodies were interested in looking at and improving education in the country, it seemed that there was a lack of connection between educational policy and the experiences of actual students. What were the educational experiences of the students? Who was able to attend school and who were the excluded children? I began to question the connection between educational decisions, policy and/or innovations and what the students think. Where was the student voice in the success or failure of educational innovations? It seemed to me there was much debate surrounding poverty, education, HIV/AIDS, basic education, exclusion and policy, yet there is limited research or evidence available that focuses on the students who are the centre of the learning experience. As Hoppers (2006) notes, there is a need for “assessment of how learning is impacting on children’s and young people’s lives” (p. 123). I decided to focus on the students themselves with the intention of giving a vocal platform to some of the
most marginalised students – students who had been excluded from the formal system. I was interested to learn about their lives and individual experiences.

The warm welcome and acceptance I experienced while I was in Malawi also inspired me to explore ways in which I could give back to the community. At first, I considered looking at life histories of the students, but as I inquired further about alternative education initiatives in Malawi I discovered the Complementary Basic Education Programme (CBE). As I gathered more information, I came to see it as a promising initiative that my research could potentially benefit. It seemed to me that looking into reasons why the students enrol and stay in the programme would be the most valuable contribution to alternative education research.

The programme is still in its pilot stage which suggests that research of this nature may also be able to contribute to informing future decisions about the direction of the programme. Ideally, making such a contribution would ultimately lead to furthering alternative education initiatives and assisting disadvantaged populations in attaining a basic education and, hopefully, increased life opportunities, social mobility and access to power.

Furthermore, lessons can be learned from exploring the lives of the students in the CBE programme. Although these students were excluded from the formal system, they decided to return to school and have demonstrated some degree of success by remaining in the CBE programme for at least two years. What factors have led to this success and how can this knowledge help future students?

Lastly, as a westerner researching another country and culture, I realised that I would be bringing something back from Malawi to contribute to western society. I felt that there are far too many depictions of the developing world, especially Africa, as a
“failure”, as a “problem” and as a place where people are burdened by poverty and unhappy lives. I wanted to explore success stories of the individuals who, despite abundant hardships, exhibit courage and immeasurable strength in their daily lives – and fight hard to achieve their educational goals.

Context

Malawi

Malawi is a small country in South-east Africa (see appendix I for map) bordered by Mozambique to the south, Zambia to the east and Tanzania to the north-west. Lake Malawi, one of the largest Lakes in Africa, stretches along the east border from the northern tip to the central region of the country. Although there are many islands in the Lake, only two are inhabited and both are under Malawian jurisdiction. There are two major cities in the country, Lilongwe and Blantyre. Although the centrally-located Lilongwe has been declared the nation’s capital, the largest city and commercial centre is the more southern Blantyre.

The Bantu people settled the area in the 10th century and it remained primarily controlled by this group until colonised by the British in the 19th century. From 1891 until 1964, Malawi was known as Nyasaland, the British protectorate. After independence, the country was lead by Hastings Kamuzu Banda under a single-party rule until 1994 when the nation held its first democratic multiparty election. The current president, Bingu wa Mutharaka, has been in office since 2004 and is fairly well-received amongst Malawian people and foreign critics. Malawi is generally known for its positive international relationships and its pro-western foreign policy.
Both English and the dominant native tongue, Chichewa, have been declared national languages although several indigenous dialects are spoken in various regions. Colonisation brought Christianity to the region and today it remains the most dominant faith. The next largest group identify as Muslim. There are a number of tribes throughout the districts of Malawi, the two most prominent being Chewa and Nyanja.

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malawi’s Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.437, giving the country a rank of 164th out of 177 countries (2009). This may explain why Malawi has been deemed one of “the poorest countries” in the world by various sources, and said to be amongst “the least developed” and “heavily populated” countries. It currently has a population of over fourteen million people for its relatively small size of 118,484 sq km. The country has a high infant mortality rate and a low average life expectancy, both of which are representative of the high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate. Current statistics show that 11.9 percent of the population are known to be infected.

The economy is mostly agriculture based and the majority of Malawian people are rural subsistence farmers. Since the early nineties, Malawi has been financially dependent on outside sources, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and in 2006 was approved for relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) program. Such dependence has given the international community a strong voice in the country’s development initiatives. This dependent relationship has re-oriented Malawi’s

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1 HDI is a measurement used by the United Nations Development Program claiming to measure ‘human development.’ It combines measures of literacy, life expectancy, educational attainment, and GDP per capita. Although a fairly standard measuring tool, there are criticisms of the method, including that it does not effectively involve ecological concerns or measure quality of life.
economic and structural priorities and contributes to several other challenges the nation faces. A citation taken from the CIA factbook demonstrates the mainstream western viewpoint that development in Malawi is particularly essential: “The government faces many challenges including developing a market economy, improving educational facilities, facing up to environmental problems, dealing with the rapidly growing problem of HIV/AIDS, and satisfying foreign donors that fiscal discipline is being tightened” (2009).

The CBE Programme

The Complementary Basic Education programme (CBE) is a para-formal programme which aims to provide out-of-school youth with a basic education in a flexible three year course. Overall, the programme strives to be community based, student-centred and cost-efficient. In Malawi, primary school consists of 8 years of education. The CBE is designed to be equivalent to the 6th year and CBE literature states that the goal of the programme is to re-integrate the out-of-school youth into the formal system after completion or partial completion of the programme.

Implemented in 2006, the programme is still in its pilot stage and is in a continual “scaling up” phase. The programme is funded by German Technical Co-operation.

2 Para-formal refers to a programme partly integrated in the formal system. A full definition and discussion on definitions of non-formal education is provided in Chapter two.

3 Administrators and student both reported to me that this was rare, and mainly because of their age, most students in the programme were not planning on returning to primary school.
(GTZ)\textsuperscript{4}, with help from UNICEF, and is working in partnership with the Malawian Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. These bodies work in partnership with civil society, which operate CBE centres on a more local level.

At present, there are 106 CBE learning centres dispersed through three districts of the country, each district having been selected due to its particularly high number of out-of-school youth and the presence of a suitable service provider. The learning centres are located in a venue suitable to the learners and are cost-efficient, meaning they are in existing community buildings located close to student homes. The centres are managed by a committee of volunteers from the community who may also act as substitute teachers and child-care workers for students with small children.

The programme runs five days a week for 36 weeks of the year, and does not generally operate during rainy season or peak farming times. The scheduling is designed to run either for three hours in the morning or three hours in the afternoon depending on which time the community members agree upon. All three centres which I focused on ran afternoon programmes which I was told enabled the students to help with farming in the mornings.

Each learning centre is intended to support forty students and one facilitator, although the first 12 learning centres (the pilot centres) have two facilitators, one male and one female. The facilitators are not ministry trained teachers, but secondary school-leavers from the community who have either completed secondary school or had two years of secondary school education. Recruitment, training and employment of the facilitators.

\textsuperscript{4} GTZ is an international co-operation enterprise that supports the German government in focusing on and achieving sustainable development goals internationally. See http://www.gtz.de/en/index.htm for more information.
community-based staff are carried out by the service provider, which is a non-
-governmental organisation operating at the local level. Training consists of a two week
induction programme followed by weekly in-service training and several between-term
training sessions.

The curriculum is based on the primary school curriculum but adapted to suit the
needs of older learners and focuses on basic education such as literacy (in English and
Chichewa) and numeracy, but also concentrates on practical “livelihood” skills including
farming, healthy living, cooking and construction. According to CBE literature, “60
percent of class time is spent on literacy in the local language, English and Numeracy just
as in the primary schools. The other 40 percent covers the same content as primary
schools but reorganized to take account of the needs of older learners.” (Concept Note
2008). Facilitators regularly follow a detailed teacher’s guide to deliver the lessons,
which from my observations and student reports seem active, student-centred and
interesting. Teachers use a variety of methods including role-play, song, student-led
discussion and group work.

**Framing the Research**

The framework for this study is influenced mainly by my experiences travelling
and working overseas and my interactions with ideas and literature that seemed to explain
these experiences and understandings. As a researcher, I am the central component to the
research itself, which is shaped by my own history, gender, class, race and ethnicity
(Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Thus, I bring a particular viewpoint to the study and build the
research around this perspective, which is also shaped by my identity and my
experiences. As Merriam (1991) also notes, “A theoretical perspective is a way of looking at the world, like assumptions people have about what is important, and what makes the world work” (p. 53).

Methodology

The study uses qualitative research methods and involves semi-structured interviews with eleven CBE participants. I chose to use qualitative methods because I felt that it best represented my intention to study the experiences of a particular group in a particular context. Not only did I intend to knowingly incorporate myself in the research process, but I also aimed to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5).

All participants were termed “out-of-school-youth” by the Malawi Ministry of Education, meaning that they were between the ages of twelve and twenty and had either been out of school for one year or more or had never been to school. Each participant was interviewed twice, for thirty minutes to over one hour per interview. During the first set of interviews, I realised the importance of developing a rapport with each participant and found that in general, the second interview was more constructive likely due to an increased feeling of comfort on both the students end and my end. Interview questions focused on life histories and background, experiences in the formal school and experiences and thoughts on the CBE (see appendix II for interview themes chart).
Theoretical Framework

My international experience has led me to question the relationship between developing countries and the Western world, and I’ve been drawn to literature which critically examines this relationship and how it influences social, political and educational development. Drawn from works by world-systems, critical and postcolonial theorists, including Samoff (1993, 1999), Carnoy (1982), Stromquist (2003) and Clayton (1998), the study is framed within three main assumptions which explain inequalities in power and marginalization through a dependent, neocolonial relationship between the capitalist West and the Global South.

The first assumption is that dominant ideology significantly influences the view of education and highlights a perspective of education that prioritizes economic development. Globalisation and neoliberalism are two dominant ideological forces which influence and shape education in the global arena largely through foreign assistance and international aid. Globalisation refers to the tightly intertwined economic and education agendas which major international donor and technical assistance agencies promote in order to ultimately return capital to the core states (Arnove, 2003). These agendas create conflicting global and local priorities which Arnove (2003) refers to: “there is a dialectic at work by which these global processes interact with national and local actors and contexts” (p. 3). Within this framework of globalisation and neoliberal thought, the main function of education is to promote economic growth within the nation-state and subsequently, stakeholders look at how education can contribute to national economic development rather than viewing it as a human right (Samoff, 1999). These pervasive ideologies influence education policies of advanced-capitalist nation-states, or
“centre” states (Carnoy, 1982) which in turn exert influence over developing (or “periphery”) countries’ national policies through transnational policies and foreign aid. Peripheral nations participate in this world system in which they are subordinate because it represents “an opportunity for access to valued resources (technology, capital and skills) as well as the likelihood of economic subjugation by stronger nations” (Arnove, 1980 p. 49) while centre states anticipate a return of capital from peripheral nations.

Samoff (1993) specifically notes how foreign aid dependency permeates many African countries: “Over time, it has come to seem not only obvious but unexceptional that new initiatives and reform programs require external support and, therefore responsiveness to the agenda and preferences of the funding agency (ies)” (Samoff 1993). As I will discuss in the literature review, Malawi’s education system has been heavily influenced by donor agencies and transnational organisations which look toward education as a means of improving economic development.

The second assumption provides background justification for the source of marginalised groups in Malawi by acknowledging that formal education within the current global capitalist system is inherently exclusionary. Inequalities in education are a product of the social-class structure intrinsic to a capitalist system (Carnoy 1982). Thus, capitalist developing countries who adopt the formal education system of Western states implement a system that is “inherently unequal, dependent and restrictive” (Carnoy 1982). The literature analysis for this study exposes that access is an existing issue in Malawi and there are a significant number of children who are excluded from the formal system, meaning they have never been to school, have been to school but have dropped-out or have been to school but have not actually learned anything.
The third and final assumption is that the excluded children are generally minority groups, including those differentiated by class, gender, race, language, religion, ethnicity or location (Samoff, 1993; Stromquist, 2000; Farrell, 2003). This again corroborates the findings of the literature review, which reveal access issues most apparent with rural populations, girls, those of low-socioeconomic status and those affected by HIV/AIDS.

I created the diagram below to illustrate how these three assumptions form the basis for the framework in which the study is set. The outer circles show the hegemonic ‘forces’ operating advanced capitalist (western) states, which in turn influence national education policies of developing countries (in this case Malawi) through a dependent neo-colonial relationship. This influence manifests itself through aid and transnational policies affecting education. Ideology is passed through these layers into the formal school system, the community and civil society. As noted, the formal school system is heavily influenced by this ideology and consequently is inherently exclusionary, thus accounting for the excluded group of children without access to the formal school. The CBE programme, incorporating elements of community, civil society and the formal system, is situated within these influences and is a means by which excluded children can access a basic education.
Figure 1: Framework for Study
Chapter Two: Conceptual Foundations: Access and Non-Formal Education

Introduction

Statistics show that many children, particularly in the developing world, do not have access to a basic education through the formal school system. Educators and policy-makers are increasingly considering alternatives outside of the traditional formal system as one possible solution to providing excluded children with access to an education. This study focuses on the issue of unequal access to education in Malawi, looks at who is excluded from the formal system and how, and asks why some youth from the excluded group return to “schooling” in the form of an alternative programme. The students who participated in this study are categorised by the CBE programme as “out-of-school” children and youth, meaning they had either never attended primary school, attended but dropped out of the system or attended but had been excluded for other reasons.

Key concepts used in the study are access and non-formal education. In order to clearly situate this study which is built upon these key concepts, it is necessary to discuss current ideas surrounding both access and non-formal education (NFE) and outline the particular definitions this research employs. The first part of this chapter briefly reviews current statistical data on access, examines what literature says regarding access in the developing world, and outlines a definition of access used throughout this study. The second section of the chapter presents an overview of NFE, discusses what is meant by the term NFE, and describes how NFE is defined in this study.
**Access as an Issue**

Literature shows that a high number of children, particularly those in developing countries, are excluded from the formal primary school system. At the Dakar conference in 2000, for example, it was estimated that over 130 million children were not in school. According to Farrell and Hartwell (2008), “there are more than one hundred million children who never enter primary school” (p. 11). In regards to Malawi, the 2009 EFA Report cites 202 000 out-of-school children between the ages of six and eleven, noting these children are “not enrolled at all” (p. 307). Statistics additionally expose high numbers of children who do enrol in school but drop-out or fail to attend classes. For example, EFA stats show the survival rate to grade 5 is less than 50 percent in Malawi (EFA 2008) and in 2005 UNESCO reported that only 57 percent of Malawian children complete a full-course of primary education.

Beyond the numbers showing enrolment rates, survival rates and repetition rates, authors highlight that there is the question of how much is being learned. Farrell and Hartwell (2008) point out that in most developing countries, fewer than half of the students that remain in school acquire “even a minimal level of literacy (and consequently other basic curricular objectives)” (p. 11) and from a similar perspective, Lewin (2007) notes that “neither Gross nor Net enrolment rates are sufficient to indicate progress” (p. 21).

**Definition of Access**

Enrolment rates, survival rates and the question of how much is actually being learned are all important aspects in defining access. However, gross enrolment rates and net enrolment rates alone cannot clearly give the full picture of access. For this reason,
this study uses a “model of equality” (Farrell 2003) which provides a full and comprehensive picture of what is meant by *access to schooling*. Farrell (2003) refers to educational access by way of a series of “sorting points” and levels of equality. He presents a model comprised of four distinguishable aspects of equality: equality of access, equality of survival, equality of output and equality of outcome. Equality of access refers to the process of actually getting into the school system, and also “what type of institution or stream to which the student is given access” (p. 156). Equality of survival denotes staying in the system and attending classes, which is affected by drops-outs and high repetition rates. Equality of output refers to how much a student may learn, and as Farrell (2003) notes, “generally, among those who have reached a given level of a nation’s school system, children who are poor, rural, female, or from any other socially marginalised group, learn less” (p. 161). Finally, equality of outcome, though not as relevant for this research, suggests that the students have somewhat equal life chances, opportunities and socio-economic status after achieving a certain degree of schooling. This study refers to access as a culmination of the first three of these “sorting points” of equality to look at access to education, or “equality” in Malawi. From this perspective, it is clear that the issue of access is complex and cannot be understood only through EFA statistics – which may not address all of the key points noted above.

In summary, this research is built around the understanding that “access” is more than an issue of numbers and enrolment rates, but rather a series of equalities or inequalities that look at: i) the chance to attend a school, ii) regular attendance and advancement through grades or “survival”, iii) occurrence of meaningful learning, and iv) that students have equal chances at opportunities, careers, self-sufficiency and access to
power. The next chapter, which reviews the literature on education in Malawi, uses this comprehensive model of equality to explore the issue of access in Malawi.

