

Assessment of Academic Interventions to Enhance Learners Academic Performance in the SDA School the Case of Malawi

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Abstract

Formal education in all countries has been considered very important for personal and societal development. Education remains the biggest instrument for academic progress, social mobilization, political survival and effective national development of any country. One of the church institutions offering formal education is the Seventh Day Adventist Church. This study assessed academic interventions to enhance learners' academic performance in the SDA secondary schools in Malawi. The 'Effective School Model' by Lezotte (2010) was used as a framework in the study. A sample of 54 participants comprising 12 teachers, 30 learners, and 6 members of the school board, 3 station pastors, and 3 School administrators was purposively selected in this descriptive qualitative study. Data was collected using open-ended questionnaire, interview guides, and document analysis that were analysed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. Result of the study reveals that some students were highly motivated to learn and do better. However, students' performance was affected by several factors. Meanwhile, the study findings show that focussing on use of English language, formation of the Parent Teacher Association, adequate teaching and learning resources, teachers' postings, use of aptitude test, time management, incentives, educational leadership, and frequent inspection would improve the performance of students in the SDA schools. Based on the study results, the study recommends consultative meetings with various stakeholders to bring their inputs on the matter, provision of adequate teaching materials, and selection of students must base on realistic results of the aptitude test administered.

Keywords: SDA schools, Learners, Academic performance, Interventions.

Introduction

Formal education in all countries has been considered very important for personal and societal development (Amie-Ogan & Chukwukah, 2021). Education remains the biggest instrument for academic progress, social mobilization, political survival and effective national development of any country (Amadi, 2015). Formal education in Malawi is closely linked with the early Christian missionaries.

The coming of the Christian missionaries in Malawi was a planned activity with full determination to Christianise Malawians. The Seventh Day Adventist missionaries as one of the foreign Christian missionaries, apart from emphasizing on the spread of the gospel, they also addressed other human needs

of the people they preached. According to Bilima (1987), almost all mission societies started their work with a triangular approach in response to the Great Commission of Jesus; to teach, preach and heal diseases. It is observed that missionaries used schools to give practical training in agriculture, crafts, and printing; a church for preaching the Word of God where teachers served as the preachers; and finally medical clinics that provided healing to humanity. Their schools were meant to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, and above all, to prepare them for baptism (Anderson, 1970; Bogonko, 1992). Most missions provided only basic education to ensure the inculcation of proper Christian principles and enable Africans attending the mission schools to become good Christians.

In this third millennium, the SDA church just as other religious denominations continues to provide different social services in Malawi, which include formal education services. The church understands that education is a vehicle of knowledge, self-preservation, and success (Bhardwaj, 2016). Education has been proven to be a tool helping individuals participate in society's basic functions and acquire an essential educational foundation for their development into a productive and versatile citizen (UNESCO, 2010). This has made the church to operate a school system that ensures the youth will receive a balanced physical, mental, moral, social, and practical education in harmony with denominational standards and ideals; having God as the source of all moral value and truth. The school prepares the youth to become effective witnesses and workers in the worldwide outreach program of the church. The stated interest of the church is in the optimum development of the whole child for both this life and the life hereafter (LaBorde, 2007).

In the recent years, particularly since 2014 the academic performance of almost all SDA secondary schools has not been pleasing. Based on the Malawi School Certificate of Examinations (MSCE) performance of one of the sampled secondary schools, it is indicated that in 2014 out of 48 candidates who sat for the MSCE examinations, 37(77%) passed while 12(25%) out of the total entry passed with less than 36 points. The data also shows that in 2015 the pass rate increased to 83% (48 out of 59); this represents a 6% rate higher than the previous year. However, the number of candidates who passed with less than 36 points was 14 representing 24%. In 2016, the pass rate was greater than the preceding two years with 85% (69 out of 97 candidates who sat for the examinations). On the contrary, the number of candidates who passed with less than 36 points was lower than the previous two years as it dropped to 17(18%). It is also indicated that in 2017 the pass rate was 82% (65 out of 79 candidates who sat for the examinations) and the number of candidates who passed with less than 36 points dropped further to 13 (16%). In 2018, the pass rate sharply dropped to 63% (90 out of 142 candidates who sat for the examinations). This was the lowest pass rate in five years. However, the good news is that in the year 2018, the number of candidates who passed with less than 36 points went higher than in all previous years as it reached 37(26%).

