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## Schooling experiences of children left behind in Zimbabwe by emigrating parents: Implications for inclusive education

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Since the year 2000, a deepening political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe has forced parents to emigrate en masse to regional and international destinations such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand respectively. Without guaranteed employment and with little knowledge of the education systems and the living conditions in the destination countries, most parents chose to initially emigrate on their own, settle down and later on send for their children. However, most of these children never joined their parents, owing to the various challenges that the majority of parents encountered in the diaspora: unemployment, lack of documentation, and poor living conditions. Against this background, this paper assesses experiences and challenges faced by the left-behind children (LBC) and explores these children's perceptions of their interactions with teachers through inclusive education practices. A phenomenological research approach was adopted; in-depth interviews were used to collect data. The high schools were purposively sampled, one from a low-income area and the other from a high-income area in order to get a more pronounced picture of the experiences of LBC in the city. The results of the study indicate that LBC faced numerous challenges: excessive household chores, little help from guardians with homework, inadequate representation at school meetings, and non-payment of school expenses. Most children viewed their interaction with teachers as generally negative and reported that most of their needs were not met. The study recommends the crafting of inclusive education legislation for the country so that new vulnerabilities are holistically dealt with.

**Keywords:** inclusive education; left-behind children (LBC); rights-based education; schooling experiences; vulnerability; Zimbabwe

### Introduction

Children need parental support to grow well, thrive, and succeed in school. Such parental support is even more necessary among vulnerable children (Harris & Goodall, 2007). In general, children often struggle with trauma, adversities of poverty, racism, ethnocentrism, religious prejudice, and disability. A stable and supportive home environment where both parents are present is thus a precondition for children's educational success (Huebner, Boothby, Aber, Darmstadt, Diaz, Masten, Yoshikawa, Redlener, Emmel, Pitt, Arnold, Barber, Berman, Blum, Canavera, Eckerle, Fox, Gibbons, Hargarten, Landers, Nelson, Pollak, Rauh, Samson, Ssewamala, St Clair, Stark, Waldman, Wessells, Wilson & Zeanah, 2016). There are, however, instances where a stable home environment does not exist for many children. This is the case in Zimbabwe where a significant number of parents have emigrated from the country in the past 20 years owing to a deteriorating political and socio-economic environment. In the next section we provide this background and discuss how these challenges spurred large-scale emigration from the country.

### Socio-Political Status of Zimbabwe

The post-2000 Zimbabwean migrations are undoubtedly Southern Africa's largest emigrations from a single country in the region's recent history (Crush & Tevera, 2010). This movement has been coined the "Zimbabwean Exodus" (Crush & Tevera, 2010), comparing it to the biblical movement of the Israelites from Egypt. The migrations were triggered by a combination of an unstable political environment and an unprecedented economic decline, which forced people to emigrate in search of greener pastures: employment opportunities and better livelihoods. Owing to this movement, a huge proportion of the Zimbabwean population is now resident outside the country, both in the region and internationally.

Zimbabwe's problems can be traced back to about 20 years, specifically to the following key issues: the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), the Fast-track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), Operation Murambatsvina, and political contestations. ESAP, a programme implemented in 1991 and funded by the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF), aimed at boosting the country's economic growth after a decade of slow growth, stagnation, and ultimately, decline. The programme was implemented through a host of measures: trade liberalisation, removal of subsidies, government operations at cost recovery levels, and devaluation of the currency (Mupedziswa, 1997). Trade liberalisation was meant to encourage investment and competition (Potts & Mutambirwa, 1998). The removal of subsidies was also targeted at curtailing government expenditure. Devaluation of the currency, on the other hand, was envisaged to attract foreign direct investment, thereby boosting production and economic growth (Mupedziswa, 1997).

Contrary to expectations, these measures resulted in a host of negative consequences: trade liberalisation stifled competition as imports destroyed local production, devaluation of the dollar increased the country's external debt to unsustainable levels, operating government services at cost recovery levels as well as removal

of subsidies impoverished the larger section of the population as services and goods became unaffordable (Potts & Mutambirwa, 1998). By the late 1990s, many factories closed down, unemployment and retrenchments increased, and standards of living plummeted. Under such conditions of increasing poverty and rising unemployment, emigration from the country also increased dramatically.

The FTLRP was officially launched in the year 2000. While the land question in Zimbabwe had always been a contentious issue owing to the fact that most of the country's prime land was in the hands of a few White farmers, the redress that was launched in 2000 created problems for the country (Gandure & Marongwe, 2006). This was because the programme was not internationally accepted, and the country was placed under sanctions. Furthermore, the manner in which the process unfolded was not systematic, and farming was heavily disturbed. The country moved from being a net exporter to a net importer of food, and in some years, survived on international humanitarian food donations (Tibaijuka, 2005). This destruction of the agricultural sector, upon which the country's industrial sector had been built, also caused massive losses of employment and increased poverty levels. Without employment and any alternative sources of livelihood, many people emigrated from the country to seek employment and survival elsewhere in the world.