**Defining Non-Formal Education**

One route by which educators, policy-makers and developers have sought to combat the “problem of access” is through non-formal education (NFE) initiatives. Although many forms of education (or learning) have always been occurring outside of the formal schools, non-formal education became part of the international discourse on education policy in the early seventies and in 1974 Coombs and Ahmed defined it as “any organized, systematic, education activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population” (p. 8). Since then, NFE has evolved towards what literature reveals to be a wide discussion about how to define NFE and what Rogers (2004) calls the “great debate on NFE” (p. 3). It is necessary to understand this complex and wide ranging concept of NFE and be aware of the varying definitional debates that exist in current literature. This section briefly examines this debate and identifies the NFE definition used in this particular study.

Since Coombs and Ahmed’s (1974) early and broad definition, literature today reveals that NFE has developed into a multitude of different definitions which can be placed upon a broad spectrum. Current NFE authors give varying and complex definitions and stress differing views on what is important to consider when defining NFE. For example, Rose (2007) notes that the definition of NFE should raise issues of who provides the differing forms of education. Some authors contend that NFE can be
defined differently depending on the context (Rogers, 2004; Thompson, 2001).

Generally, however, authors agree that in most contexts NFE refers to learning activities outside of the formal-schooling system. Rogers (2004) perceives NFE as many things depending on the context and notes that there is “no consensus” amongst scholars towards what NFE may refer to. From the literature it is quite clear that all recent NFE authors take note of the difficulty in defining the term itself, some authors even claiming that the term itself “has lost all meaning and relevance” amidst definitional debates (Hoppers, 2006, pg. 18).

The causes or motivations behind this definitional debate are varied amongst current NFE authors. Difficulties in defining NFE may come from changes in both the formal and non-formal systems that have caused the boundaries between the two spheres to blur significantly (Hoppers, 2006; Rogers, 2004; Rose, 2007). For instance, some authors comment that the formal education system, in developing contexts, seems to have lost its rigidity (Hoppers, 2006). Rogers (2004) argues that “the concept of formal and non-formal in education no longer fits reality. Education cannot be cleanly divided into two pigeon-holes. There have been...some who have said this for a long time, but it has become particularly apparent today” (p. 239). This incapacity to clearly define or separate either form of education has sparked discussion on defining both forms of education.

Some authors note that one particular cause of the definitional debate is from the extensive diversity of the types of NFE (Hoppers 2005; Rose, 2007). This diversity of programmes is obvious from all literature reviewed and is apparent by the numerous types, groups and sub-groups of NFE and their varying definitions. As such, terminology becomes particularly muddled when attempting to define NFE by dividing it into types, groups and sub-groups. Some common sub-types or sub definitions include terms such as
alternative education, complementary or supplementary education, community schools and flexible schooling. In NFE literature in the context of Malawi, the common types of NFE that crop up include community schools, adult literacy programmes, village-based schools, vocational training and complementary education (also called para-formal education or flexible schooling) (Dowd, 2004; Hyde et al., 1996; Swann, 2007).

In light of this dialogue, other terms or descriptors for NFE are emerging. For example, materializing from the debate is the idea that NFE is not about definitions, but rather about common traits reconceptualised into a set of “good practices” that outline what makes an NFE initiative successful (Farrell, 2008; Rose, 2007; Torres, 2001). For instance, Rose (2007) suggests that NFE should be defined by a set of typical characteristics and outlines some of these as alternative, child-centered, flexible/participatory, bottom-up and locally relevant. According to Torres (2001), “acknowledging diversity, demand-driven, needs assessment, ownership, family and community participation, decentralization, school autonomy, flexibility, accountability, transparency, etc., have become mainstream thinking and attributes of “good practice”” (p. 5). Farrell (2007) takes a similar approach and notes that some common features of successful “alternative” education programmes include being child-centered, active, free-flowing and with community involvement. In light of the framework of the Complimentary Basic Education (CBE) programme, which aims to be child and community centered, this study utilizes this current perspective as NFE as a set of good-practices employed outside of the traditional system.
Definition Used in this Study

In terms of definitions, the CBE programme comes under the canopy of non-formal education in that it subscribes to most typical NFE characteristics and at its most basic corresponds to Ahmed and Coombs (1974) original definition mentioned above. According to Hoppers’ definitions, CBE is considered para-formal education, which refers to programmes that tend to run parallel to the formal system and often provide a substitute for formal provisions (p. 20). Indeed, the CBE Implementation Strategy (December 2006) refers to the programme as “flexible schooling” and in the footnotes clarifies that flexible schooling is another term for para-formal education, which “situates the system quite accurately between current understanding of formal education and non-formal education” (p. 1, footnote 2). Similarly, the programme is also referred to as complementary denoting that it is a counterpart to the formal system, suggesting its aim to return out-of-school youth to the formal system.

Call for Research on NFE

To some authors, reconceptualising the term necessitates a re-working of NFE and a new stock-taking of what NFE programmes are offered. Many current NFE authors outline a ‘what now’ agenda and suggest a framework for future directions of NFE.

Rose (2007) shows concern over the role of the provider in the case of NFE. From this perspective, she argues that there needs to be “rigorous analysis of NGO programmes” (Rose, 2007 p. 13). Other authors share a similar view, and from the literature reviewed, it appears there is a common understanding that what is most needed
in NFE advancement is a thorough examination and analysis of current NFE initiatives (Farrell and Hartwell, 2007; Hoppers, 2006; Rose, 2007).

In his publication, Hoppers (2006) focuses on the merger of NFE with providing children with a basic education. He expands on the idea that a thorough examination of current NFE programmes needs to occur by noting that “basic data need to be systematically collected for a wide variety of characteristics that enable initiatives to be placed within an overall national framework of basic education provisions” (p. 121) and an in-depth analysis of the actual experience of “how learning relates to the reduction of poverty and social inequalities” is necessary in future research (Hoppers, 2006, p. 122, 123).
Chapter Three: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter outlines the context of the study and reviews the literature on education in Malawi. A historical overview of formal education and outline of the socio-political context of the country is presented first, followed by a review of the literature addressing the question: what are the current issues surrounding access to education in Malawi? This inquiry uses Farrell’s (2003) model of equality framework as discussed in the previous chapter to define access, thus looks at access in terms of equality of access, equality of survival and equality of output. Through this review of the relevant historical background followed by an examination of current literature and empirical data, four central themes relevant to educational access in Malawi are outlined; the quality of education, gender, health HIV/AIDS, and economics. Following a discussion of these themes, the chapter looks at the literature surrounding NFE in Malawi and gives an overview of the programme used in this study, the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme. I conclude the chapter by identifying issues and gaps that have emerged from the review.

Formal Education in Malawi: Historical Background and Implementation of Free Primary Education

Before Malawi’s independence in 1964, the small east African nation was under the rule of British colonialism. Literature that exists on education in Malawi before this
era is mainly traveller stories and expatriate anecdotal writings that outline education as being Western, church-based and limited to creating Malawian elite (Hudson, 1996; Kendall, 2007; Pretorius, 1967; Rimmington, 1966). After Independence, Western-educated Hastings Kamuzu Banda led the country in a single-party government calling himself “President-for life”. The ministry of education came directly under Banda’s control, and he ensured educational access was limited to a few, mostly male, students (Kendall, 2007). During his rule, primary school enrolment rates were below 50 percent, and according to Mungazi (1997) the literacy rate in 1990 was only 25 percent. There was also a large gap in favour of educating boys and although girls’ education became more notable during the early nineties, “the regime lacked a coherent approach to gender inequalities in education” (Swainson, 2000, p. 52). Secondary and higher education was considered more important, and primary school was not developed.

It is important to note that the Banda government also consistently resisted international aid. However, in the early eighties Malawi was confronted with a financial crisis and as a consequence, government funds allotted to education dropped from 13.7 percent to 8.9 percent (Kendall, 2007), and the majority of these funds went to the elite Kamuzu Academy (Lwanda, 1993). Under this pressure, Banda conceded to international aid funding, and programs were established to waive primary school fees and support girls’ education, though they operated with limited governmental support. As Kendall (2007) notes, these programs were successful in that they increased the number of students participating in primary school but they did not significantly change the school environment or educational system.

Education took a new turn when in 1992, after 28 years of authoritarian rule, Banda called for a referendum on multiparty democratic governance. Parties campaigned
for 2 years following and in 1994, democracy was implemented. Bakili Muluzi, leader of the UDF (United Democratic Front) party was elected into power and one of his primary acts was to implement Free Primary Education (FPE). Literature reviewed suggests that FPE was largely a political act to secure support for the newly elected government and increase international aid (Durston & Nashire, 2001; Kadzamira & Rose, 2003; Kendall, 2007).

By 1995, problems in education infrastructure were apparent and an education policy and investment framework (PIF) was implemented to accommodate FPE and has been updated several times, the most recent version emerging in 2001. According to Kadzamira & Rose (2003), the most recent PIF reflects foreign interests and was developed “in close collaboration with major donors in education, in particular USAID, DFID, DANIDA and JICA” (p. 504).

The most recent documents guiding the Malawian government are the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy and the National Education Sector Plan, developed in 2008 and in use until 2017, which makes a provision for non-formal education.

**Quality as a Concern**

With the introduction of FPE in 1994, primary enrolment rose from 1.9 million to 2.9 million students (Chimombo, 2005). Durston & Nashire (2001) note that this figure may be as high as 3.2 million, depending on the source. Despite this leap, the Education for All (EFA) report (2007) shows that in 1990/1991, before FPE, 64.5 percent of students reached standard 5 and 10 years later, this number had dropped to only 32.8 percent. One suggested explanation is that although FPE significantly improved primary
school enrolment rates and equality of access, this increase has brought many other challenges, including “major infrastructure problems and a decline in quality” (Sustainable Development Network Programme [SDNP], 2007). There is a considerable amount of literature dealing with the quality of education in Malawi, both in terms of empirical data and structured research and analysis. Statistical data available reveals high student/teacher rates and a lack of trained teachers. For example, according to data from the Malawi National Statistics Office (NSO) the average pupil/teacher ratio in Malawi in 2005 was 71 students per teacher. However, statistics from the Education for All (EFA) report (2007) show that in 2002/2003, the average student teacher ratio was 62 pupils to one teacher, demonstrating that either this number had increased significantly or the sources are unreliable. Furthermore, the EFA Report (2005) reports that only 51 percent of teachers in the country are trained, although this percentage has risen slightly from 46 percent in 1998/1999. These figures additionally tend to be more extreme in rural areas. For example, one rural area in Malawi reported a ratio of 104 students to one teacher in 2005 (National Statistics Office Malawi [NSO] 2006). Statistics from the Zomba district show a clear example of the disparities between rural and urban, with the urban district showing a ratio of 37 students to one teacher as compared with the Zomba rural district in which this number more than doubles at 88 students to one teacher (NSO 2006).

The literature reveals a general consensus among authors claiming that FPE significantly decreased the quality of education (Al-Samarrai and Zaman, 2002; Kendall, 2007; Kadzamira & Rose, 2003; Chimombo, 2005; Chimombo et al., 2001). Nancy Kendall (2007) notes the poor educational quality in one village after doing ethnographic research saying, “Interviewees reported a deterioration of learning environments and outcomes... parents said that past graduates could write a basic letter in English by
standard 5. Now most students in standard 8 could not do so” (p. 296). Additionally, the increase in student enrolment has left a lack of proper facilities for students, meaning students are often without desks, chairs, schoolbooks and other resources. In a case study approach, Chimombo (2005) shows that some students are even left without classrooms and the teacher must conduct lessons under trees. In the central western district of Malawi, statistics show an average of 122 students per classroom available (NSO 2006).

The Malawi Ministry of Education (MoE) remarks on the importance of school quality noting that “the poor quality of education has tended to contribute to the very high rate of dropouts and repeaters, particularly at the primary level. This has resulted in extremely low levels of internal efficiency of the primary system” (pg.2). Subsequently, statistics reveal an increase in repetition and dropout rates showing the effects of educational quality on equality of survival. For example, the EFA report shows that in 1998/1999 the survival rate to grade 5 was 44.1 percent but had dropped to 32.8 percent by 2001/2002 (2007).

**Gender Issues**

Gender inequities are very much evident in Malawi and these imbalances are particularly apparent in the education sector, impacting girls’ access to education. Statistical data shows that FPE increased enrolment rates for girls. For example, UNICEF (2007) reported that in 2005, 97 percent of girls were enrolled in primary school as compared to 92 percent of boys. However, literacy rates demonstrate a wide discrepancy between males and females. For example, the EFA 2005 report notes that 68 percent of
illiterate youth are female. Moreover, according to the CIA factbook (2003), only 49.8 percent of girls over 15 years of age are literate, as compared to 76 percent of males.

Internal efficiency further demonstrates inequalities in gender, illustrating lower equality of survival and equality of output for Malawian girls. The EFA report shows that the percentage of girls who repeat standard one and two is lower than that of boys but the same source shows that from standard 3 onwards boys have an increasingly lower repetition rate, and in 2002/2003, 11.5 percent of girls repeated standard six as compared to 8.7 percent of boys (2007). While the majority of statistical data available reflects this high repetition rate, data from the Malawi Ministry of Education shows female repetition rates as relatively equal to those of boys. This again demonstrates the unreliability of statistical data. However, the NSO reports a lower number of promotion rates for females then males. For example, in 2005, 70 percent of girls were promoted to standard eight as compared to 77 percent of boys.

Gender issues are most apparent in the drop-out statistics, reflecting an issue in access in terms of equality of survival. While girls may be enrolling in schools, numbers show that they are not staying in the schools. In 1998, 64.9 percent of females dropped out and by 2001, this number had risen to 69.1 percent (EFA, 2007). Furthermore, the NSO statistics show that in 2005, 15 percent of boys dropped out of standard eight as compared to 27 percent of girls (NSO, 2007).

The literature reviewed argues that the high female drop-out rate is due to various factors including negative treatment of girls’ at school (Chimombo et al., 2000; DevTech, 2004), societal gender norms (Scharff, 2007; DevTech, 2004; Chimombo et al., 2000) and sexual harassment or violence (DevTech, 2004; Kadzamira et al., 2001; Scharff, 2007). All authors agree that gender is a multi-faceted issue and reasons for gender
inequities in schools are numerous and complex. In relation to FPE, Chimombo et al (2000) argue that the problems incurred because of FPE, such as low quality and internal efficiency, hit females the hardest. Their study questions why this is despite “the mass efforts to improve girls’ education” Kadzamira & Rose (2003) argue that many children tend to enrol in school later than the official age of six years and consequently they often do not complete primary school before they reach puberty, which is problematic because girls drop-out of school because of pregnancy and/or early marriage.

The effectiveness of girls’ educational programs is a debate evident in some of the literature. For example, while Scharff (2007) argues that programs such as the USAID funded AGSP program “improved conditions for girls” (p. 5), Kadzamira & Rose (2003), argue that FPE brought an increase in external donor funding and spread donor projects aimed at improving girls’ education but because of heavy donor involvement, “initiatives aimed at improving girls’ schooling have not always been internalised within the ministry of education, partly due to weak organisational structures” (pp. 504).

The literature is consistent and in agreement about purposes for equalising education between genders and approaches the issue from an economic development perspective. Authors argue that improving girls’ education in the country would further economic growth and productivity (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003; Scharff, 2007), help fight HIV/AIDS (Chimombo et al., 2000; DevTech, 2004; Kadzamira & Rose, 2003; Scharff, 2007) and alleviate poverty (Scharff, 2007).
Economics

The literature reviewed points to poverty (or economic conditions) both at the national and local level as an underlying and continual issue in access to education. Authors refer to the economic context in various ways but generally the literature, including statistical data, suggests that the country faces severe economic poverty. Durston & Nashire (2001) note the difficulty in defining the term ‘poverty’, noting that “the definition of poverty is contestable” but generally, “the concept embraces human development, social inclusion, sustainable livelihoods, individual consumption, security and income” (pp. 75).

For example, Kadzamira & Rose (2003) define Malawi’s poverty level by referring to its declining GDP and place it “amongst the poorest countries in the world” (pp. 502) and Chimombo et al (2000) claim that Malawi is putting extreme pressure on the land, education, employment, health and forestry, wood energy, and the environment because of it’s high population growth.

Statistics additionally point out the economic conditions in the country and unsurprisingly, the majority of the literature on Malawi’s economic context relies heavily on statistics, most notably from the EFA Global Monitoring Report. The report notes that in 2002, Malawi’s net aid per capita in US$ was 31.8 and 76 percent of the population is living on less than 2 US dollars a day. Malawi’s relative poverty level can also be identified by looking at the extremely low life expectancy (Durston & Nashire, 2001), which the EFA reports as 37.5 for males and 37.7 for females between 2000 and 2005 (2007).

Durston & Nashire (2001) are the only authors who take into account peoples’ own perception of their poverty, which differed at the individual and community level,
though lack of schools featured as a response from villagers describing poverty at the community level. They also noted that when “asked to comment on changes over the past few years, approximately 10 people in 8 out of 12 of the villages agreed that poverty had increased” (pp.78). However, it is necessary to consider the sources of the statistics, noting that they derive from government stakeholders or transnational institutions.