Problem statement

Based on the data above, it shows that the average pass rate of this SDA secondary school in the past five years was 78% and the average number of candidates who passed with less than 36 points was 22%. This clearly shows that each year at least many learners in the SDA secondary schools pass and qualify for the award of the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) certificate. On sad note, many learners who pass the MSCE examinations fail to qualify for the admission into various public colleges and universities as most of them get more than 36 points. It is evidenced that the academic performance in terms of learners

who qualify for selection into the public universities and colleges is very low in these schools. In reference to the literature available, it is not known what academic interventions can be implemented to enhance academic performance in the SDA secondary school in Malawi so that many students should qualify for admission in the public universities. Therefore, the main objective of the study was to assess academic interventions that can enhance learners' academic performance in the SDA secondary schools in Malawi. Meanwhile, the research specific objectives that guided the study were to explore school based administrative practices on learners' academic performance, and to explore church organisational administrative practices on SDA secondary schools.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework known as 'The Effective School Model' by Lezotte (2010) guided this study. An Effective School refers to a school whose educators are responsible for producing acceptable results by putting emphasis on a number of traits. There are seven correlates or traits of effective schools and these are; strong instructional leadership, clear and focused mission, safe and orderly schools, climate of high expectations for success, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home-school relations, and opportunity to learn/time on task (Lezotte, 2010). Therefore, this study looked at the interventions to enhance performance in the SDA schools in line with the traits of the Effective School Model.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was qualitative in nature because it wanted to develop in-depth knowledge about how academic performance can be improved. It is also argued that qualitative approach is preferable where the goal is to seek an understanding of a process or phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2009; Creswell, 2009). The study was conducted in three Adventist secondary schools found in Malawi, that is one from each conference. The schools are under the Malawi Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists Church that consists of three conferences namely; North Malawi Conference, Central Malawi Conference and South Malawi Conference. These schools were chosen because they have a common problem of low academic performance at form four Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB) examinations leading to few students having opportunity to study into public universities. Saturation point determined the sample size and the data collection cut-off point. In this regard, the study had 54 participants comprising 12 teachers, 30 learners, and 6 members of the school board, 3 station pastors, and 3 Participants were purposively selected in this descriptive qualitative study. The selection of these participants was based on the idea that they would provide tangible information on the interventions towards improving academic performance in the SDA schools. Data was collected from schools through document analysis which was analysed using descriptive statistics. Besides that, another set of data was collected using open ended questionnaire from students and interview guides with the rest of the participants and was analysed using thematic analysis.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The researcher also got permission from the SDA Education Department to go into the study schools to collect data. Further, the researcher first sought permission from people in-charge of the study sites and participants. Those selected for the study participated voluntarily and were free to terminate their participation any time they wanted and there was no coercion of whatever form. Maximum confidentiality was assured to the respondents if they wanted it to be so. For confidentiality, the respondents are identified

by prefix in the report of this study as follow: TR for teachers, LR for learners, BM for board member, SP for school principal, and PR for pastor.

FINDINGS

Through administration of the open ended questionnaire and oral interviews, it was found that there are many strategies if well implemented academic performance in the SDA secondary schools in Malawi can improve. These strategies fall under school based administrative practices which embraces English language, adequate teaching and learning resources, time management, and incentives. Besides that, church organisational administrative practices which contains formation of the Parent Teacher Association, teachers` postings, use of aptitude test, time educational leadership, and frequent inspection.