Operation Murambatsvina was launched in 2005. The government argued that the objective of the operation was to rid the country, especially the urban areas, of disorderly growth of the informal sector, which had become a menace to law and order as well as health and hygiene in the urban environment (Tibaijuka, 2005). Others have argued that the government used the operation to rid the cities of a restive urban population that would have provided fertile ground for a revolution to topple the ruling party (International Crisis Group, 2005). Whatever the true reason may have been, there is no arguing the destructive nature of the operation. More than 700,000 people lost their jobs, businesses, houses, property, and livelihoods in the country's urban areas (Mugara, 2007). Without livelihoods or housing, a significant number of people emigrated from the country.

In addition to these economic challenges, politics played a significant role in the demise of the country's economy. Almost every election since the year 2000 had been heavily contested and the results equally disputed (Tibaijuka, 2005). As a result, the country has been unable to present a united front to tackling both the economic and social challenges arising. The only stable period had been between 2009 and 2013 when the country had a Government of National Unity. This period saw a relatively stable economic environment, one-digit inflation, stable prices, and relatively stable wages

that could sustain workers. Other years, however, have been characterised by political bickering, which has impacted negatively on the economy and ultimately on livelihoods, leading to continued large-scale migrations out of the country, increasing the numbers of the Zimbabwean diaspora.

The establishment of the Zimbabwean population in the diaspora has not been without consequences back home. The emigrations split families. Most parents were living in the diaspora while their children were left in Zimbabwe – either on their own, in the care of extended family, or even of non-relatives. This situation drastically altered the environment in which their children needed to survive. Studies have shown that the disruptive nature of parental emigrations has left most learners vulnerable, psychologically strained, and lacking motivation (Filippa, 2011; Lahaie, Hayes, Piper & Heymann, 2009). The majority of the learners concentrate less in school and had little time for school work due to their assumption of adult roles like managing the household budget, heading families, taking care of siblings, and even fending for the family (Filippa, 2011; Rupande, 2014). For some of these left-behind children both the home and school environments were affected since some guardians were inexperienced, too young or too old, and therefore unable to support the children in the same way that their biological parents would have (Zirima & Nyanga, 2012). Such challenging conditions may affect LBC's schooling experiences as there are no significant others to motivate and support them.

For some parents the hope of their children joining them never realised as most of the children never joined them in the foreign countries. The majority were always "waiting to migrate or waiting for papers" (Bakker, Elings-Pels & Reis, 2009; Rupande, 2014). In this situation, most learners were unable to concentrate fully on their schoolwork as they were always anticipating joining their parents (Bakker et al., 2009). The waiting period was usually long or indefinite, thereby negatively affecting the performance of the concerned learners. Such learners generally did not perform well due to limited school attendance, reduced concentration, and a lack of motivation to excel in a school environment, which they considered temporary (Filippa, 2011).

Although some research has been done to document information on LBC and their vulnerability (Filippa, 2011; Mabharani, 2014), two elements seem to be missing in this body of knowledge. The first is the scarcity of voices of vulnerable LBC in the literature. As in most cases, the children's experiences are told by others. Secondly, little has been said about the LBC's perceptions of their interaction with teachers regarding their needs. Our study, therefore, sought to address these two issues. We argue that this information is important for two

reasons. Firstly, Zimbabwe, like any other developing country facing socio-economic challenges, is experiencing large-scale emigrations where many parents are moving on their own, leaving their children behind. However, the focus is not necessarily on the effects of political and socio-economic challenges on these children, but rather on their experiences since our approach was phenomenological in nature.

These children face many challenges, particularly in education. There is a need for reconstruction and development to build a democratic society which is inclusive of all children, LBC included. Information on the views and experiences of LBC may thus be useful to achieve such a social justice project. Secondly, teachers are hard-pressed to respond to international calls for inclusive education. Such transformation may only be achieved if their interaction with learners is responsive enough to redress imbalances, which include violations of children's rights that undermine the provision of quality education to vulnerabilities like LBC. Given these concerns, this study sought to address two questions. Firstly, what are the views of LBC in Zimbabwe on guardianship and the challenges they face? Secondly, what are these children's perceptions of their interactions with teachers to meet their specific needs? To answer these questions, inclusive education and the right to education were used as lenses for the study. These concepts are outlined briefly in the ensuing sections.