Initially, it was widely purported that FPE would alleviate poverty at the individual and household level and allow access to the poorest Malawian children. However, what nearly all the literature reveals is a severe critique of FPE, most authors arguing that FPE does not contribute to poverty reduction at all. Although FPE was alleged to provide access to the most impoverished children, the top reason amongst children who never attended school is for lack of money for fees, uniform or other related costs (NOS, 2005), revealing household income to be a barrier to equality of access and suggesting that the poorest children are often excluded. Kadzamira & Rose (2003) further corroborate this by noting that “although they do not have to pay fees, they still incur other direct costs of education such as buying exercise books, pens and clothes for school” (pp.506). Moreover, the most impoverished child often does not attend school because her family cannot abide by the loss of income (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). In addition, because the low quality of education increases the length of a child's schooling needed to achieve basic skills, the direct and indirect costs of acquiring basic literacy and numeracy are increased, which is most problematic for poorer households (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003).

Although FPE was designed with the goal of alleviating poverty in Malawi, most authors see it as only serving to highlight issues, and to some scholars it can even be considered “anti-poor” (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). Literature clearly shows that the
economic situation on both a national and household level it a key theme influencing educational access.

**HIV/Aids**

Current data also reveals another issue in education that is an overarching, external factor severely impacting educational access, development and progress. Like much of sub-Saharan Africa, Malawi has a high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, at an estimated 15 percent (EFA Report, 2005). UNAIDS (2006) reports the prevalence rate as being as low as 6.9 and as high as 21.4. While HIV/AIDS has a direct impact on the health of both students and teachers, the data also outlines the high number of orphans in Malawi. UNICEF estimates in 2005, there were five hundred and fifty children orphaned by AIDS in the country. However, the NSO reported over 290,000 children with only one living parent and almost 150,000 orphans with both parents dead in 2005. This high number of orphans has a significant impact on school enrolment (Durston & Nashire, 2001). Orphans tend to be less likely to attend school or more likely to drop out (NSO, 2007). This is also evident for children with sick relatives. In a recent publication, Human Rights Watch (2003) noted that “withdrawing children from school or not enrolling them at all appears to be a common coping mechanism for families affected by AIDS, which both impoverishes families and creates the need for children to help with care of an ill person or with bringing income into the family” (p. 16).

The literature shows HIV/AIDS as closely linked to gender. According to UNICEF statistics, in 2005 3.4 percent of males between 15 and 24 were infected as compared to 9.6 percent of females of the same age. Moreover, most often children who
are withdrawn from school to be care-givers to family members with HIV/AIDS are female (White, Kachika, Kathewra-Banda, 2005) and the NSO (2007) shows that more orphaned females never attend school as compared to males. By the same token, HIV/AIDS is more widespread in homes with a lower socio-economic status, suggesting that children (mainly girls) who are most in need of education are the children that are most likely to not attend school because of illness in the family (White, Kachika, Kathewra-Banda, 2005).

The literature shows varying ways in which HIV/AIDS and education intersect. First, HIV/AIDS can be looked at as negatively affecting enrolment and drop-out rates, which is a hindrance to increasing education development (Kadzamira et al., 2001; Scharff, 2007). Students who become ill will likely drop-out of school and considering the disproportionately high number of females who contract HIV/AIDS, this furthers hinders the achievement of gender parity in schools (Scharff, 2007). Secondly, the education system is often seen as a “vaccine” for HIV/AIDS (Coombe & Kelly, 2001) though the available literature deals with the Sub-Saharan Africa region rather than Malawi specifically. And lastly, education can be looked at as perpetuating the virus itself and further increasing the vulnerability of young females through gender based violence in schools (DevTech, 2004; Kadzamira et al., 2001). These diverse intersections show a complex and interconnected cyclical relationship between the virus and education.

A notable problem with data regarding HIV/AIDS is the question of reliability. Although significant, albeit unreliable, statistical data exists, there is little literature available regarding analyses of the relationship between education and HIV/AIDS specifically in Malawi. A significant challenge as noted by researchers (Kadzamira et al.,
2001) in conducting research on HIV/AIDS is the stigma surrounding the virus and the lack of willingness to discuss the issue with researchers.

**NFE in Malawi**

One route aiming to increase access to education in Malawi is through alternative, non-formal education programmes. Although some authors argue that initially implementation of FPE left non-formal education “a forgotten priority” (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003, p. 512), this route is beginning to be seen as a possible approach to address some of the access issues mentioned in this review. Recently, the nation’s 2004 Education for All plan included a provision for non-formal education, a vast change from a previous view that saw non-formal education as a threat to government provided systems. It is becoming more and more accepted that education, particularly basic education, can be provided through many different channels. Swann (2007) notes this:

> The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training is responsible for providing basic education to children between the ages of 6 and 17 years. Where this provision has not been made, there is scope for complementary systems and flexible schooling. In 2004 Malawi produced a Draft Education for All (EFA) Plan, which refers to the provision of alternative forms of education to youth who have dropped out of school and those who never attended school. (p. 3)

However, literature documenting such programmes is scarce, particularly in Malawi. In 2007, Swann provided an overview of non-formal education programmes operating in Malawi for an upcoming EFA report. This document categorises major programmes by type and by provider. These include large donor supported programmes
that focus on literacy and girls’ education such as National Adult literacy Programme (NALP) and Adolescent Girls Literacy Programme (AGLIT) (Swann, 2007). Other common education related non-formal programmes by donor organisations, non-governmental organisations and faith organisations include life-skills and feeding initiatives, including HIV/AIDS programmes, and training in income-generation and vocational programmes.

There is some literature regarding the Save the Children and USAID funded village based schools (VBS) programme which ran from 1994 – 1998. A report conducted 2 years into the pilot stage determined VBS to be successful in providing rural areas with effective early-primary education, had high parental-satisfaction, employed competent community-based teachers, showed lower dropout and repetition rates than government schools and students demonstrated competent levels of math, English and Chichewa (Hyde et al., 1996).

A report commissioned by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) in 2006 notes that “Village Based schools in Malawi reach over 300,000 children” and argues that the programme is a success in terms of equality of access (Balwanz et al., 2006). However, Kadzamira & Rose (2004) contend that the programme was a failure, arguing that the ultimate failure of VBS came from the lack of government support and receptivity to diversifying educational practices. They further note that the programme is no longer functioning, but rather the schools have been absorbed into the formal system.
Gaps in the Literature

Current literature on education in Malawi points to poor quality, gender imbalances, poverty and the spread of HIV/AIDS as main issues impacting educational access that are interconnected in a complex relationship extending itself even beyond the education arena. There is ample evidence revealing these themes as “problem areas” which policy-makers and funders may look towards regarding development. However, there are several glaring gaps in the data set on education in Malawi, notably in regards to alternative solutions to these “problem areas”. Specifically, there is very little literature addressing alternative, or non-formal education initiatives, particularly “successful” initiatives, and literature reflecting or addressing the voice of the local youth whom education is supposedly benefitting.

The amount of literature and data on the individual themes discussed reveals the above four issues as areas as foci for government aid agencies and stakeholders pushing for EFA goals. Moreover, the majority of literature available on the discussed topics is empirical data presented as statistics or studies conducted from a functional-modernist perspective that pose a question, conduct a study, and present findings. Despite the unreliability and inconsistency amongst some statistics, little literature exists from other theoretical perspectives. This study, however, takes a more critical stance and attempts to incorporate and consider the voice of the local youth in the study and findings.

Although the literature shows that various organisations and donors are operating NFE programmes in the country that may target the foci addressed, there is little documentation surrounding such initiatives beyond perfunctory reports and general statistics. What are the programmes that are currently operating? Are any of these
programmes successful in terms of providing access? How are individual lives affected by these initiatives?

Additionally, the issues discussed need to be considered from all interest groups. Literature reveals the interests of transnational organisations, policy-makers and politicians, but what is notably lacking from this set of data and literature is the voice of the local actor. It would be interesting to examine the role of local actors in addressing educational issues. Future researchers should ask the question: What roles do the individual actors play and/or how are the individual lives affected by the educational challenges and global policies?
Chapter Four: Methodology

Introduction

Denzin & Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” and further highlight that “it consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). I was initially drawn to the versatility and openness of qualitative research when considering my topic of study primarily because this type of research is particularly suitable for an inquiry about a culture very different from my own which focuses on a group of people often termed “disadvantaged” or “marginalised”. Thus, although the inquiry may easily be overwhelmed by ethical and representative issues, it also provides a route by which marginalised groups may be given representation. For instance, Fontana and Frey (2005) note that some qualitative approaches “take an ethical stance in favour of the individual or group being studied. The interviewer becomes an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policies and ameliorate the conditions of the interviewee. The preference is to study oppressed and underdeveloped groups” (p. 696). Furthermore, my research is located within the field of comparative education which particularly lends itself to qualitative inquiry. Rust (1999) illustrates this point and outlines the comparative educator’s paradigm:

The pervasive analytic research orientation of the field of comparative education is qualitative...Concerning the nature of reality, comparative educators would tend to see reality as somewhat subjective and multiple, rather than objective and singular. Epistemologically, comparative
educators would tend to interact with that being researched rather than acting independently and in a detached manner from the content. (Rust 1999, p. 106)

Although not explicitly defined in the inquiry, post-modernist ideas and assumptions weave through the inquiry and are highlighted by the research question itself. As a key element to postmodern thought, it is necessary to “reject any claim that one way of knowing is the only legitimate way” (Rust, 1991, p. 616). While traditional western ideas about research, education, and culture are one way of knowing, my inquiry looks to examine other ways of knowing and understanding which are just as valid. Other post-modern authors note that qualitative research is moving away from the search for grand meta-narratives and is being replaced by local, smaller scale narratives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Subsequently my study attempts to gain perspective into individual lives and perhaps find what role they play and what they do (or do not) contribute to the “grand-narrative.” These ideas form the basis of my methodological approach and the foundation of my research questions.

**Research Questions**

When I began the study, my initial proposed research question was: what factors have led to student success in the CBE programme and how can it help future students? However, during the data collection period and afterwards, I realised I had been heading in a different direction. At some point in the first interviews, I noted a few fascinating responses from the participants and continued along this line of questioning with all participants. I subsequently re-focused my primary research question as follows: what
factors influenced second-year CBE students to return to ‘school’ and remain in the programme?

**Research Site**

My research focused on the district of Ntchisi, a primarily rural area of central Malawi (see appendix I for map). The district has a land area of 1655 km squared and an estimated population of 224,098. Life expectancy in the area is thirty-seven years, the literacy rate is 59.9 percent and the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate for the district is 3.4 percent, which is relatively low in relation to many other districts of the country. The dominant ethnic group is Chewa and the language is Chichewa. The prevailing religious affiliation in the area is Christian. The majority of people in this area are subsistence farmers and the District Education Plan (DEP) (2007) cites the district as being “one of the poorest in the country”, noting that “it lacks so many social amenities” (p. 11).

Ministry documents note that there are 137 primary schools and 14 education zones in this district. In 2007, total student enrolment was 60 041, student teacher ratio was 88:1 and documents noted average primary drop-out rate as 8 percent.

I chose this site for my research because it was one of three districts in the country that implemented the pilot CBE programme in 2006. According to the CBE literature and my conversations with programme personnel, Ntchisi was selected as one of initial CBE sites because of its “substantial problem with drop-outs” and also because of the existence of a potential service-provider in the area. Although I originally intended to look at all three pilot districts, I focused solely on Ntchisi because of logistical reasons including transportation, cost of travel and availability of a translator. This
recommendation also came from the CBE personnel who were assisting me to plan the study while I was still in Canada.

Within the Ntchisi district, I focused on three of the fourteen CBE centres: Chisanja centre, Nyalavu centre and Gwangwa centre. Each centre serves 3 or 4 villages in the immediate area. Again, this choice came from a recommendation from the CBE staff.

Participants

The participants are all students in the CBE programme who were ending their second year of study when I conducted my interviews. The students are all part of the pilot cohort and therefore were amongst the group that had been participating in CBE the longest. The students were from three different centres, and lived in varying places within the Ntchisi district. The participants were between the ages of twelve and twenty at the time of interviewing. To have a balance of gender perspectives, I intended to interview six male and six female students but in actuality I only interviewed eleven students, five female and six male. This was due to unexpectedly long interviews and tight time constraints.

According to Fontana and Frey (2005), a qualitative researcher studying a culture other than her own should “find an insider – a member of the group being studied – who is willing to be an informant and act as a guide and translator of cultural mores and, at times, of jargon or language” p. (707). My guide came in the form of Goodwin¹, the CBE

¹ Names have been changed to protect privacy
district supervisor and also my interpreter, aide and participant selector, who asked each
centre’s facilitator(s) to invite volunteers from their classes to participate in the study. I
limited the criteria in some instances, asking for more females, student(s) who had never
enrolled in school, mothers, various ages, etc. to broaden the sample. To each group of
participants and facilitator(s), I orally gave a brief summary of my research and the
process involved for the participants. Each participant was also given an information
form and a consent form (see appendix III) translated from English to Chichewa.

In order to collect contextual data and to learn more about the programme and its
operations, I also formally interviewed the district supervisor and the programme director
and informally interviewed centre supervisors, committee members, CBE facilitators,
community volunteers and one village chief.

**Ethical Considerations**

As per institutional guidelines, I went through the process of an ethical review
from the University of Toronto before conducting the research. I also applied and
received consent from the Malawian Ministry of Science, Education and Technology for
permission to conduct research. The interviews were conducted in complete agreement
with the participants and students signed and were given a copy of the consent form and
information letter which had been translated into their native language. Although
participation in the study was optional and there were no penalties for withdrawing, no
participants chose to abandon participation. However, in one case I felt that the student
was uncomfortable with the interviewing and I stopped the interview session early. In
terms of privacy, it should be noted that pseudonyms are used in place of the participants’
names and names of friends and family members mentioned in the interviews are also changed.

I further recognise that even though this account uses pseudonyms, there is still a small possibility that participants may be recognised or they themselves may read my account and disagree or be displeased with the representations I have provided. However, it should be noted that as a piece of narrative inquiry, my account does not strive for objective truth but rather is my interpretation of the events that transpired. As Mulholland and Wallace (2003) note, “narrative inquiry is, after all, qualitative research, concerned with knowledge, not as objective truth or a reflection of reality, but with knowledge as human construction” (p. 6).

**Timeline**

I chose to travel to Malawi for an open-ended but approximate time of six to eight weeks from October through November. This decision was based on operation of the CBE, convenience for the programme director and in relation to my own proposed timeslot for completing the research.

After I settled in and adjusted to being back in country, the first week of my arrival I utilized to secure a document translator and to arrange a meeting time with Goodwin. I explained my study to him and we laid out the interview plan together and set-up a schedule. That same week, Goodwin introduced me to people at all levels of the CBE programme including chiefs, committee volunteers, students, facilitators, district education managers and community members, all of whom I was able to meet and have informal discussions with.
The following two weeks I spent travelling the three hour return distance between Ntchisi and Lilongwe (where I was staying), observing CBE centres and conducting the first and second rounds of interviews with group A and group B students. As I didn’t want to interfere with the normal operation of the CBE programme, nor the participants’ daily lives, we scheduled the interviews for morning times before the participants went to CBE classes. The interviews were all conducted at the CBE centres which I accessed by travelling through the villages and winding paths on the back of Goodwin’s motorbike.

Due to the approaching end-of-term, lack of transportation and busy schedules, the next three weeks went slowly. However, during this time I managed to squeeze in a few centre observations, interview the last group of students twice and interview the programme director. Unfortunately, the last interview with students had to be conducted after the end of the CBE term, which I had tried to avoid in order to not interfere too much on the students’ lives. I interviewed Goodwin on my last day visiting Ntchisi.

**Method of Data Collection and Recording**

I chose to use semi-structured interviews as the main method of data-collection. I began the research with an interest in learning about other’s stories and experiences relating to education and schooling, and interviews complement this interest (Seidman, 2006). Interviewing also lends itself to subjectivity and experiencing the moment, and it is my intention to situate each participant’s experience, and my own experience in the interview process within a particular context. As Fontana & Frey (2005) note, “[Interviewing] is inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound” (P. 695).
Interview questions asked were open-ended questions of both a direct and non-direct nature that were geared towards learning more about particular circumstances that led the individual to the CBE programme. The questions also concentrated on bringing to light the participant’s experience with the primary schools and the CBE programme itself. Themes for interview questions were: life stories, including parental/family background, future aspirations and educational experiences. See appendix II for a finalised version of the interview themes/questions which I used during interviews.