Most of the participants argued that there was need for principals and teachers to intensify the use of English language as a medium of communication among learners all the times. They lamented that frequent use of local languages was negatively affecting learners academically. This is evidenced by the following quotes:

“The culture of using English as a mode of communication among learners is not there. They usually use their local languages” (BM 4)

“It is embarrassing finding learners talking to teachers using vernacular language” (MP 1)

“We do not always use English when communicating to each other. In most cases we are at liberty to use any language we want as there is not stiff punishment for that. Teachers advise us to use English but we use any language” (LR 30)

“To say the truth, our students do not always use English on campus” (TR 12)

In addition to that, most learners and teachers pointed out the need of adequate teaching and learning resources for the enhancement of the performance of learners. Participants suggested that the SDA education department in conjunction with the principals should ensure adequate supply of teaching and learning resources in the library and laboratories. Principals should also ensure that enough teaching resources are made available to teachers. The responses from participants are evidenced by the following selected dominant quotes:

“Not all the times students get information from the teachers. It is their duty to go and search for more information on their own. However, they complain most of the times when they go to the library they find that some of the students have already borrowed the few books available” (TR 14)

“Due to shortage of books, we are not able to study as we want. For example, if we have been given a passage to study at the Library, we go there and find that the textbooks for that subject have been given to other students” (LR 23)

“Inadequacy of lab materials make other experiments not to be done hence students lack knowledge about such topics” (TR 9)

“Some lessons need to be practically learned but due to lack of some laboratory materials we fail to do them” (TR 4)

The study found that most members of the school board and mission pastors were of the opinion proper time management. The focus was on that teaching and learning must commence on the first day and first period. This is evidenced by the following quotes:

“Not only is day one affected. Sometimes administrators are too busy to deal with all learners on day one as such registration work is spilled to day two. Much as both learners and teachers know that day one and even day two there is almost no learning, psychologically there learning mood in that week is put off” (BM 2)

“Time management is a problem. We usually consider day or even week one for not serious teaching business” (TR 15)

“At this school we are not good stewards of time. In most cases learning does not start on day one or day two” (TR 5)

“My observation is that day one and some days in week one teachers are not in class” (MP 2)

Observably, most of the teachers and students among the respondents resonated in separate interviews concerning incentives. It was claimed that for the learner`s academic performance to be enhanced, the SDA education department in conjunction with the principals should make sure that funds are set aside every term to facilitate the giving out of incentives to learners and teachers for the outstanding academic performance in every term. This is evidenced by the following quotes:

“We hear that other schools motivate both teachers and learners by giving them incentives. This culture lacks in our schools” (TR 5)

“Apart from salary we also need incentives for us to engage an extra gear. Incentives would make us give more tests and able to mark, arrange remedial lessons and make ups” (TR 2)

“I haven`t seen best performers being awarded during assemblies. In primary school, our head teacher could award best performers during assemblies. This could motivate us to strive for a good position next term” (LR 21)

Besides, most of the participants involved in the study insisted that there should be the formation of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). In their argument, this would stimulate parents to have more interest in their children`s` education as learners can perform better academically with parents` involvement. The responses from participants are evidenced by the following selected dominant quotes:

“I have always been suggesting that our schools should have PTA apart from the board of governor that we have” (BM 5)

“If the church can allow PTA to be formed a number of things can improve. We need views of parents for the smooth running of these schools” (SP 1)

“In my view, the board of governors are not effective. We need to try the PTA” (TR 7)

Similarly, most members of the school board and mission pastors revealed the need of teachers to be posted from one school to another. This is evidenced by the following quotes:

“Some teachers have been here for quite long. This place is now their village” (BM 2)

“It would be wise to have these teachers posted to the sister schools at a particular time rather than being here forever” (MB 5)

“Over staying is a challenge. Some have been here almost for more than 30 years” (MP 1)

Not only that, in agreement with the school principals, most teachers argued that the SDA education department should make sure that aptitude test administered is well standardised. They also contended that those given places in all forms should be learners who have genuinely passed the aptitude test. To their understanding, this would make the SDA secondary schools to have learners who have a positive school mind hence cases of indiscipline can be subdued.