The interviews were all recorded with a digital voice recorder and later transferred to my laptop computer and then transcribed. In order to collect more dynamic and rich data, I also made informal observations and notes of the students’ in the centre environment and other CBE centres, I took numerous photos and wrote extensive field notes during and after the interviews. I also kept a detailed journal of my thoughts, impressions, questions and interpretations of the research experience.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis began as the interviews were being conducted as I immediately noted themes, commonalities and differences between participant responses and interview experiences. The evenings before the second interviews, I spent time reviewing and processing each student’s responses from the first session in order to prepare. During this time I made further connections and new understandings. The next step involved transcribing the interviews. I began positively but after several difficult hours realised I was unable to transcribe correctly the Chichewa parts of the interviews. Consequently, I hired an interpreter to transcribe the Chichewa sections after I filled out
the English. I wrote notes while transcribing and found further connection and differences within the data. During the final part of the analysis phase I read and re-read the transcriptions, created wall charts comparing relevant student information, cut up and sorted the transcribed interviews and relevant comments and picked out particular sections and quotations from interviews. These processes helped me to make sense of the data and solidify and categorise the themes that I saw emerging. Eventually, these categories turned into factors and sub-factors. When I had the information sorted I looked at how the factors crossed and related to each other and generated a diagram that illustrated these complex relationships. The diagram can be seen on page 72 in the findings chapter.

Limitations

As with all endeavours, there are always drawbacks or imperfections, some that are there from the start and some that can only be seen in hindsight. It was never my goal to conduct the “perfect” study, but rather to carry out a well-rounded account that might shed light on the schooling experiences of people living a very different life from my own. Reflecting on the limitations of this study, I see they revolve around issues of representation, communication difficulties and issues of cultural difference.

One significant limitation to my study is that I was unable to communicate fluently and directly in the same language as the students. Although I speak limited Chichewa and some of the students spoke very basic English, the interviews were conducted with the use of a translator to ensure the maximum amount of understanding between myself and the participant. As noted earlier, my translator, Goodwin, also acted
as a collaborator and cultural interpreter. Although I am not a stranger to Malawi and Malawian people, having lived in the country a few years prior, by no means do I claim to understand or be part of Malawian village culture. Goodwin acted as a liaison between myself and many of the people involved in my study, which also denotes the contribution of his voice in this project. I moreover feel that had I been of the same ethnic background and language of the participants, I may have been able to create a rapport more quickly with the participants and perhaps elicited more detailed and/or honest responses. However, in most cases there was a noticeable change after the first interviews, and learners seemed to be more open and honest during the second interviews. In some instances the translation itself doesn’t lend itself to clear expression of the participants’ voices, and it was clear that at times meanings and understandings were skewed by language.

There is also a chance that some of the informal centre observations and visits I conducted were “staged” in that the centre was aware of my visit. In some cases this was not possible, but in others it seems likely. For example, at one visit, the village chief was present which suggested my arrival had been pre-announced.

**Issues of Representation**

As briefly mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the initial inspiration for my study came from a desire to give a voice to an underrepresented group and provide them with a vehicle through which their lives’ could be improved. It is important that I acknowledge the power relationships that exist here. The participants involved in the study are a particularly marginalised group, being rural out-of-school youth, while I on
the other hand am of a privileged race, ethnicity, and have opportunities and access to power. I entered into this study with the opinion that the voice of the student in comparative educational research is a rare sight indeed and had the notion that I could use my ‘power’ to give this underrepresented group a voice in the international education arena. However, on my journey I came to realise that although I strove to give a legitimate voice to the young people I met, people whom I came to know and care for, their voices can only come through my own lens which also has a particular (and in this case privileged) identity attached to it. Thus, my representations should not be taken as objective facts that come directly from the participants mouths’ but as an account that represents the particular reality of myself, the storyteller, a reality constructed for the purpose of telling the story (Wallace & Louden, 2000). It must therefore be acknowledged that although I claim these events to be true to the best of my knowledge, they are still presented to the reader through the lens of my own identity, biases and interpretations. They are represented to my audience as what I as a researcher experienced, and not as what I assume to be another individual’s perspective. Again this relates back to the issue of representation. As Wallace & Louden (1997) note, “despite our attempts to provide accounts based firmly on actual events, contextualised by the history of the participants and our own preconceptions, texts are always open to further interpretation“ (p. 12).

Nevertheless, it is my intent that this study be used to benefit the participants and future CBE students in any way possible.
Chapter Five: Student Profiles

Introduction

This chapter aims to give insight and background information into the lives of the students I interviewed. It attempts to create a general portrait of life for a rural Malawian youth by describing the participants’ daily and economic activities, home and social life and thoughts, dreams and hopes for the future. I also paid particular attention to students’ educational experiences to provide background information and insight into the context from which these students come.

Although each student I interviewed provides a different lens into the life of Malawian youths, there were a number of commonalities between them. All the students come from the rural Ntchisi district of central Malawi and from three different villages. All the students come from subsistence farming families and all contribute to the farming work, though in different capacities. A small portion of the students families’ have small businesses in conjunction with crops. The participants either lived with grandparent(s), parent(s) or a spouse. Two of the participants interviewed were young mothers. Participants’ daily activities involve bathing, gardening, assisting with household chores, and going to school. Free time mostly consists of going to church, spending time with friends, studying, playing the traditional Bao board game and/or football.

It is clear that all the students face hardships in their lives including one or some of the following: hunger, the death of one or more parents, physical abuse, alcohol abuse in the family, early pregnancies and abandonment, and lack of basic needs including soap
and clothing. Most of the students’ occasionally struggle to ensure they have adequate food, whether this is on a daily basis or less frequently.

Although I have aimed to include in each profile the information I felt most necessary to create a portrait of each participant, these short sketches by no means encapsulate the complex lives which the students each live, nor try to essentialise their diverse and unique personalities. I hope instead that this chapter can give a small window into each person’s experience and background, while also providing an overview of life in general for a rural Malawian youth. For this reason, what follows is an account of the background information that ten\(^1\) participants shared with me about their lives, their thoughts and their hopes.

\(^1\) It is important to note here that while I interviewed eleven participants, I have decided not to include data from one female participant who I felt was uncomfortable with many of the questions and with whom I ended the second interview early.
Student One: Gift

Gift\(^1\) was the first student I interviewed, and though I felt that he was a particularly shy student, I was probably more nervous than him. At the time of the first interview, Gift was nineteen years old, almost twenty. He is the first born son in a family of three children and both his parents are alive. The family are all farmers and have no other means of economic production. Although he lives with his parents, he has his own small garden in which he grows tobacco and maize.

After some preliminaries, Gift told me about his life in the village. In a typical day, Gift wakes up and goes directly to the fields to work. At about ten, he returns home, has his lunch and prepares for class which begins at one. After class, he goes back to his field and works until dinner time, which his parents prepare for him. Before going to bed at eight, he often spends a bit of time chatting with friends. He also told me that on Saturdays he spends the whole day working in the gardens and on Sundays he goes to church and uses the day “for prayers”. Gift explained that in his free time he likes to play Bao, a local board game, and football with his friends from the CBE. When I inquire, he told me that there is a CBE football team and he proudly noted that he won the trophy this year.

Securing enough food for himself and his family is a challenge for Gift, but Gift said he mostly worries about money. He told me that sometimes he gets cheated when he sells his crops. This worry ties into his belief that money is the most important thing in

\(^1\) Pseudonyms have been used for names of people.
life and his conviction that he is most happy when the farming season has gone well and there is a profit from his crops.

None of Gift’s immediate family members have a formal education. He told me that while both his sisters are eager to attend the formal primary schools, they are too old to begin at standard one. One sister has enrolled but never attended. As a younger child, Gift himself wanted to go to primary school, especially after seeing his friends go. However, he told me that he could not attend because his family could not afford clothes for him – and he didn’t want to go to school naked. Later, when he had clothes, he was afraid to go to school because he thought he was too old and the others would laugh at him. He was the only student in my study who has never attended the formal schools “even for one day,” he said.

Therefore, when he heard about the CBE from the facilitators, Gift told me that he thought “Now is my chance!” because the programme allowed him to work on the farms in the morning and go to classes in the afternoon. While beginning the programme was his own initiative, Gift said his parents were glad and supported him. In fact, he said there is no one in his life that discourages him from going to school. He told me that his main incentive to go was to learn to read and write. Now, he said, he is happy when he is able to read words that he hears spoken aloud.

He also told me that his behaviour has changed since he began attending the programme. He said that he used to fight with people in the village, elaborating to say that he would beat up the students returning from school who would tease him. He confidently adds that now he has changed, and the people in the village view him as someone to go to when they need help – all because he can read and write.
In the future, Gift wants to have enough capital to start a fish selling business. He said he wants to have a business that will keep himself and his family happy. He plans on getting married and having children and he told me he wants his family to have "everything they need."

**Student Two: Captain**

Nineteen year-old Captain was the second student I interviewed. He greeted me formally and was very polite. Although he rarely smiled, he was easy to talk to and answered my questions directly and seriously. He took his time to listen carefully and answer as if he had thought about each word carefully before it came out of his mouth.

Captain lives very close to the interview site which is also the CBE centre, only two minutes walk away. He lives with his parents and is the youngest of five children. He told me that two of his siblings are married and working on their own farms and two of his brothers are security guards. Captain admitted that his parents are “very old” and well some days but “are very sick” other days. He has a good relationship with all his family members.

The family grows groundnuts, maize and tobacco and Captain spends a lot of his time farming. He also makes hoes with wooden handles to use in the gardens. When he is not farming or going to school, Captain said he spends time chatting with friends and they encourage each other to go to school and trade farming advice.

Captain said his biggest challenges are finding money, having enough to eat and fighting malaria. He admitted that Malaria “hits [him] so often” and also some days he
goes without eating. He said he is happiest when he is doing work at home and when he comes to the CBE.

Although he would like to get married one day, Captain said right now he is still too young. However, in the future he would like to have five children and be a driver.

Captain’s mother and three of his siblings have no formal education although one of his brothers reached standard three. He told me his father has some education but “not far” and his mother took adult literacy classes. Captain himself dropped out during standard three, when he was thirteen years old. He initially told me that he dropped out because of his “own laziness.” He said he thought school was a waste of time and he felt that he was old enough to be a farmer, so he left school to work full-time in the garden although his parents were angry with his decision.

Eventually, Captain came to realise that he wanted to go back to school, especially when he saw his friends being able to read and write when he could not. Now, Captain strongly believes in the value of education and speaks very passionately about it. He said that even farmers need an education and wrapped up our interview by saying “if one is educated he can go into any field and do better than those who have never attended school... I value education as the most important thing in my life.”

**Student Three: Chotsani**

Chotsani was the third participant I interviewed and the youngest in my study. She was twelve years old and lived in Fitizalimba village; about 10 minutes walk from the CBE centre where we conduct the interviews. She strikes me as serious, guarded and old beyond her years. The fourth child in her family, she lives with her mother and five
siblings. Her father died in 2004 and Chotsani attributes this to his drinking habit saying “the beer killed him”.

Chotsani helps with the farming and the daily household chores which include cooking, sweeping, washing the house and the dishes and fetching water from the borehole which is approximately thirty minutes walk one way from the home. When she is not helping around the house, she is at school, studying, or chatting with her friends. She often works in the fields with her mother because she told me the two older brothers have their own gardens.

Chotsani has two close friends. She explained that she used to have more friends but after some rumours were spread about Chotsani having a boyfriend, her mother advised her to cut contact with some of the girls. She doesn’t mind and feels she is happier without the gossipers. She enjoys playing Bao and chatting with the friends she has kept.

Two of Chotsani’s brothers dropped out of the formal schools and one of her sisters still attends. Chotsani dropped out in standard four and told me that she did not do well in school and had to repeat classes because she was not intelligent. She said this was one of the reasons she left school. She was also frequently bullied by boys on the way home from school. When questioned, she told me that they would demand her and her friends give them food and would hit and kick the girls when they did not give in. She also reveals that she was routinely harassed by a teacher who sexually propositioned her, wrote her letters and offered to assist her on the school exams if she entered in to a sexual relationship with him. Chotsani told the head teacher and the teacher was eventually transferred to another school.
Chotsani feels that life is tough since her father’s death. When I asked her to explain, she described how her mother’s parents are hostile towards her and her sister and tell them they should stay with her paternal grandparents, who live in another village. She also told me she often goes without food, soap or clothes.

At the time of the interview, Chotsani was learning about livelihoods in the CBE and she told me that the lessons have inspired her to be a builder in the future and build schools, houses and bridges. She wants to finish primary school and go on to secondary when she is finished the CBE programme. She told me she wants to stay in the same village but said she doesn’t want to get married “because [she] sees a lot of ladies complaining about their partners.”

Chotsani told me that coming to the CBE is one of the best things in her life. She said she never gets bullied when she walks to and from the centre and she feels comfortable and happy there. She told me that when she is at CBE, she doesn’t think about her problems at home. She told me. “I’m free when I am at school and not home.”

**Student four: Vincent**

Vincent was an enthusiastic seventeen year-old and was the fourth student I interviewed. He was proud of his English skills and began the interview with me in English. He laughed easily and calls himself the “Englishman”. Like the three aforementioned participants, he was in his final year of the CBE programme at the Nyalavu Centre.

He lives with his grandparents and two younger siblings. His grandparents are very dear to him and “make him happy.” Both of his parents died in 2005, so he is an
orphan. He told me that his mother was sick but his father was bewitched by someone in
the village. When I inquired, he said his father went out of the house one morning, went
behind the door and “was found dead”. He doesn’t know who bewitched his father, but
said it was someone in the village.

Vincent assists his grandfather with the family work, which is mainly farming, but
also consists of a side business in which the family buys and sells paraffin. His
grandmother does all of the housework.

One of Vincent’s pastimes is drawing. He eagerly showed me some of his
drawings and told me that his uncle taught him to draw. Aside from drawing, Vincent
listens to the radio. He said there are three programmes he listens to; a prayer
programme, a music programme, and a programme that broadcasts plays in Chichewa.

Vincent faced many difficulties after the death of his parents. Most of his relatives
live far away and his grandparents are elderly, so he felt that he was on his own. He told
me that to support himself, he often took on piece work for other villagers who would not
pay him because he was an orphan. He also said that he faced discrimination at school
from his friends and teachers, who both would “group” children according to their orphan
status.

When Vincent was twelve, a year after his parents died, he dropped out of
standard five. Although he thought school was important and enjoyed going, particularly
to “hear the teacher speak English”, like many students, Vincent often missed days to
help his grandparents in the garden and eventually he felt that he had missed so much that
there was no point in going at all. He told me, “I saw many days I haven’t attended
school, then I was …it was like a shyness to say that all these days I haven’t attended
school, should I go today, no, maybe its just better to stay out from school.” He
elaborates by telling me that by the time he left primary school he could only write a few words in Chichewa and speak, but not write, a few words in English.

Now, Vincent said he is able to “write what [he] can speak” and he said he realises the value of education. He doesn’t plan to go to secondary school but to continue farming in the village. In the future, he would like to be in business, maybe selling his drawings. He hopes to have enough money to keep his family happy and help his relatives.

**Student Five: Chimwemwe**

Eighteen year old Chimwemwe was the fifth student I interview, and the first from the Nyalavu Centre. The centre is located high in the hills of the district and takes us almost 45 minutes by motorbike to reach. Chimwemwe comes across as a very gentle person and answered my questions with confidence and maturity.

He lives with his parents and five siblings and is the second born child. His family grows tobacco, soya beans and groundnuts, as well as smaller crops like tomatoes, peas, onions and pumpkins. The father is the principal farmer while Chimwemwe’s mother “gives the orders” and looks after the house. Chimwemwe also has his own small side business in which he is rearing goats and pigs. The business began when he sold some soya beans he grew a few years back and bought a small pig with the earnings. He uses the money he earns from selling livestock to buy and sell tobacco. From our discussion, he seems to have a keen business sense.

Outside of his income generating activities, Chimwemwe loves football and plays often with eight other friends, both boys and girls. He also participates in Gule Wamkulu,
a traditional dance for adolescent boys that is scheduled by the chief. During Gule Wamkulu, the boys craft masks and costumes and dance for the community members, who sometimes give them money.¹

Chimwemwe’s mother and father both have a high level of education relative to people in the area. Having both reached standard seven, they are both literate and encourage the children to go to school. Although Chimwemwe’s oldest brother dropped out, his remaining siblings still attend. Not surprisingly, Chimwemwe told me his parents were very angry when he dropped out, which he initially told me was because he was “lazy”. He said that at the time he did not see the value of education because he could not see educated people working in his village. Subsequently, he decided to drop out, leave home and try his hand at herding cattle to support himself. He told me that he wanted to be independent, but ended up returning to his parents two years later.

For Chimwemwe, the most important thing in life is business. Business generates money which can be used to buy fertilizer and food. He also feels that businesses do better in developed areas and consequently, in the future, he hopes to move to an urban area where he can go into business selling clothes. He also wants to get married and have three children who he will send to school “to be educated”.

¹ I collected varying explanations and descriptions of Gule Wamkulu from villagers, townspeople and written sources throughout my travels and data collection period, but I have only included here the information the participants individually told me.
Student Six: Faith

Faith was the sixth student I interviewed and the second female. She was shy and hesitant and carried a small child with her. She was the only married participant and lives in a nearby village with her husband and daughter.

Faith was born into a family of ten and is the sixth child. Because she is married, she lives in her husband’s village which is some distance from her parents. She has been married for four months and said that her and her husband met at a chieftainship and were married two months later because, she told me shyly, they “love each other.”

In a typical day and while minding her daughter, Faith wakes up, goes to the fields, cooks relish and nsima, fetches the water and prepares it for bathing, rests, goes to school, prepares and eats dinner, and goes to bed. She also finds time to clean her home, go to church and chat with friends. She told me that her friends are also married and together they chat about their husbands and farming practices. Her husband is a farmer and uses his farming profits to buy and sell cattle from a Northern district. Consequently, he travels a lot and Faith stays alone. She told me they often miss each other.

Faith’s daughter, Lydia, is 2 years and nine months old. Faith became pregnant at sixteen and when the baby’s father rejected her, her parents said she could stay with them. Although she was angry, she accepted the rejection and now has no contact with the baby’s father.

Faith dropped out of school in 2002 near the end of standard five. She said that often she would not go to school because she did not have food to eat or soap to wash her clothes. When she was in standard five, one of her teachers called her to his office and told her he loved her and offered to give her school supplies if she would agree to a sexual relationship. He became angry when she said no. Faith told me she was frightened
and left the office and later told her parents. Faith said the incident caused many of the other female students to drop out and enrol in other schools, although Faith herself remained at the same school. The teacher also remained and Faith said she “had to see him everyday”.

In the future, Faith wants to have more children and run a business selling general supplies, like sweets and sugar. She said that in order to have a good life, one must have enough food and clothes and rear animals.

**Student Seven: Kondwani**

Kondwani was an energetic and confident fifteen year-old. He lives with his parents and two siblings in the same village as Chimwemwe. He is the fourth of eight children, though only three still live at home. He told me that he has three close friends, who feature prominently in the stories he told me.

His family has a garden where they grow tobacco, maize and potatoes. They also have a small plot of land which they divide amongst the male children, so each has his own field in addition to the family garden. Kondwani uses his garden for a “small scale business.” He would like to start a small grocery shop, but said he cannot get the capital to start it. He described this lack of money as a significant problem in his life.

Kondwani’s father is a strong role model in his life. He has a standard seven education and is always reminding the children that they must get an education “because nowadays education is a priority”. He is also strict with his children and encourages them not to be fighting amongst each other, to work hard in the fields and to “have good behaviour” in public.
When I asked him about his difficulties, Kondwani told me that in 2000 two of his relatives died from hunger. He feels that God has spared him and he is lucky to have this life.

Like Chimwemwe, Kondwani frequently participates in Gule Wamkulu. However, he told me that when he participates, he and his friends stay in the graveyard for one week. Although the explanations of why vary, Kondwani told me it is customary to prove manhood. During Gule Wamkulu Kondwani usually spends the morning at the graveyard and the afternoons in the CBE.

He is also an avid football player and frequently plays with both the CBE group and the same friends he often refers to. In addition to football, Kondwani likes writing letters to his friends in other villages. He told me that wanting to write letters was one of the main reasons enticing him to return to school.

Although he liked learning, and particularly enjoyed playing and learning about football, Kondwani dropped out of primary school in standard three. He said it was only because he “was playful” and wanted to play rather than be in school. Although his parents were angry, he thinks they were eventually glad to have his help in the fields because it brought in more money for the family.

Kondwani sees himself living in the same village when he is older, and he said he would like to be “educated and doing business” like the people he most admires. He hopes to build houses with iron sheets or open a small grocery shop as a business venture. Although he has a girlfriend now, he laughed said he wants to remain a bachelor.
Student Eight: Chisomo

The interview with Chisomo starts off shyly, but it was soon apparent that she was a spunky girl with a great sense of humour. I found myself laughing often throughout our discussion. She was seventeen years old and like the other girls, she had toughness about her. She told me that she has no difficulties in her life but enjoys going to church and school because, she said, “I know I am doing something which will assist me in the future.” She was optimistic and content with her life. She told me that she worries about nothing and has a good life because “I receive all the care from parents. I get food and buy clothes.”

She is the first born of six children and lives with her parents and siblings. Chisomo helps her family farm the maize, groundnuts and soy but she told me that she does the most housework which includes looking after her younger siblings. She told me that this was “because [her parents] have a girl to do these things.” She has a good relationship with her parents and said her father cares for the children because he provides clothing and food. She told me that her father makes all the decisions in the family and has taught her how to work hard in the fields.

In her free time, Chisomo said she goes to church, strolls around the village, watches Gule Wamkulu and chats with her friends. Although she has a boyfriend, Chisomo told me that her friends spend a lot of time talking about how to refuse the boys who are frequently “proposing”\(^1\) to them.

\[^1\text{In further discussions, I learn that this means sexual propositioning}\]
Chisomo’s boyfriend of two years plans to marry her in 2009. Although she has never met his parents, he knows hers and “they love him.” She told me that she likes him because he has good behaviour and when I inquire, she explained that this means “he doesn’t drink or smoking, he is not a thief.” She also told me that he went to school until standard eight, knows how to read and write, and encourages her to continue with the CBE.

The community holds dances for girls, called Chitelera, which Chisomo participates in. She described these events as young women gathering in a circle and dancing, usually on an evening of moonlight and after parents have gone to sleep. She told me that even though parents don’t want the boys in the village to watch the girls dance, they hide and do so anyway.

Neither of Chisomo’s parents went to school and two of her siblings are in primary school. She dropped out in 1998, in standard three. She was eight years old. Like a few of the other students I interviewed, she told me she dropped out because she was “lazy.” She later said that she was expecting to get food at school and became disheartened when she was not fed, and this was why she stopped going. Although she enjoyed spending time with her friends at school, she didn’t like the harsh punishments given by the teachers and being beaten and bullied by the boys.

Although she feels that she has a happy life, from our conversations food, and lack of it, seem to permeate Chisomo’s life and thoughts. Her only criticism of CBE is that it does not serve food.

When I asked about her dreams for the future, Chisomo laughed and said she hopes to have five children and farm to earn money and food. She told me that she plans on encouraging her husband to buy bags of fertilizer and have enough food every year.
Student Nine: Tione

Tione was eighteen years old and lives in Yohane village, about twenty minutes from the CBE centre where he attends class and where we are conducting our interview. Immediately Tione strikes me as a confident, wise, and good-natured eighteen year old.

He lives with his grandmother, uncle, cousins and six siblings. He is the third born. His family grows soy, maize, millet, groundnuts and tobacco. He spends most of his time working in the fields, going to the CBE in the afternoons and going to choir practice three nights a week. He also spends time studying, reading and chatting to his friends. He told me they usually chat about their girlfriends. On the weekends he goes to the Saturday market, to church, and sometimes plays football.

His mother and father separated in 1994 and have since both remarried and live in separate villages. Tione said that they separated because the father frequently drank too much and beat his mother. He said his behaviour was the same with his new wife. While his relationship with his mother is good, he attributes his strained relationship with his father to alcoholism and said his father doesn’t care for his children and used to whip him. Tione told me that regardless of their difficulties, he has learned a lot from his father. He said “I have seen that beer is not good and I will never drink beer in my life. I have made a decision never to drink because of the way the father was treating the mother and us the children.”

Regardless of the difficulties in his life, such as not having enough to eat, Tione told me he is happiest when he is attending school, meeting friends, and learning a lot from CBE. He also enjoys spending time chatting with his girlfriend, Leticia, who he
plans to marry in 2010. Although Leticia lives in another district, they write letters to each other and visit when they can. According to Tione, she is hardworking, respectful and she “understands” him. He said he can forget about things when he is with her.

Tione’s father has a standard one education and his mother a standard seven. All of Tione’s siblings are in school, including the eldest brother who is in the CBE with Tione. Tione himself dropped out of school in 2005, when he was in standard 7. Although he enjoyed playing football in school, he said he wasn’t a good student and was often punished by being made to dig pit latrines or being beaten by the teacher. Sometimes the head teacher, who Tione told me was often drunk, would not even show up to school. Tione eventually dropped out after the same teacher beat him “with a stick” and he was hospitalised. Neither he nor his family wanted him to return to school afterwards.

In the future, Tione hopes to move to another village or district where he can have his own land and grow the same crops as is growing now. He and Leticia want to have four children. Tione told me that the most important thing in life is to have a steady income or salary, which can be achieved by working hard and getting a good education.

**Student Ten: Joy**

Joy was in the last group of students interviewed and the second participant who was also a parent. During our interview she speaks easily and matter-of-factly about all aspects of her life. In describing her difficulties, I come to see her as strong and resilient and her story as inspirational. She was seventeen years old and lives in Yohane village, about twenty minutes walking from the CBE learning centre. She lives with her infant
daughter, mother, step-father, and five half siblings who are all younger than her. Joy told me her father died when she was very young, so young that she “can’t even remember the face”. She later told me that he was killed over a land dispute and was told he was poisoned.

Three of Joy’s siblings are still in the formal school and like her, the other two dropped out. Her mother, who she told me was illiterate, dropped out in standard four and her step-father reached standard six. Joy herself dropped out in the second term of standard six.

Like the other students I interviewed, Joy’s family survives on subsistence farming. They grow maize, tobacco, groundnuts and soya beans. She told me that they save some to eat and sell the rest. She also said that her father, who is “the boss” of the family, does the most work in the fields and her and her mother help. The other children in the family do not work because they are busy going to school. Her role in the family work involves helping to garden, preparing the food and doing chores like collecting firewood, water and cooking. Three evenings a week Joy goes to choir practice.

Probably the biggest challenge in Joy’s life is her poor relationship with her step-father. She told me that while he is financially supportive of his natural children, he is unwilling to support Joy and her daughter, even though she spends time working in the family’s fields. Because of this, Joy’s relationship with her half-siblings is also poor. However, Joy said her mother and her are close although she has little influence over the step-father. Joy doesn’t like to see them arguing over her. She said her mother is a good mother.

She told me that to help her deal with problems at home, in her free time Grace enjoys spending time with her friends and chatting about challenges they face in their
lives. She has one friend particularly special to her, Meie, who she has known since childhood and who also goes to CBE. Joy told me that her friend also has difficulties at home and they meet and talk about their hardships. They also talk about school and study together. Joy explained that often the two girls do small farming jobs, or “piece work” for other people in the village. This enables Joy to have money of her own which she doesn’t share with her family and uses to buy soap and clothes for herself and her daughter. She said she is happiest when she is clean, at school, and when she has some money to support herself.

Joy’s daughter, Alile, was 8 months at the time of the interview. Joy was in a relationship with the baby’s father but he refused to marry her when she became pregnant. Joy told me that her step-father’s younger brother, who does not like Joy, told the father that Joy is lazy and steals. These accusations turned him off her, although Joy said he had promised to marry her. She said she was very angry at both men, but didn’t defend herself because she must have respect for her elders. Although she hasn’t forgiven him for breaking his promise, now Joy has a civil relationship with the baby’s father, who sees the baby often. His parents are also very involved and have a good relationship with Joy. Sometimes they look after Alile when Joy is at the CBE.

Pregnancy was one reason why Joy dropped out of school, although she told me that she had difficulty with the lessons and did not learn very quickly. She said this was because the teachers used to beat her, so she was always angry rather than focused on her lessons.

Another reason Joy dropped out of primary school was because of her workload in the fields. She told me that some days her parents would forbid her to go to school in order to help with the farming, and that after awhile she lost interest in school and felt
that she wouldn’t be able to catch up to the other students. She said that because he is not her natural father, she thinks her step-father has no interest in seeing her get an education. She said he told her not to go to school.

Although she missed school some days to work in the fields, Joy said she likes to learn and was disappointed when she was not literate by standard six. When I asked why she remained in school so long in the face of all her deterrents, Joy responds that she wanted to learn to read and write. Hence, when the chief began promoting CBE in Joy’s village she thought, “Now is my chance to learn to read and write” and enrolled in the programme with no hesitation. She also encouraged her friend Meie to enrol with her.

Joy told me that she thinks the girls in the programme are more interested to learn in comparison with the boys because they are more concerned with their problems and therefore have a greater desire to learn. I wonder if this means that Joy thinks educated people will be better equipped to deal with their problems or have less of them.

Despite her pleasure with CBE, Joy said there are people in the village who discourage the CBE students by saying they are just wasting their time. She includes her step-father in this group and said that often she disobeys him and comes to school even though he orders her not to. She said that as punishment, he will often withhold food from her. She said: “I know what I'm learning and what my goal is and what I'm benefiting from the programme, so I can’t listen to whosoever is discouraging me.”

In the future, Joy said she would like to re-integrate back into the formal system and finish primary school. She also wants to get married, though she said not until her daughter has grown in order to prevent repeating what happened to her. She would like to live in another village “with people who understand her and care for her child” and where she hopes to run a business selling tomatoes, sugarcane and fish.
Chapter Six: Findings

Introduction

Initial findings reveal themes which have influence over the learner’s return to and retention in school. From what the students told me and for cohesion and analysis, I have divided these themes into categories. The first category I call **social factors** and directly relate to the individual learner’s personal and social life. This includes family, friends and community. The second category I classify as **programme factors**, which include aspects of the design and implementation of the CBE programme. The third category, **intrinsic factors** refers to a student’s viewpoint about education, personal characteristics and individual aspirations which influence the return to school. The final category I classify as overarching **external factors** and include economic situation, gender and health. There are further sub-categories within each main category which are labelled and described throughout the chapter.

It is important to note that these findings emerge not only from my own interpretations and analysis of what the students told me, but from the participants’ own views on why they returned to school. Consequently, participant views and perspectives significantly influence all the categories and factors discussed in this chapter.

It is also necessary to point out here that in most categories, there are factors which both enabled and challenged the return to school. Although my study focuses on the factors which enabled or positively affected the students return to and retention in school, in order to present a balanced and complete picture of the findings I have
included a brief outline of these obstacles as they emerged. However, this only applies to some categories. For example, there were no programme factors that could be interpreted as obstacles, but for each sub-category of social factors, there were both enablers and obstacles.

This chapter attempts to classify, explain and present to the reader the major factors that emerged from the data. Although the findings are presented linearly for cohesion, it is important to recognise that they are essentially impossible to separate into individual realms of influence. All of the categories overlap and exert influence over others and interact in a complex relationship that *is not in itself linear*. In some cases, it was difficult to even place factors into one of the aforementioned categories. Instead, all factors emerge as social constructs that may be associated to people’s agency, purpose and ability rather than being fixed or immutable.

The diagram provided below aims to demonstrate this intricate relationship between factors. It is clear that factors are not linear or clear cut, but are interrelated in a complex relationship. In the diagram, the CBE student is located at the centre of the influencing forces which surround him/her. The closest level of influence to the student is the *intrinsic factors*. As previously mentioned, this includes the student’s personal thoughts, characteristics, beliefs and motivations. Family, friends, and programmatic factors are the next level and influence the student, the intrinsic factors and each other. Surrounding these constructs is the community, which the student, family, friends, and the programme, are all located within. The small two-way arrows indicate that influence may travel in both directions. Finally, the overarching *external factors* are seen to permeate through all other spheres, directly and indirectly influencing all other factors and the student herself.
This chapter progresses through these layers of influence that emerged from the data and provides explanations and examples of each category and sub-category. I will begin with social factors and then progress to programme factors as these are the most clearly defined and straightforward. Next I will discuss intrinsic factors which are more difficult to categorise and explain. Finally I will depict the external factors which are best described within the context of the other categories, as these factors are overarching and influence all other spheres.
Part One: Social Factors

The first category of factors affecting the return to schooling and retention in the programme are categorised as social factors. These are factors that are directly related to the student’s personal and social life and along with programmatic factors they hold the bulk of the data. This category contains family, friends and community. For each sub-category, first enablers and then obstacles are outlined.

Family: As Enablers

The participant’s family was found to have a significant effect on the student returning to school. Family includes parents\(^1\), siblings, and/or extended family\(^2\) that are particularly close to the students. All but one participant reported that at least one member of his/her immediate family encouraged him/her to go to CBE and stay in the programme. By encouragement, I refer to support, assistance and positive reactions to CBE either verbally or through actions. For example, Chotsani reported that it was her uncle’s idea that she go to the CBE and her mother is also very adamant that she attend, and does not feed her if she misses class. In Captain’s case, both parents are very encouraging and the mother helps him with homework, as she is attending adult literacy classes. Kondwani commented that his parents encourage him to go to school and tells him he must be educated because “education is a priority, everything needs someone who is educated”. Faith, who is married, says her husband supports her in going to the CBE by

\(^{1}\) In most cases, unless students were single parented or orphaned, participants referred to mother and father as “parents” without often differentiating between the two.

\(^{2}\) For example, in Chewa culture, the maternal uncle has significant influence over the child. Also, some students lived with grandparents rather than parents.
reminding her when it is time to go to school. Tione’s brother also goes to CBE and he tells me they encourage each other to attend regularly. Vincent, who is an orphan, says this about his grandparents: “They are now happy to see me at times speaking English words, so they are happy to say oh! School its good.”