This is evidenced by the following quotes:

“The crop of learners we have it is doubtful that all pass entrance examinations” (SP 1)

“The church administer” (TR 9)

“I understand that the aptitude tests administered by the church have no meaning. Many students we have are not fit for secondary school in terms of their capabilities” (TR 11)

“There are instances where schools want to fill out some spaces especially in forms two, three and four, learners who have applied for a place do not sit for the aptitude test rather are told to produce a transcript from their recent past school” (SP 1)

All over again, most of the participants were of the view that the SDA church should split the directorate of youth and education so that there should be an independent department of education headed by someone with teacher qualification. It was argued that this would make the Director of Education fully committed to deal with academic issues in the church. This is evidenced by the following quotes:

“The problem is our structures. How can they combine two crucial departments to fall under one leader?” (BM 2)

“The two departments need to have separate directors” (MP 2)

“Many education focus on youth department which makes education department to suffer” (TR 12)

Lastly, most of the participants claimed that if performance is to be improved, the SDA education department should promote frequent inspection and supervision in the SDA schools. It was further suggested that, there is need to hire government education inspectors to provide a true reflection on the ground. This is evidenced by the following quotes:

“Sometimes we are supervised once in a term by the Union Education Director. He is accompanied by other individuals who sometimes happen to be teachers from secondary schools” (TR 3)

“Honestly, the few years I have stayed here I do not remember seeing a team of inspectors” (MP 1)

“Usually, our schools are not frequently supervised possibly because of monetary issues. There is need of well-trained inspectors like those from government” (BM 5)

DISCUSSION

The results presented above show interventions required to improve academic performance in the SDA schools in Malawi. These include school based administrative practices which encompasses English language, adequate teaching and learning resources, time management, and incentives. Besides that, church organisational administrative practices which focuses on formation of the Parent Teacher Association, teachers` postings, use of aptitude test, time educational leadership, and frequent inspection.

1. School based administrative practices

Languages used and learners` academic performance

The study revealed that most participants were of the view that the principals and teachers should intensify use of English language as a medium of communication among learners all the times if learners` academic performance is to be enhanced. English language plays a central and strategic role in the school system because almost all the school subjects are taught using English language. This is in agreement with the study results by Prinsloo, Rogers and Harvey (2018) in South Africa which reported that more than half the overall effect on Science scores was attributed to language and language related cultural capital. The study found low incidences of usage of English language as a medium of communication despite the Ministry of Education Policy that English be used as the medium of instruction and communication throughout the country except when learning other language subjects. In most cases, local languages make learners fail to comprehend subject contents as they are delivered and asked in English. This is supported by the result of the study by Prinsloo, Rogers and Harvey (2018) which showed that learners whose conceptual thinking, language proficiency or exposure to the school language everywhere are closely aligned to language demands posed by textbooks, other teaching materials, daily learning and teaching; and as a result, assessment flourishes academically. Lack of English use becomes a big challenge when they face Malawi National Examinations Board examinations as they fail to understand the questions better leading them to answer off the questions. Alidou (2009) says that under-achievement is not experienced by learners because they have inherent cognitive problems but due to the fact that most learners do not fully master the language of instruction used. Additionally, a study by Bernhofer and Tonin (2022) reported a negative impact of poor comprehension of English in terms of marks scored by learners. This likely impacts the whole school performance as when results are released it happens that many students have failed or have no good points. The study established that Chichewa and Chitumbuka were the most widely local languages used. High preference on the vernacular languages is likely to have adverse effect on concept formation and articulation hence serious difficulties in comprehension, analysis and synthesis, translating to poor academic performance. It also makes many learners to have very poor knowledge of vocabularies used in various subjects. Lack of use of English language also makes learners to have weak English capacity to the extent of failing to make good and logical sentence in English during national examinations. The findings of this study are in agreement with the findings of the study done by Njuguna (2011) which revealed that one of the school-based factors that influenced academic performance was the use of mother language in school and more so during the teaching and learning process. The findings of this study are further supported by study finding of Maganga (2016) which revealed that poor capability in English limited learners` ability to understand concepts in various disciplines like History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry and the like. The less usage of the recommended mode of communication which is English language by learners, and the high preferences of Chichewa and Chitumbuka implied

lack of clear and focused mission of the schools which is a correlate of effective school according to Lezotte (2010).