**Family: As Obstacles**

One student reported a family member significantly discouraging her participation in the CBE saying that her step-father preferred her to be home working in the fields and was not supportive of her going to school. Elaborating on her step-father’s lack of encouragement during her time in primary school, Joy said:

It’s the same with the CBE programme. Sometimes he could set programmes or some work to be done, maybe from afternoon when he knows that during that time I’m supposed to come to school. So he just say from this time to this time and share the work to the family during the afternoon and sometimes they say no don’t go to school you are just losing your time. Most of the days I just leave what he has said and come to school. He gets angry and sometimes he commands the mother not to give us food. So I just live without food.

Joy later told me that she felt this was because her step-father “did not care about [her]” because she was not his natural daughter. Accordingly, he had no interest in sending her to school.

**Friends/Peers: As Enablers**

The data reveals that peers have influence over students attending the CBE and act as enablers by providing verbal encouragement, by peer-pressure or simply by their
presence in the programme. For instance, some students commented that they like the CBE because they have friends in the programme. One student told me that her two closest friends were in the CBE with her and they study together. Another student said he and his friends “encourage each other to go to school everyday”. Two students told me that reason they became interested in the CBE was because their friends had joined already. For example, Chisomo says:

When I came here [to her village] I just saw friends going to school, they said we are going to school and I asked, which school is this one? And they were explaining about the CBE. Then I was getting interested to join and I came to enrol.

From another angle, some students reported that they were teased by friends and peers when they did not go to school. For example, Gift, who had never been to the formal schools, said he was teased by his friends who did go to school. This heightened his desire to go:

I was pitying myself to see my friends going to school and me just staying idle in the village. They could laugh at me but I couldn’t do otherwise, just to say to stay... I knew I missed primary school and upon hearing about CBE I thought it is my chance now to learn how to read and write.

Other students commented that they wanted to go back to school when they saw their peers were literate while they were not. For example, Captain said he saw his friends “being able to read notes from the doctor” and “it hurt” him to know he could not read. He also attributed his desire to go back to school to this:

The major reason [I went back to school] – the major was that, um... I wasn’t comfortable to see my friends reading, writing, and so on, write letters and read letters, so... The major one that made me to come to CBE was that I wanted to learn how to read and to write.

Another student said the following:
I could admire my friends writing letters and reading books… big books, so I had regret to say why did I drop from school. I think its better I go back to school to study, know how to read and write.

In a few cases, the students wanted to be able to learn to read and write in order to communicate with friends at a distance. Two students said they wanted to write letters to friends who live in other villages, and for Tione, he was motivated by a long distance relationship with his girlfriend. While discussing the relationship and why he went back to school he told me:

I was thinking it would be not good for me if I have received a letter for example, and go to someone to read for me. And I may have some secrets, my personal things so I don’t want someone to know.

**Friends/Peers: As Obstacles**

Most of the students said that they had at least one peer or friend who discouraged him/her from attending CBE. In some cases, this meant a peer group teasing the CBE students, and in other cases this meant a friend speaking negatively about the programme. For instance, Captain says this about his friends:

They say you are just wasting time, instead of going to the garden you are going to school. You are just wasting your time and you could see us going to garden this afternoon again to do some work there, so you are just wasting your time.

The majority of students who commented that some peers teased or discouraged them also noted that in response they either generally ignored the remarks. However, some students reported that they sometimes made an effort to tell naysayers otherwise. In Kondwani’s case, his friends pressured him to participate in cultural dances rather than
attend the CBE classes. He doesn’t listen to them but maintains his position regarding the programme and also attempts to encourage them:

> Some days they could tell me to go to Gule Wamkulu instead of going to school. I used to tell them…Gule Wamkulu will not benefit me. And I also sometimes encourage them, or tell them the importance of going to school being educated learn some things in school.

**Community: As Enablers**

From the data, community merged as a theme that enables the students in two ways. First, students commented on general community acceptance and encouragement of the CBE programme itself by parents, community members, and community leaders such as chiefs or village headman. For example, Chimwemwe said the following:

> A group village headman looks after the chiefs, maybe four to six chiefs under him. So he is the Group Village Headman. So it’s this person who came to the village and talked about CBE... He said the CBE programme is for the learners who have - I mean for the children who have dropped out from school for finishing standard five, and even those who have never attended. And those interested should register their names to one who was assigned in the villages so the learners went to this person and registered...I registered straight on the same day.

This excerpt demonstrates the community involvement in the programme and the influence of a community leader. All of the students I questioned said that either the village headman or the chief was promoting the CBE programme in the village.³ In another example, when asked about how he heard about CBE, Kondwani said the chief

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³ In Malawian culture, particularly in rural villages, the chief has substantial power and influence. As part of its implementation strategy, the designated proposed location for a CBE programme undergoes a sensitization process at which the chief is brought on board with the project.
came to his house “to meet the parents and talk to them” because the chief knew there were children in the household who were not in school.

Secondly, the community influences the students’ sense of self-worth and level of confidence, which in turn motivates the students to remain in the programme. All of the students reported that since attending CBE and attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills, they are more valued members of the village community. It is important that for the findings of this particular study that this is not seen as an outcome of the programme itself, but as an incentive which keeps the children engaged in the programme. The students commented that they are now asked by community members to participate in one or some of these activities: writing down village ledgers, keeping records, reading aloud the bible in church, knitting garments for village babies, and generally “assisting” people. For instance, referring to his change behaviour since attending the CBE, Gift says, “some people in the village have trusted me to say I’m somebody who can help them and other things in the village.” Tione describes how the community leader finds his education useful:

Before I was not a person very important in the community, but now am acting as a Secretary to the Chief because the Chief cannot write, cannot read but now I am assisting, helping him, assisting him in some writing and whatever the government has sent for the chief to do, I’m the one writing and reading for him.

He further notes how this raised status in the community has affected him: “I’m happy because am taken as one of the important people in the area.” Kondwani is particularly explicit on this subject:

In my village there is someone who is doing carpentry, and I sometimes go there practicing to do some brick boxes and I may also assist him in some other works there at the workshop. Right now in my village there is
a church and when I go there sometimes I was assigned to read a bible in the church. So people are using me in different places, in the church in the community to read something for them.

He further comments by saying he “enjoys” being asked to do jobs in the community. In a final example, Faith relates her increased value in the community to helping her personally. She says:

The school has assisted me because some community people could depend on me. Maybe they have something or have received something from the government and they need someone to read for them. They sometimes call me to explain what is in the letter or those documents.

Community: As Obstacles

Similar to the friend/ peer factor discussed earlier, a few students reported that some community members discourage the CBE participants by commenting on the programme negatively to the students themselves or to other people in the community. Three of the students interviewed said that some people in their communities said those who go to the CBE are “wasting their time.”

Part Two: Programme Factors

Many aspects of the programme itself were appealing to the students and enabled or influenced the return to school. Other factors kept them in the programme. I have classified the factors into three sub-categories; accessibility, curriculum and lessons, and facilitators.
Accessibility

In terms of access, I refer to elements of the CBE that make the programme available to particularly disadvantaged groups. Some learners interviewed noted that they are able to participate in CBE because it is close to their home, does not cost money, allows them to work in the gardens in the mornings and/or allows them to bring their younger siblings or children with them while they studied.

All of the students interviewed stated that their home is twenty minutes or less by foot from the CBE learning centre. No student thought that this distance is too far to walk. This is particularly important for the female students, four of whom noted that in primary school they were bullied by boys on the walk home. Chotsani, who cited bullying as one reason why she dropped out of the formal system, said that she never gets bullied walking to and from the CBE.

The schedule and timing of the programme also contributes to its accessibility for out-of-school populations. The programme does not run at the height of the rainy and farming seasons, which would make attending class difficult. Furthermore, CBE operates for thirty-six weeks of the year, five days a week, for three hours a day. The community members choose whether these three hours will be in the morning or the afternoon, though all three centres where I interviewed students were running the afternoon programme.

As noted, all of the students interviewed come from families that survive on subsistence farming and all students remarked that they support the family by working in the fields. Eight of the participants said that one reason they dropped out of primary school was to assist family members with the farming. Accordingly, most of the participants commented that one draw to the CBE programme is being able to farm in the
mornings and go to school in the afternoon. Gift, who did not go to primary school because he could not afford clothes, notes this on two different occasions. He says:

CBE is giving the time for someone to work in the morning and going to school in the afternoon, so I say “ah” this is my chance, I can go to the garden and work and buy some clothes and in the afternoon go to school... So it’s not a challenge.

It is apparent from this excerpt that this student feels that he is able to attend classes because the timing does not interfere with farming.

In another example, Kondwani says, “[my] parents were happy because they also heard the CBE was also starting in the afternoon, so they knew they will still be with me in the morning in the garden”. Earlier in the interview, this same student had said that although his parents did not want him to drop out of primary school, they eventually were glad that he did because he was able to help in the fields. Later, he agrees saying:

The only reason is CBE gives someone time to do his personal work in the morning which could be difficult with the primary school pupils they start in the morning, and had it been the CBE was starting in the morning, most of us would have already stopped, but we are starting in the afternoon after we have worked in the garden done some work, so that is why we are still in CBE.

Faith also comments on this aspect of the programme and consider it to be the reason why the participants stay in the programme. She says:

That’s the very big and important reason why we stay in the CBE, because if we have been starting the classes in the morning maybe some of us would have already dropped out. And because we start in the afternoon - that’s why we stay in the programme.
Just as some students commented that the scheduling was an important initial attraction to CBE, it also enables students to stay in the programme, as outlined by the three students above.

A final feature of the programme that contributes to accessibility is the acceptance of mothers in the programme and allowance to bring the children to school. As noted, two of the participants were mothers of young children. One in particular cited that she dropped out of the primary system because she became pregnant and pregnancy “is not allowed” in primary school. Faith corroborated this and said, “It would have been a problem because in primary school they do not allow students to come with children.” Although both girls do not always bring their children to the lessons, they are welcome to do so and the children are either watched by community members or stay with the mother in class. When I asked Faith if she brought her daughter, Lydia to school, she said “[Some days] she’s in the class playing, some other days I leave the girl at home.”

Curriculum

The main theme emerging regarding the curriculum is that lessons and content are seen positively by the learners. Generally, the data reveals that lessons are interesting and relevant to student lives. Most learners commented on enjoying the lessons, especially Chichewa and livelihoods. These subjects are also cited by participants as being the most important ones, although agriculture, English, livelihoods and life skills were also mentioned.

In particular, the learners commented on the practical use of the livelihoods lessons in everyday life. For example, Faith said she learned to make chips in a lesson
and she went home and cooked them for her husband and small daughter, who liked them:

**Participant:** In a livelihood lesson we were learning how to cook, making chips.

**Interviewer:** Did you actually cook them?

**Participant:** Yes we cooked chips.

**Interviewer:** And then?

**Participant:** We shared the whole class and we ate the chips

**Interviewer:** Did you make them after for your husband?

**Participant:** [Laughing] Yes. And this one [referring to baby]. And he was happy. So this is something very useful we are learning. [Laughing]

Tione said he has used the method of building taught in CBE to begin building a kitchen at his grandmother’s house and Chisomo said, “Now I am able to knit a jersey for a baby for some women who are pregnant or have small children.”

In some cases, the lessons act as motivation for the students. For instance, Vincent is specifically interested in learning English and is motivated to come to school because English is part of the curriculum. He also points out the importance of curriculum relevance by noting how he thinks agriculture and environment are particularly important subjects for the village students:

We learn more of the good practices of agriculture and how to conserve the environment and surroundings….We also learn how to care for animals and also to make some manure for our gardens which is a bit cheaper than to buy fertilizer which is costly.

Other examples of curriculum relevance are given by the students who say they learn how to treat diarrhoea, how to make bricks, about the rains and the importance of trees, and how to write letters, curriculum vitas, and have job interviews.
Another curricular element that acts as a positive factor influencing the students is the presence of CBE sports teams. Most of the boys said they enjoyed playing football and played on the CBE team. Gift was particularly proud of his football skills, noting that he was never able to play because he did not go to primary school and now in the CBE he is not only able, but won the CBE football trophy. For the girls, some of them said they enjoyed playing netball and occasionally played with other girls in the programme.

**Facilitators**

All of the students mentioned the facilitators as being positive factors and they were generally adamant about the high degree to which they were pleased with them. One student remarked that at the start of the programme, the facilitators were actively recruiting out-of-school youth in the village and this was how he heard of the programme and what initially made him want to enrol.

Primarily, the main impression coming out of the data is that the facilitators encourage the students to attend class and learn. Responses that suggest the students feel that the facilitators support the students in continuing with the programme were most common. This is significant considering that regular attendance at school is often an issue especially in rural farming populations. As noted in the student profiles, some students even commented that after missing many days of primary school they decided not to go back because they thought they had missed too much and/or would be laughed at.

However, constant encouragement from the facilitators appears to be a factor keeping the students in the programme regardless of other difficulties. For instance, when I asked Joy, whose step-father doesn’t allow her to come to CBE, why she would continue going to
school regardless of her difficulties, she replied that “the teachers, they always encourage us. And sometimes they advise us not to listen to our father to come to school to learn.” Another student observed that the consistency of having the same facilitators show up every day and utilising interesting teaching methods used encouraged the students:

All the times when we come here, we find them here. We are happy with them. Yes...The way they teach is very encouraging to us to be attending CBE every day.

Furthermore, many of the students commented that if a student is absent, the facilitator will often go to the student’s house to find out why and encourage him/her to come back to school. Only one student commented that she was absent often and the facilitators did not “follow” her, although they followed up with other students’ absenteeism. One student also reported that the facilitator’s are dependable. For instance, Captain says this:

They encourage us. If they see someone has not come to school, they visit the one who is failing to encourage us to come back to school. And when one of them is sick, he reports to us to say today I’m not coming, you will have my friend because I am sick or because I have gone somewhere.

It is apparent from the responses that students feel that the facilitators are very encouraging in relation to CBE attendance.

Another common response was that the facilitators are not only encouraging in relation to attendance, but also through their attitudes and teaching methods. For instance, Chotsani attributes her success in the CBE (in comparison with her poor performance in primary school) to the facilitators. On more than one occasion she mentions how primary school teachers did not explain things, unlike in the CBE where the teachers explain clearly. Joy corroborates and expands on this thought, saying:
They are good teachers, they are not harsh. When we have problems, we ask. They explain to us. Unlike in primary school where one could ask and just be told, “You were not in class,” and be given a punishment. But here they are able to ask and the teacher explains to us where we have problems.

Later on during the interview, she also mentions that the facilitators sometimes divide the students into “groups” and also use “role plays” and “games” which make the lessons “interesting”. Another student adds to this list, incorporating “songs” into the repertoire. Other students also commented on this, agreeing that the facilitators make the content interesting through voice, teaching strategies or enthusiasm. 

Lastly, students feel that the facilitators also encourage the students to stay in the programme by supporting them to study, to participate, to learn and to be well-behaved. This is found to be done in various ways, including asking specific student’s questions, reminding them to study and verbally supporting or encouraging the students.

1 It is important here to note that most teaching methods can be attributed to the material development of the programme because the facilitators are provided with very detailed step-by-step teaching guides. However, in the interviews the students often accredited the lessons being “interesting” to the facilitators themselves. At the very least this shows the facilitators’ successful implementation of the teaching strategies in the teacher guides.
Part Three: Intrinsic Factors

Intrinsic factors are the most difficult to classify, though the study would not be complete or valid without them. Many scholars agree that even amid substantial global and local influences and pressures, the individual has an element of agency (Clayton 1998). Correspondingly, there are a multitude of reasons why each one of the students I interviewed chose to return to school and was able to choose. This section addresses the individual beliefs and ideas about education that influence why students wanted to return to school and attain a basic education, and it also addresses the characteristics the students possess which influence how they returned to school, and achieved some level of “success” by remaining in the programme for two of the three required years. For clarity, I have divided this section into the four main themes that arose through analysis; personal characteristics, individual aspirations/desire, safety and security and confidence.

Personal Characteristics

All of the students displayed personal characteristics that supported them in returning to school. I have labelled these resilience, industry, and independence. Resilience is the most common among students, as participants “survived” being excluded from the formal system but retained strength and conviction to return to school, despite other pressures which have already been discussed but may include poverty, abuse and discouragement from friends or family. For instance, some students said that although people in the village may tease them or discourage them from going to school, they do not listen to such pressures. Chotsani says that although her friends laugh at her and tell her she should be thinking about getting married, she does not listen to them:
“They laugh at me, to say that why don’t I get married? Why am I attending school? I answer them to say that am waiting for my time to get married.” In another example, Chimwemwe told me this about some “young people” in the village, and notes how he stands up to them:

They say if we have missed school there is no chance for us. It’s better to stay at home...We explain to them how we have benefited within these years in CBE. We always tell them what we are learning that we are now able to read and write.

Tione also shows resistance to those who discourage the CBE students saying:

They say we come here just to play not to learn. Maybe those people have never been here and see what we do here and that’s why they say that. But in responding to them I just say no, ourselves we have changed - now we are able to read and write. We know what we are doing, we have gained a lot from the programme and we can’t drop from CBE.

It is apparent that most, if not all of the participants interviewed demonstrate a resilience to external pressures to remain out of school and chose instead to achieve their own educational objectives. As Joy noted to me, “I cannot be changed by the other people who discourage me to not attend school, because I know what am learning and what my goal is and what am benefitting from the programme.”

The students I interviewed also gave the impression of being exceptionally hard-working and independent, characteristics which may contribute to their resilience. For example, Kondwani told me that the CBE students are successful because of their character:

It is because we are very hard workers. We do what the facilitators advise us or give us to do. Homework and the other things. If he has told us to bring us some other materials we bring them, we do all what the
facilitators advise us and tells us to do. So it’s the spirit of hard work which is in us students.

Like Kondwani, most of the students I spoke with also mentioned at some point in the interviews that they spend a significant amount of time doing school work outside of school. In another example, Captain indicates his own determination and drive:

There was no one who told me to come here to CBE classes. There is no encouragement from parents or friends. It is my own decision and my own encouragement to be attending CBE. Looking the problem I have, I had before because I could not read or write. So that problem encourages me to come to CBE classes just to learn how to read and write.

**Individual Aspirations**

What I found remarkable from the data was that the majority of the participants I spoke with had a strong belief in the value of education and expressed themselves firmly on this topic. More than one participant said education was the most important thing in life, yet the reasons *why* students felt this way differed. One learner remarked that she wanted an education so she could “be employed” and another thought that education was the only way to make a better life. Another student told me that all the people he admires as role models have been educated, and he aspires to be like them. Vincent, who was very proud of his English skills said:

I like to learn more in English and I like coming to school just to learn English mostly. I’m coming to CBE to learn English. I want to learn a lot in English to speak to other people like you from there, and say: “I can speak English”.

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Tione initially said that he wanted an education so he could have privacy when reading letters from his long distance girlfriend and Chimwemwe expressed his concern over getting lost:

Those who have gone to school could read some sign posts to say the bus is going Nchisi, is going to Zomba, which is difficult to those who have never gone to school. Sometimes they go in wrong directions.

Captain, who was very adamant about the importance of education in his life, noted how “even farmers” like himself can benefit. He spoke to me about how he can distinguish among those who are educated and those who aren’t and how the “educated people” generally “do better”:

I’m in a village, we have farmers, some attended school before, some haven’t attended school. I do differentiate them to say, those who have attended, they are making and progressing their farming and those who have never attended they are not doing anything. So I consider education to be most important thing in life to say if one is educated he can go in any field and do better than those who have never attended school.

It is clear that for this student, he is motivated by a desire to have more opportunities and be “more” successful “than those who have never attended school”.

After analysis, I identified the different motivations as: desire for self-improvement, a desire for communication with either long-distance friends or foreigners such as myself, and especially, a general desire to learn.

The desire just to learn was obvious in all the students I interviewed. This was apparent not only in their words, but in their passion and determination. For instance, Gift, who had never been to school, expressed his desire to attend CBE to “learn what [he] missed.” Faith, who does not want to return to the formal system, said she went to CBE to “learn some other things” and Joy, who “liked to learn” in primary school but
didn’t achieve the literacy skills she wanted, tells me that she returned to school “to learn to read and write and gain other skills.” Finally, Captain, who was bothered by seeing his friends reading when he could not said: “I came to CBE to learn how to read and to write. I want – I mean – as of now I already writing and reading, I could write a letter, read a letter, for some other people and even myself.”

**Safety and Security**

Another interesting result was discovering that many students went to school not only to learn, but to participate in an activity away from the home. As mentioned, many participants have difficulties in their family lives including deaths, alcohol abuse and neglect from step-parents. Often these difficulties contributed to the students dropping out of the formal system. Joy claims she feels “free and happy” at CBE and away from her parents whom she thinks are fighting over her:

Sometimes I run away from the problems at home, especially with my father. Because sometimes I could see some quarrels between my father and my mother so I wanted to stay away from some of these things. So I come here to attend school and spend some time here and then go back maybe late in the evening... I forget everything and I concentrate on the lessons.

Chotsani is in a similar position and enjoys escaping the daily pressures of her home. She says “coming to school is one of the best things [in her life]” and she tells me “I am free when I’m at school and not home.”
Confidence

The findings also indicate that one big pull keeping the students in the programme is the confidence “being educated” inspires. Many students described how they felt before attending CBE, namely when they were illiterate. Some students described how they were upset seeing their friends reading and writing when they were unable to do so and this partly inspired them to pursue their education. Now, however, all of the participants I interviewed shared their happiness that they returned to school. For Gift, he commented on the difference between not being literate and being able to read words:

I wasn’t... ah... happy to hear some other words which were just speaking outside without knowing how to read it. So after coming to CBE, I could say oh! This word is written in this way, so I was happy to read.

Participants also revealed their newfound confidence at being literate and more valued in the community. This pull is closely linked to the enabling factors of the community, because many students felt a heightened feeling of confidence because of their increased “worth” in the community, as discussed in section one. Faith illustrates this when she remarks: “The school has assisted me because some community people could depend on me” and another student remarked proudly: “now I am a changed person and the relatives and some people in the village have trusted me to say I’m somebody who can help them and other things in the villages.”

Part Four: External Factors

Circling around and through the layers of influence are the external factors, which I view as forces embedded deep within Malawi and its complex relationship with global
economics, culture and positioning. These factors generally affect the return and retention in school indirectly but in some ways are the strongest and most difficult forces to control. As mentioned, these factors affect all other factors and are engaged in a complex relationship with other influences. I have divided these factors into economics, gender and health.

**Economic Situation**

A particularly influential factor important to consider is the economic situation of the participants. As already noted in this study, the majority of rural Malawian youth live in poverty and struggle regularly for sustenance. Primarily, the participants interviewed showed concern over having enough food and/or enough money to meet basic needs. For instance, Captain states: “I have problems to – to find money to be using in my daily life,” and Chotsani says: “some other problems we face is the lacking of some clothes, the food, the soap.” In almost all cases, this lack of basic needs was a direct influence on the student being excluded from the formal school system, be it through needing to stay home and farm, not having appropriate clothing, or choosing to work instead of being in school. Correspondingly, poverty is a clear obstacle to the students’ return to school.

**Economic Situation: As an Obstacle**

Findings show socio-economic status displaying itself as an obstacle through irregular or missed attendance in the CBE. This manifests itself through lack of basic needs, the necessity to do “piece work” to supplement income, and students staying home to offer financial support to the family.
First, all of the students indicated that they struggle on a daily basis to have enough food, soap and/or money. When questioned about the circumstances under which they would be absent from school, most students cited one or more of these factors as the main reason. Students also said that sometimes they would miss class when they do not have food and were hungry, or when they could not afford soap – they did not want to go to school unwashed or with dirty clothes.

Second, many of the participants reported that they often missed days of school in order to do “piece work” to supplement income. For example, Captain says: “we spend a day maybe without food so those days which I have missed school I was doing some piece work somewhere just to find money to buy food for home.” Joy, who reported that her step-father doesn’t assist her financially, testified that some days she must do piece work to support herself and her young daughter. Tione, who does not live with either parent, says:

As I have said, I stay with my grandmother and most of the years I could not harvest enough food for the whole year. And we may fall short of food some other days, so we organised to be together to go to someone to work in the garden and maybe we could receive some maize or money to buy some maize for food at home. So I missed some lessons some days, so I could go to do some piece work somewhere.

Lastly, some students’ situation is further hampered by the necessity of assisting the family by working in the fields at home. Vincent, who is an orphan, is a particularly evident case and notes that he needs to be working at home to assist his elderly grandparents with the fields and the family business. Chotsani, whose father is dead, is in a similar situation. She explained that one reason she dropped out of primary schools is because she didn’t like to see her mother “working alone in the fields”.

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**Economics: As an Enabler**

Although it may be assumed that a difficult economic situation can only be an obstacle for students’ return to school, the study showed that economics have a much more complex relationship in regards to the research question proposed here. Many of the responses revealed that the drive behind “being educated” was instigated or driven by a desire to have a stable economic position. Essentially, the study reveals that a large and overarching influence to return and to stay in school is the desire to improve one’s economic situation in some form. Data analysis reveals that in nine out of the ten students, the deeper reason motivating the students return to school was connected to improving his/her economic status. Captain illustrates this point when he says:

> I consider education to be the most important thing in life, to say if one is educated he can go in any field and do better than those who have never attended school. So I value education as one of the most important things in my life. And also looking at people who are educated, [they are] in higher positions.

Gift is the most evident example, and is also, perhaps unsurprisingly, the student who was at the lowest economic group from the sample I interviewed. Most notably, Gift told me outright that money was the most important aspect, and also the biggest challenge, in his life.

Interviewer: What in life is most important to you? What is most important?
Participant: Money. [Laughs].
Interviewer: Money! That’s most important?
Participant: Most important is money.
Interviewer: And after money, what is important?
Participant: Food.
Shortly after, he expresses that he has been cheated before in his dealings with selling his tobacco crops because he could not do the math himself. And when I ask him when he is most happy, he responds saying “some small profits after selling the – the – crops... the maize the tobacco, is when I am most happy. To say “I’m successful this year and everything has gone well”. It is apparent that this student connects success and happiness with profit-making and food security. To him, returning to school and learning farming practices and numeracy, which he believes will benefit him financially, are incentive to continue with his education.

In another example, Chimwemwe, who is extremely interested in “business”, admits that money is an issue in his life saying it is “hard to find money”. He further tells me that he admires people who “are educated and doing business” and states that in his future he wants to be “doing business” either by a small grocery store or operating a clothing shop. Most importantly, however, is that he tells me that the CBE is helping him hone his business skills. He equates education with “business”, money, and thus finding a solution to his problem.

Further related to this notion of “business”, some students responded that a major reason for returning to school was to learn numeracy in order to do their own math calculations that would enable them to “count money”, avoid being “cheated” when doing business and to “make change”. For instance, one student remarked: “It is important to learn numbers because we learn how to count money. So to count tomatoes, to be making good budgets, and... It is good to learn how to count money.”

It should be noted that not all students expressed some incentive to return to school in order to improve their life situation financially or economically. After analysis,
only one student did not directly or indirectly mention the desire for a “better life” economically.

**Gender**

Gender is another factor which reveals itself as having influence over the students’ return to schooling. As noted, five of the participants are female, although only the data of four is being used. As females living in rural poverty, these students are even more marginalised than the male students and face additional difficulties that stem from traditional gender views, roles and power relationships that exist within Chewa culture. Such difficulties were expressed through students’ discussion of their experiences at home and in the formal school and include bullying, extra duties at home, teacher harassment and verbal and physical gender-based violence. I particularly noted from the interviews that the life experiences of the girls were generally more tumultuous and difficult than those of the boys.

It is difficult to pinpoint how gender indirectly influences the return to schooling, but it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of gender stereotypes and power relationships that exist in the culture and are generally unfavourable to girls and women. These relationships undoubtedly affect girls return to and retention in schooling. For example, Chisomo told me that she does the most housework out of everyone in her family because “they have a girl to do these things.” She also admitted that she misses class to help with household duties like “fetching some firewood, cleaning the place and other household chores” which are typically duties assigned to women. In another
instance, Chotsani reveals the pressures she faces to get married: “[My friends] laugh at me, to say that why don’t I get married? Why am I attending school? I answer them to say that am waiting for my time to get married.”

From the interviews, although it was clear that all girls I interviewed had negative experiences in the primary schools directly related to gender (i.e. sexual harassment and bullying), gender did not arise as a direct obstacle inhibiting students from returning to the CBE and staying in the programme. In Joy’s case, gender actually works as an enabler. In our discussions, Joy tells me that she thinks girls have a bigger desire to learn and are more interested in the lessons because “they are more concerned with their problems,” suggesting that it is more important that girls – who have more difficulties – be educated. She told me:

Participant: The teachers encourage both sides, boys and girls, but girls are more interested than boys.
Interviewer: More interested to learn?
Participant: Yes, than boys.
Interviewer: Why do you think that is?
Participant: I can’t explain well, but everyone has his own problems and he knows what to achieve so maybe girls are more concerned with their problems then they come to school. They have a bigger desire to learn.

**Health**

Health is another overarching external factor that is necessary to consider when looking into factors related to returning to school. HIV/AIDS, malaria and malnutrition are health issues common to rural Malawi. Although the nature of this study did not investigate sensitive issues surrounding terminal illness (specifically HIV/AIDS) nor probe too deeply into the personal lives of students and how illnesses might be affecting
them or their families, it is an issue that should be mentioned as an external factor. Poor student and student family health is an obstacle to returning to school because it affects student attendance. For example, many students reported that “malaria” was a common reason why they might miss class. One student told me he frequently suffers from the illness. Another student told me that he misses class to work in the fields because his parents are in poor health.

Summary

In conclusion, it is clear that the factors affecting out-of-school youths return to school are numerous and complex. Primary, the findings suggest that there are large-scale forces that are embedded within culture, politics and prevalent ideology that influence the return to school which I categorise as economic, gender and health. These forces directly and indirectly influence the students. Moving in closer towards the participant is the programmatic factors that physically and/or directly influence the student. Moving past this level are the social factors, which include the influence emitting from the participants’ family, friends and community. Finally, on a level closest to the participant is the participant’s personal characteristics, individual aspirations, participant’s safety, and the level of confidence the student experiences. These factors make up the intrinsic factors, which also influence all other factors, as they include the participants’ viewpoint and agency.
Chapter Seven: Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to provide insight into the lives of rural Malawian youth who have made the transition from out-of school youth to enrolment in and near completion of a complementary basic education programme. Factors which influence this return to and retention in school were explored. As revealed in chapter six, there are numerous interconnecting factors that affect this process. This chapter highlights and discusses these findings, and presents conclusions by pulling back immediate influence to examine these factors in a wider contextual setting.

Findings Highlighted

The previous chapter has revealed the findings of the research and here I will briefly highlight some of them. Primarily, in order to consider answering the question of “what factors have influenced the students return to school?” we must first look at the factors that speak to the following questions: can the student attend classes, will the student attend classes and will the student remain in the programme? Answering these questions results in a sort-of filtration system that prioritizes the factors.

Can the student attend?

The first question, can the student attend, is markedly one of the most important. On reflecting upon the findings, it is clear that regardless of personal factors, family influences or other elements, the students in this study would not be able to achieve their educational goals if there wasn’t a space where they could do so. What are the factors
that have made the decision to return to schooling possible? Principally these are the elements which make it possible for the students to attend the classes, which include the existence, location and scheduling of the programme. For instance, some of the students I spoke with did not go to the formal school or dropped-out simply because it was extremely difficult, if not impossible for them to attend, such as Gift, who had no clothing, Faith, who could not attend school because she was pregnant, or Chotsani and Tione, who experienced harassment and violence. Furthermore, for most of these students, their first priority is survival via food security. Some students could not attend primary school because his/her family could not abide the loss of work from the child which equates to loss of income, and consequently, food. However, the existence, suitable location and convenient, community-decided scheduling of the CBE programme make it feasible for students who were unable to attend the government school able to attend the CBE.

**Will the Student Attend?**

If it is now possible that students can go to the programme, we can look at the next question which asks: will the student attend?

The support which the student receives from his/her peers, family, and friends are an important element here. As noted in the findings, students I spoke with were all encouraged to initially attend the CBE by people from these three groups. In most cases, the family is at the level of influence closest to the participant and all the students in the programme had at least one close family member who supported him/her in going to the CBE whether it be encouragement through actions or words.
On the next level are the peers and friends of the student, who also emerged as having major influence on the learners. This could be partly due to the age of participants, who are teenagers and likely to be more influenced by their peers. Regardless, it was clear that students were swayed by their friends attending the programme and/or encouraging them to attend themselves.

Expanding farther out but still of notable importance is the community’s influence on students. In all three centres, communities were supportive and on board with the project. This is essential both to successful implementation of the programme itself and motivating the participants to attend the classes. As some students told me, they were encouraged by the chief who supported the project.

Finally, the primary factor influencing attendance is undoubtedly the students’ desire to go back to school. Their individual characteristics and drive motivates them to achieve their goals regardless of the challenges they face. All of the students I interviewed revealed a passion for learning and acquiring literacy and/or numeracy skills although the reasons behind this motivation differed among students. It was quite clear that the path to an education had not been easy for any of the students I interviewed, illustrating the determination that unquestionably exists within each one of them.

**Will the Student Remain?**

If the students have the place, the support and the motivation to attend, we can now ask: will the student *remain* in the programme? A combination of all the factors recorded in the findings contribute to answering this question but deal mainly with: the quality of the lessons, teaching and the learning, positive reinforcement from self,
community and/or family and friends, and most notably, an increased level of confidence and feeling of worth the student experiences.

Considering the findings of the study, students felt that they were receiving a quality education in the CBE. By quality I refer to: evidence that students feel they are learning, approval of the curriculum content and teaching methods, and liking of the facilitators. For instance, some students expressed frustration at being in primary school without learning to read but felt that they learned easily in the CBE.