Teaching, learning and assessment resources

Lyons (2012) states that learning is a complex activity that involves interplay of students' motivation, physical facilities, teaching resources, and skills of teaching and curriculum demands. In education, the availability of teaching and learning facilities and resources is very vital as the provision of quality of education is concerned. The resources that should be available for teaching, learning and assessment include material resources, human resource such as teachers and support staff, and physical facilities like laboratories, libraries and classrooms (Lyons, 2012; Okongo et al., 2015; Thurairaja et al., n.d.). These are supposed to be available, in abundance and in good condition. This is in line with (Heugh, 2014) who argues that at the school level, adjustments in learning and teaching practices must include greater attention to teaching and learning resources and maintenance. The availability of teaching and learning resources for secondary school students is also vital as they can learn from those resources without always depending on their teachers. In a situation a teacher demonstrates using teaching aids to motivate children interest, it also equips a child to develop a great enthusiasm and willingness to learn more and become attentive in the class (Joseph, 2015). Besides that, Joseph (2015) argues that teaching and learning resources make a learner to understand what has been taught in the classroom which lead to the development of the brain of a child and interest that will lead to good academic achievement.

The study had interest in teaching and learning materials as Eshiwani (1983) found a significant relationship between the availability of teaching and learning resources and academic performance achievement. The study found that there was need of adequate teaching, learning and assessment resources in SDA schools as they were inadequate. This could be due to shortage of funds, poor library and laboratory management or loss due to theft. The study by Prinsloo, Rogers and Harvey (2018) in South Africa also found that many schools were inadequately funded hence poorly resourced which strained teaching and learning experience for learners. The consequence of this is that there can never be any tangible improvement in performance in MSCE examinations as students lack adequate practice in exam format, more exposure to exam techniques and confidence in exams. Therefore, the author agrees with the respondents that all SDA schools must be well equipped with teaching, learning and assessment resources for their learners to perform well. This is supported by the findings of a study by Okongo et al. (2015) in Kenya which reported that institutions with adequate facilities such as textbooks stand a better chance of performing well in examination than poorly equipped ones.

Time management

Time management is very important and it may actually affect individual's overall performance and achievements (Razali et al., 2018). Similarly, Ahmad, Batool and Ch, (2019) argues that time management is perceived as one of the central point of achievement in academic structure where marks are undeniably affected by time organizing abilities. The current study found that another notable intervention to enhance academic performance in the SDA secondary schools was time management. The study revealed that the problem of poor time management in terms of lack of punctuality by teachers and also lack of learning on the first day was affecting the performance of learners. This is in agreement with the study conducted in Malaysia by Razali et al. (2018) which found that time planning was the most significant correlated

predictor to the academic achievement of learners. The Malawi curriculum has many course syllabi being very wide in terms of many topics with much content to be covered. This requires utilisation of every official available time and make up lessons to cover the syllabus. However, when teachers lose some minutes from their periods they are likely not to complete the syllabi hence learners sit for the MANEB examinations without being prepared fully. The findings of the study show that for the performance to be improved, administrators must ensure that teachers go to classes on time. In addition to that, learning should always start on day one and during first period in order to make sure that there is enough time in a term of covering the syllabi. The findings of this study are supported by the findings of other studies which reported that time-management had a positive and significant influence on improving academic achievement among learners (Alyami et al., 2021; Cyril, 2021; Wilson et al., 2021).