Even more significant was that students experienced an increased level of confidence through their return to school. This heightened sense of worth was obvious in all the students I interviewed. They feel they are more valued in the community and have higher opinions of themselves. This factor is essential in encouraging the students to remain in the programme.

Duality of Factors

This study has attempted to delve into the experiences of a group of rural Malawian youths and explore the factors that influenced their return to school which have been presented and highlighted above. However, it is important to consider the duality of the factors presented. While the research question asks: what factors have influenced the return to and retention in school, what emerges from this study is partly an answer to the following: how do students in the CBE programme explain their return and retention in school? All the findings presented are from a combined perspective of me as researcher, and the participant’s themselves.

At this point we can return to the diagram (figure 2, pg. 72.) of the findings. As noted in the previous chapter, the factors cannot be clearly separated and defined but
rather they all influence each other in a complex relationship. However, in concluding this study, I will point out that the most significant influences on the work presented here are the individual students themselves and what they shared, as well as myself, who has analysed, interpreted, and explained the findings.

**Conclusions and Discussion**

Without the CBE, most likely the participants in the study would not have had the opportunity to return to school to ‘catch-up’ on material they feel they missed in primary school. Primarily, it is clear that accessible alternatives to the formal system need to be made available to disadvantaged populations. From the student response to CBE, I assume that there is surely a demand for such programmes and a population that has the interest in getting an education but has been excluded from formal schools. These programmes should be community oriented and designed specific to each population or area. Like the CBE, these projects should consider factors which make formal schooling extremely difficult for some groups and look towards providing a solution and a space where these kids can get an education.

Furthermore, the findings from this study show that parents, family members, and community members should be supported in sending children back to school and integrating alternative forms of schooling into the community. Although most participants did not differentiate between mother and father, all of the learners noted at least one family member who either encouraged him/her to go to the CBE or to generally get an education. While most parental attitudes were pro-education, some students reported negative influences from family members suggesting that there is still a need to
advocate and support rural Malawian parents in encouraging their children to go back to school. I also noted that parents who had more education were more likely to be a positive influence on the child going to the CBE, such as Captain, whose mother was taking adult literacy classes, or Tione, whose parents had both reached beyond standard five.

At this point we can scale out and examine the findings of this study on a larger, global setting. As discussed in the introduction chapter, the CBE programme is situated within a broader framework and influenced by the community, civil society and the formal school system. This framework is defined by three main assumptions: 1) economic development and income-generation is prioritised as the functioning view of the importance of education, 2) this system is inherently exclusionary to some groups and 3) these groups are chiefly already disadvantaged groups including girls, rural children, poor children and minorities. The existence of the CBE programme works to address the last two assumptions by aiming to support the excluded and marginalised populations and provide them with a basic education.

However, in terms of the first assumption, it appears that there is a disconnect between student opinion and policy level perspectives. Although the formal school system is exclusionary, particularly to minority populations, the CBE programme provides an avenue where students may resist this exclusion and gain access to power through literacy, numeracy, and the opportunity to choose to learn. Primarily, as previously noted, the CBE provides a space and opportunity for the marginalised out-of-school youth, families, peers and the community provide them with support and the students themselves bring their courage, motivation and intrinsic belief in the value of an education. These components combined create a space and motivation where students
have the ability to *choose* to learn and why. While the dominant view prioritises education as a means of economic development rather than a human right (Samoff, 1999), responses with the students I met did not corroborate this view. Students return to school for a multitude of reasons that include a desire to communicate with friends, loved ones or foreigners, to improve employment opportunities and overall an aspiration to improve the quality of their daily lives through having increased confidence and individual power to be informed and aware of life around them.

In conclusion, although the CBE programme is a response to an essentially exclusionary formal school system and is situated within a system that promotes education as a means of achieving economic development, the findings show that with support from family, friends and community, the students have a significant degree of agency within this framework and are the ones who ultimately choose to return to school for their own personal goals which range from the belief that education will provide them with better employment opportunities to an increased level of confidence in their daily lives. This motivation, along with positive reinforcement of the programme itself and the increased feeling of value and confidence the students experienced, are why the students remain in the programme.

**Further Research**

In light of the minimal amount of literature available on non-formal education and success stories of alternative programmes, it is necessary to inquire further into these initiatives and examine how they are contributing to education systems and the education of marginalised, excluded populations, particularly in developing countries. It would be
It would be beneficial to explore additional “success stories” and investigate what elements contribute to a successful NFE programme. In future, this literature may be used to develop programmes that can successfully reach those who desire an education but do not have access. Such literature may also contribute to improving current education systems, both formal and non-formal.

Secondly, this study examines the pilot cohort of the initial stages of the CBE. It could be beneficial to the programme itself to conduct a study further down the line to examine the longer-term outcomes of participation in an alternative programme. How do alternative education programmes, like the CBE, influence students later on in life?

Finally, programmes can benefit from exploring deeper into student motivation to attend and remain in school. This study has only scratched the surface and found a division between large-scale hegemonic perspectives on the purpose of schooling and the individual reasons why the local students desire an education. Policy-makers, programme developers, aid workers and governments can benefit from examining the reasons why students themselves want to get an education, and the factors that motivate them to remain in school.

**Personal Response**

I began this study intending to give a voice to a marginalised population of youth in rural Malawi. I wanted to know and understand how they lived and learned, and how education – or the lack of it – affected them. I hoped to explore how inequality manifested itself in the government education system and how these youth were somehow bypassing this exclusion to find a place in an alternative school system.
In pursuit of this I discovered that it is not possible to give a voice to another person, but only to allow their perspectives to influence and shape my own views, which are inextricably weaved throughout this work.

While speaking and connecting with each participant, I also learned that most of the students I interviewed face challenges in their daily lives that I have never experienced because of my privileged background. By the time they were teenagers, most of the students experienced a level of suffering I knew I would likely never live through. Yet despite such hardships, the students have found strength and courage to set and work towards goals for themselves, most looking to empower themselves through education. In light of this discovery, I found that while I may have initially anticipated giving something back to the Malawian community, it was these extraordinary students that have taught me more then I could have imagined.


Malawi Ministry of Education.

http://www.malawi.gov.mw/Education/Home%20%E2%80%90Education.htm


Malawi Sustainable Development Network Programme (SDNP).


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Thompson, E. J. D. (2001). Successful experiences in non-formal education and alternative approaches to basic education in Africa. *ADEA Biennial Meeting (Session 8: Mainstreaming Nonformal Education: Towards a Grounded Theory)*. Arusha, Tanzania, October. 7-11.


Appendices

Appendix I: Map

1 From: www.politicalresources.net
2 From: www.lib.utexas.edu
# Appendix II: Interview Questions Charts

## Interview One

### Theme: Life Story

| General/ Daily Life |  ● What is your full name?  
  ● How old are you?  
  ● Where do you live?  
  ● When do you usually go to school?  
  ● Tell me about a typical day. When do you wake up? What do you do? Imagine that you are walking me through a regular day (Monday).  
  ● Tell me what you do when you’re not at school.  
  ● Tell me what you do on Saturday & Sunday  
  ● Are you religious? What religion are you?  
  ● Do you go to church?  
  ● Do you work/ earn money? Please explain.  
  ● Tell me about the best thing in your life.  
  ● Tell me about the most difficult part of your life. |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Parents/Family      |  ● Tell me about your parents and your family.  
  ● Who do you spend the most time with in your family? The least?  
  ● What are your parents’ names?  
  ● How old are they?  
  ● Were they both born in this village?  
  ● Do you live with them?  
  ● Did they go to school?  
  ● How do they earn money?  
  ● Who is the primary caregiver in your family?  
  ● Do you have any siblings?  
  ● What are their ages?  
  ● Do they go to school? Why or why not?  
  ● Tell me about your childhood/ when you were younger.  
  ● Tell me about your husband/wife/children. |

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1 Note: These charts are sample questions only. As the interviews were semi-structured, often these questions would lead to further inquiry not shown here.
Interest/Goals/Thoughts

- Tell me about your hobbies.
- How do you spend your free time? Or time with friends?
- Tell me about your friends.
- Tell me about the things that are most important to you.
- Tell me about something that you are proud of.
- What do you want to do in the future?
- What do you worry about?
- Do you have problems in your family or in your life? Tell me about them. Tell me about something you did in your life that was very challenging.
- Tell me about your hopes for you and your family (children)?
- Do you have a job or role you hope to fulfill?

Interview Two

Theme: CBE Experiences

CBE Education Intro

- What year are you in of the CBE programme?
- What did you do before you went to CBE?
- Tell me about a typical day at school. Start with when you arrive.
- Tell me how you came to be participating in the CBE programme.
- Why did you decide to participate in the CBE programme?
- Did you consider not participating? Tell me about that. Why do you think you might have reconsidered?
- Was it your decision or someone else’s (i.e. a family member) to go to school?
- When you miss a class, what is usually the reason?
- Do you go to school every day? If not, why not?
- What hours do you usually go to school?
- How close is the centre to your house?
- How many students do you study with?
- Do you study outside of class? Why/ why not.
- How do you feel about going to school every day?
- Do you think you are learning a lot? Tell me a little about what you learn.
- Do you write tests or exams? What do you think about them?

CBE Subjects/classes

- Tell me how you feel about your lessons.
- Tell me about the materials you bring to class. Do you use textbooks? Tell me about them.
- What classes do you have? Or what subjects do you learn?
- Which classes/subjects do you like the most? Least? Why?
- What subject/class do you think is the most important?
| **CBE Facilitator** | • Tell me about the most interesting lessons. Can you remember a lesson that was really fun? One that wasn’t? Are any of the lessons or topics very challenging for you? Or too easy?  
• Is there any lesson that you think is not important?  
• What happens if you miss a lesson? Is it difficult to catch up the next day?  
• Tell me about what you usually do in your lessons. Do you mostly speak, write or listen?  
| **CBE Thoughts, Feelings, Plans** | • Tell me about the facilitator.  
• Does s/he encourage you to study at home?  
• Do you often ask questions? Does s/he answer your questions?  
• Do you know the teacher outside of school (e.g. in the village)?  
| **In your opinion, is school very hard work? Is it more work or fun?**  
| **Tell me about what you like the most about CBE.**  
| **Is there anything that you think might make CBE better?**  
| **What advice would you give to other children in the village who were considering going to the CBE?**  
| **Do you think that going to the CBE was a good decision? Why? Has it helped you in your life? Tell me how.**  
| **What will you do next year, after CBE is over?**  
| **Do you want to continue to go to school?** |
Appendix III: Consent Forms

Information Letter in English

Re: A Study of Malawian Youth in a Complimentary Basic Education Programme

October 01, 2008

Dear _________________________

Hello, my name is Alison Malcolm and I am a graduate student at a University in Toronto, Canada. I am working on my master’s degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which is part of the University of Toronto. Two years ago I visited Malawi and lived and worked in Blantyre for one year. I met many people and I became very interested in education in Malawi.

For my university programme, I am conducting a study on student experiences in the Complimentary Basic Education (CBE) programme in Malawi. I would like to interview some students, such as you, who are in their 2nd or 3rd year of study in the programme.

I am interested in finding out about your life and your experiences in the CBE programme. I would like to know your personal stories and education history. I would also like to know how you came to be participating in the CBE programme and what experiences you’ve had so far. Lastly, I am interested to hear about your personal thoughts and feelings about your education, the CBE programme and your future hopes and dreams.

The CBE programme aims to give students such as you a basic level of education. The fight to get an education is one shared by many students both in Malawi and other parts of the world. It has become a popular understanding that regular school systems cannot serve every child and so other types of schools and learning are growing. The CBE is an example of a different type of school that is serving children who were not able to go to the government schools. This research will help advance the idea that different types of education are important and determine how different forms of education can be useful to students in various circumstances. It will also help the CBE programme itself make improvements and learn about what the students in the programme are thinking and experiencing.

The research I conduct will be semi-structured interviews approximately one hour long, which will be done at a time and place of your convenience, provided the atmosphere is not too noisy. The interviews will be tape recorded and kept in my possession. After I return to Canada only myself and my supervisor will have access to the interviews, and they will be destroyed 2
years after I complete my masters’ degree. At any time during the interview/research process you are free to request changes or ask me to remove any piece of information. You are also free to withdraw your consent and the information you provided me with would be removed from the study. Your name, or the name of anyone you may refer to during your interview, will **not** be used. I will use a code name for each participant and related people that only I will recognise.

You are free to contact me after I return to Canada at any time, to ask questions or to request a change or removal of the information you gave me. My address is:

245 Brunswick Ave.  
Toronto, ON  
M5S2M6  
Phone: +1(905)782-4880  
Email: ali.malcolm@utoronto.ca

You may also contact my supervisor, Joseph Farrell at: jfarrell@oise.utoronto.ca.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign the attached consent form and return it me, at which time we can set-up an appropriate time to interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alison Malcolm
Consent Letter in English

Re: A Study of Malawian Youth in a Complimentary Basic Education programme

I, ______________________________, agree to participate in a study about Malawian youth in the Complimentary Basic Education programme.

I understand that the study will involve approximately one-hour long interviews at a time and place of my convenience. Participating in these interviews may involve answering questions about:

- My previous educational experiences
- My experiences in the Complimentary Basic Education Programme
- My thoughts and feelings about school, learning, and my future

I understand that any information I share during this interview will be kept anonymous and confidential. My name or the names of others I may share will not be used.

I understand that I am not required to participate in the study, it is voluntary. There is no penalty or negative consequence if I agree to participate and withdraw my consent at a later point.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in the study, though the information gained may assist researchers and others in the academic community to better understand the lives and experiences of students in the CBE programme.

A summary of the study will be sent to me at the address I provide.

I understand what this study involves and I agree to participate. I have been given a copy of the consent form.

____________________     __________________  __________
Printed Name          Signature               Date
Consent Letter in Chichewa

Zofunika Kudziwa Ophunzira

Mdondomeko a maphunziro a wachinyamata wa chimalawi mu pologalamu yapadera ya CBE

Ine ______________________________ ndabroeleza kutenga nawo mbali mu maphunziro awachinyamata wa chimalawi mu pulogalamu ya \padera ya CBE.

Ndidikudiwa kuti maphunzirowa asanachitike padzakhala nthawi yondifunsa mafunso kwa ola limodzi. Mafunswa mudzandifusa kumalo komwe ndidza sanke. Kwathu kapena komwe a CBE amaphunzira. Pathawi ya mafunsoyi ndidrafunsidwa za:

- Maganizo anga, maphunziro anga ndi kulchududwa kwanga pankhani ya sukulu nditsogolo langa
- Mbiri ya maphunziro anga mmbuyomu
- Mbiri ya maphunziro anga mu pologalamu ya CBE

Ndidikudiwa kuti zonse zobambidwa panthawi ya mafunsoyi bapena maina anthu othchulidwa adrasungidwa mwa chinsinsli ndipo sadzagwirtsidwa ntchito.
Ndidikudiwa kuti ndi ufulu wanga popanda kukakami zidwa kutenga nawo gawo pa maphunziro wa, ndipo ndibafuna kusiyi osapitiliza palibe vuto.
Ndidikudiwa kuti sindidalipidwa koma ythenga ndi maganizo anga zidzapangitsa kupititsa patsogolo maphunziro wa pozindilara kuti ndidzawnikira zinazazomwe ophunzira a CBE akudutsamo.
Zotsatira zuke zidzatamizidwa kwa ine pa keyala yomwe ndidza pereke.
Ndidikudiwa zomwe maphunzirowa adzapange ndipo ndabromera kutenga nawo gawo.

________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________________  __________________
Lembani dzinalanu                       sayinani                                              tsiku

Mukafuna kudziwa zambiri lembaba pa keyala ya emalilyi:
ethics.review@utoronto.ca kapena imbani lamya pa +1-416-946-3237 pofuna kudziwa za ufulu wanga ngati otenga nawo gawo.

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Maphunziro akatha mungathe kufunsa mafunso anu kapena zidandaulo zanu kwa opangitsa kafukufuku.
Alison Malcolm,
8 Melbourne Place,
Brampton, ON,
CANADA.
+1-905-792-0816.
alibaba3@gmail.com
Translator Consent Letter

Re: A Study of Malawian Youth in a Complimentary Basic Education programme

I, ____________________________, agree to act as translator in a study about Malawian youth in the Complimentary Basic Education programme.

I understand that the study will involve approximately one-hour long interviews. During these interviews I understand that I will be privy to personal information about the participants. However, by signing this form I agree to:

- Not reveal any personal information about the participants to anyone other than the primary researcher
- Keep the identity of the participants’ confidential
- Not record any data I may learn during the interviews

I understand that any information I learn during the interviews will be kept anonymous and confidential. My name or the names of others I may share will not be used.

You are free to contact me after I return to Canada at any time, to ask questions or to request a change or removal of the information you gave me. My address is:

245 Brunswick Ave.
Toronto, ON
M5S2M6
Phone: +1(905)782-4880
Email: ali.malcolm@utoronto.ca

You may also contact my supervisor, Joseph Farrell at: ifarrell@oise.utoronto.ca.

__________________  ________________  ________________
Printed Name       Signature         Date