Incentives

The study found that introduction of the incentives to learners and teachers would be a paramount intervention to enhance performance in the SDA schools. The current study agrees with the finding by Katamei and Omwono (2015) which reported that when desirable behaviour is reinforced in schools by rewarding the most disciplined students other students are trained on how to monitor and evaluate their behaviour and set goals. In line with Katamei and Omwono, (Elliot et al., 2017) argue that students' motivation has a significant role in academic performance. The use of incentives can induce student effort and thereby increase academic outcomes (Wang et al., 2021). Schools that promote excellence instil through their administrators the value of appreciating good performance among teachers and learners. The findings of the current study show that only teachers were being rewarded every year for the good grades produced in their particular subjects once MSCE examination results are out. However, it was revealed that rewards could not match with their effort. The school that congratulates best performers motives the rests of learners and teachers as this is likely to happen to them when they too perform in an exemplary manner. Learners in school without such a culture just attend classes without any expectation of being congratulated or recognized publicly by both teachers and fellow learners for good performance. The finding of this study is in agreement with the recommendations by Chileya (2016) that for poor academic performance of pupils to be reduced there is need of the introduction of teacher and pupil motivation in schools.

Schools that encouraged excellent performance have a culture of setting a fund to reward both teachers and students who exhibit exemplary performance. However, other schools raise many excuses like shortage of funds so as to justify the lack of a reward culture in these institutions. Based on the data given above, motivating students by giving incentives stands as one of the academic interventions that would enhance learners' academic performance in the Malawi SDA secondary schools. Similarly, the study by Rapp (2017) on reward features in World of Warcraft and their experiential effects on players found that rewards made students feel more autonomous as they had a greater variety of resources to choose and use in the game. The findings of the study also aligns with the finding by Tüzün, Barab and Thomas (2019) which reported that external rewards such as points and privileged equipment can drive school players to work harder and achieve their school game performance. This is in line with the findings of most prior studies on incentives which commend the culture of rewarding best performers (Herranz-Zarzoso and Sabater-Grande, 2023; Wang, Zhang and Sun, 2021).

2. Church organisational administrative practices

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

One thing greatly needed for learners' academic performance to be enhanced is the formation of the PTA. The PTA greatly contributes to the smooth operation of the school in the process of trying to meet the school goals and mission. The finding of this study is in line with the recent finding by Whyken (2022) which reported that engagement of parents, teachers, and external stakeholders could bring change and help combat the social issues facing learners. Besides that, (Katamei and Omwono (2015) found that parental involvement strategy in academics and learning makes students perceive that their parents value education, eventually learners are more likely to feel competent and motivated in their studies. The SDA schools only have Board of Governors in which few community members represent parents. However, Parent Teacher Association meetings are very useful as both parents and teachers discuss learners' progress and exchange ideas on how to improve performance. This is in line with the argument by Lezotte (2010) who states that for the school to be effective there must be high level of family and community involvement as they play a vital role in the achievement of the school goals. According to Lezotte, family and community members have a responsibility to educate students, not just teachers and staff in schools. In the case where parents attend PTA meetings regularly, students feel important and worthy of their parents' time and eventually learners respond by working hard to impress their parents. This is in tandem with a study by Mafokwane (2017) which reported that parental involvement is of importance because learners who have positive support and involvement of their parents in their education tend to perform better. In such forums, parents learn more about the organisation of the school and they are able to critique some of the shortcomings of teachers and administrators which help the school to change and achieve good performance. Besides that, parents as stakeholders can provide student support programmes, behaviour modification, life skills programmes, parental involvement, and capacity building to enhance learners' performance (Katamei and Omwono, 2015). Similarly, the findings by Chileya (2016) in Zambia recommended parents involvement in some schools affairs as he found out that non-parental involvement in the learning process of their children was among many causes of poor academic performance in Mwense district. Therefore, the present study recommends the formation of PTA and regular PTA meetings would positively influencing the learners' academic performance in the SDA secondary schools.

Use of aptitude test

The use of valid aptitude test is found to be another intervention to enhance academic performance in the SDA secondary schools. Aptitude test refers to the assessment of an individual's characteristics that indicate the potential to develop a culturally valued ability (Schneider, 2013). Aptitude test is fundamental element of the everyday school, academic and professional lives of students, instructors, job applicants, researchers and policymakers ((Breuer et al., 2023). Many schools use this test as entrance examinations for admission to secondary schools. The examination is good as it serves as a direction scheme by assessing the students' aptitude and potentials (Camacho, 2012). The study found that many learners in the SDA schools were average and below average performers. Therefore, this was found to be one of the major factors contributing to low academic performance in the mission schools. The respondents faulted system of admitting learners as it was revealed that the administration of the aptitude test had no meaning because most learners selected could not fit the secondary school academic stuff. This calls for the aptitude tests that are fair, reliable and valid in order to measure relevant abilities and skills of learners (Formazin et al., 2011). Therefore, sticking to use of aptitude tests that are of high value would help the SDA schools

to have good performance as the importance of this test has been proved to be ideal by many studies (Corengia, Pita and Mesurado, 2013; Sugano and Mamolo, 2021; Aldurayheem, 2022; Breuer, Scherndl and Ortner, 2023).

Postings of teachers

The study found that posting teachers from one school to another was a remedy to enhance performance in the SDA schools. Meanwhile, Moor, Ishaque, Memon and Lodhi (2012) think that frequently change of teachers during a given teaching session or term is harmful to academia and that situation becomes more acute when a teacher is transferred during academic session. This further suggests that when such postings are considered in the SDA schools, they should be done after the academic year. The idea of having teachers posted to other schools was raised because some study participants had an observation that overstaying of teachers at one school was among many other factors influencing low learner academic performance in the SDA schools. The study revealed that some teachers due to overstaying were resistant to change when the new administrator comes.

It was further revealed that such teachers could argue that those new ideas would not work as different principals before that new principal tried the same but failed. In line with the current study, Ghost (1985) argues that transfers for overstayed teachers are always necessitated for enhancement of efficiency in an organization's performance and need for labour in this situation. More to that, some overstayed teachers could challenge the new administrators sometimes because those administrators are younger than them in terms of age and experience of how that particular school was being run. This practice contradicts with the idea of Lezotte (2010) about the Effective School model. The model states that for a school to be effective, leaders and teachers need to understand that their duty play a big role in achieving the vision as it is developed from common beliefs and values. This means that if teachers neglect their duty and start intimidating administrators, it is not possible for the vision of the school to be achieved. In line with Lezotte's assertion, it was revealed that due to over staying some teachers became more less like villagers in which they fully take part in activities done in their local areas such like owning big farms, becoming football coaches and many more which in most cases affect their preparation and delivery of the instructional content. Therefore, postings for such teachers increase chances of fairness of distributing teaching quality and overall school performance (Grissom, Loeb and Nakashima, 2014). The entails that if the issue of overstaying of teachers at one place is controlled, learners' academic performance in the SDA secondary schools in Malawi would be enhanced.

Change of leadership

The findings of the study show that change of leadership would assist the SDA schools improve academic performance. According to Li, Zhu and Li (2022), the effect of school leadership on student achievement has been extensively examined. Many prior studies agree that school leadership has a significant effect on student academic achievement (Marks and Printy, 2003; Webber et al., 2013; Lending & Mrazek, 2014). Similarly, the findings of study by Day, Gu and Sammons (2016) show that the school's ability to improve and sustain effectiveness over the long term is the result of leadership's understanding and diagnosis of their school's needs and applications of clearly articulated educational goals. Additionally, school administrators have the second greatest effect on student learning, after classroom instruction (Neufeld, 2014).

In the view of Lezotte (2010), for the school to become effective there must be strong instructional leaders. Lezotte argues that strong instructional leaders are always proactive and try to build team leadership and a culture conducive to learning and professional growth. In his model, he emphasises that in the effective school the head teacher and others in administration play a role as instructional leaders where they communicate and model the mission of the school to staff, parents, and students. Much as he seems to focus on the administration of the head teachers and other administrators below him, this study begins with the leadership above the head teacher. The majority of the participants indicated that, change in education directorship was among many other academic interventions leading to high learners' academic performance in SDA schools. The study found that some of the Director of Education and Youth had no teacher education qualification and also had never been teachers before. This relates to an argument by Stewart (2006) who claims that the some administrators head school, however, may not even be the primary educational expert in the school. Therefore, these leaders know less about education administration as they are not teachers by profession.

The study learnt that the officers who are elected to be the director of education also have a task to be the director of the youth ministries. This being the structure, in most cases such an officer is elected to the directorship because of his knowledge and activeness in the activities of Adventist Youth (AY) Ministries. Mainly, once elected into that office the primary thing he does is to make sure that the AY Ministries is vibrant. It was learnt that some of the Directors of Education and Youth finish their term of office without visiting all schools under their charge. This aligns with the claim by Neufeld (2014) that many challenges in school are associated with the modern leadership. The findings show that most Directors of Education and Youth are much occupied with the activities of the youth in the church rather than in education. The researcher found that some pastors who have teacher education background have had the view of creating a special office for education at the Union level and as well as at Conference level as it is the case at the General Conference and Division levels. However, their views have not been aired out in fear to be noted as rebels and also to be considered as individuals who are power hungry is thinking that once that post is created they will ascend to that. Therefore, the issue of having well capable teachers to head the education department is found to be one of the academic interventions that could enhance learners' academic performance in the SDA secondary schools in Malawi. This is supported by Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008) in their claim that leaders are to improve teaching and learning indirectly by influencing staff motivations, commitments and working conditions at school under their charge. In the same line, the findings of a study by (Tedla and Kilango, 2022) revealed that principals' behaviours promote higher performance through practices, such as classroom supervision, directing, setting goals, teamwork, collaboration, continuous monitoring of students' progress and supporting teacher autonomy.

Inspection

The issue of inspection was highly considered as one of the interventions to enhance good performance in the SDA secondary schools. Inspection is referred to as the critical examination and subsequent evaluation of a school as a designed place of learning so as to make it possible for the necessary advice to be given for the purpose of improving the school (Ojelabi, 2001). For a school to be effective there is need of frequent monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment. This requires paying attention to both learner learning results and to the effectiveness of school and classroom procedures (Lezotte, 2010). Learning is monitored by school inspectors tracking a variety of assessment results such as test scores, performances,

and other evidence of learning. In this case, the exercise of inspection helps teachers to improve their teaching as they are able to see more clearly the problems and needs of learners. Additionally, during the exercise school inspectors give guidance to teachers so as to develop greater competence in teaching (Amie-Ogan and Chukwukah, 2021). The findings revealed that in most cases, SDA secondary schools in Malawi do not have thorough inspection exercises. Therefore, based on the above findings, for academic performance to be enhanced in the SDA secondary schools, there is need of sufficient inspection of schools by trained government inspectors. The finding aligns with the results of a study conducted in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State by Amie-Ogan and Chukwukah (2021) which found that checking of teachers' classroom activities and inspection of instructional facilities to a high extent influenced the academic performance of students in public senior secondary schools. Similarly, the study by Evertsson (2022) in Sweden showed that school inspections had a definite impact in these areas as contributed to teaching reforms. In a related prior study conducted in Tanzania by (Matete, 2021) concluded that for teachers to grow professionally and improve the quality of teaching and learning in primary schools, school inspectors need to carry out classroom observations and be trained based on the subject matter.

Conclusion

Shortly, the objective of this study has been achieved. The study assessment result showed that use of English language, formation of the Parent Teacher Association, adequate teaching and learning resources, teachers' postings, use of aptitude test, time management, incentives, educational leadership, and frequent inspection would improve academic performance in the SDA secondary schools. The findings of this study allow for a clear understanding that there is room for academic improvement in the SDA schools. The researchers recommend consultative meetings with various stakeholders to bring their inputs on the matter too, provision of adequate teaching materials, and selection of students must base on realistic results of the aptitude test administered.

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