#### Inclusive Education

The concept of inclusion in education is not monolithic but is a fluid one. There is a growing realisation that inclusion means different things in different contexts (Herbert, 2011). The multiple definitions of inclusion can be attributed to the different discourses through which different theoretical notions of inclusion are constructed. The educational politics discourse is concerned with the extent to which a particular school realises and protects the rights of its learners, and monitors power distribution accordingly (Stofile, 2008). Inclusivity is concerned with the eradication of injustice in schools, focusing primarily on democracy, social justice, and the cost-effectiveness of educational services to achieve equity in education. It deals with issues of diversity in order to ensure equal opportunities for all learners. It is the development of an inclusive society where all members participate optimally and contribute in a democracy (United Nations Education Scientific Cultural Organization, [UNESCO], 2017). Pragmatics discourse, on the other hand, is more interested in a school's effectiveness, is concerned with what an inclusive school should practically look like and provides an illustration of an approach that focuses on the inclusive practices and cultures within a school community.

Inclusion is a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation, and achievement of learners, the central message being that every learner matters and matters equally (UNESCO, 2017). It is rights-based and requires all aspects of the education system to be reviewed and re-designed with particular emphasis on the educational rights of learners who are vulnerable, marginalised, or at risk of exclusion, including those who are in school, but not learning (UNESCO, 2008). The core meaning of this concept is therefore the participation of all learners in the learning process, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). The different ways in which inclusion is understood in education has often resulted in some authors describing it in ways that contrast with special education. Inclusive education, however, is not special education reform, but is borne out of a need to restructure the education system to meet the needs of a changing society (European Agency for Development and Special Needs Education, 2010). It goes beyond the traditional and narrow focus on physical disability and takes a broader view that promotes access and quality education for all learners to achieve their full potential (Themane, 2017). Ultimately, therefore, inclusive education is about the transformation of a society and its institutional arrangements in order to accommodate all learners.

#### The Right to Education

Our study was framed by four conventions to the rights to education as a basic right: the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Salamanca), the 1994 and 2000 World Education Forum Framework for Action; the 2008 Millennium Development Goals and the 2015 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development Goals. These conventions made impassioned appeals on education for all regardless of differences. Such education is expected to be inclusive and to accommodate the needs of all children.

Globally, many countries have legislated for the right to education and inclusive education. Spain's 1990 General Regulation Law for the Education System gave special needs learners the right to receive an education that responds to their personal needs. South Africa emphasises inclusion in White Paper 6 on education. The aim is to address historical educational imbalances and inequalities by acknowledging that learning disabilities arise from the environment rather than from the individual learner (Department of Education, 2001). Although Zimbabwe is a signatory to a number of international conventions on education for all, it does not have a specific inclusive education policy (Chireshe, 2013). Inclusive education in the country is generally managed and supported through policies such as the Zimbabwe Disabled Person

Act, which advocates for non-discrimination of people with disability. The Education Act of 1987 (Zimbabwe Ministry of Education, 1987) revised in 1996 and 2006, makes provision for inclusive education through its education-for-all stance, placing on every local authority the responsibility of providing education to all children. Moreover, the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission report and recommendations are also used to manage inclusive education. It is, however, doubtful whether, in the absence of a clear, specific and dedicated policy, inclusive education in the country can be implemented successfully.

Despite the embeddedness of education rights in acts, policies, conventions and national constitutions of many countries, serious violations of these rights occur world-wide and are often unrecognised or underreported (Bakker et al., 2009). While some violations may be blatantly intentional, other rights are violated in a very subtle manner. Such violations also include the violation of rights regarding LBC. World-wide some parents leave their children behind when they emigrate as they do not want to expose them to the unknown, even if this is done temporarily. Such children risk losing the right to proper education as they may be left in the care of people who are unlikely to support them fully in their quest for education. The lack of support is usually because some guardians have little knowledge to adequately help these learners or lack the zeal to fulfil their expected roles as guardians acting in loco-parentis. The objective of this paper is therefore twofold: one, to assess the experiences and challenges faced by LBC and two, to explore their perceptions of their interactions with teachers through inclusive education practices.

#### Conceptual Framework

Since we sought to assess and understand the nature of challenges confronting LBC and how teachers dealt with their specific needs as part of inclusive education, we framed the study within the social model of inclusivity. There are two models of understanding inclusivity. One is the medical model, which regard disability or vulnerability as residing in an individual. Here the focus is on the inability of the learner to cope with schooling demands. The other is the social model, which regards inclusivity as residing within the social structure (Gartner & Lipsky, 1999). The core element of this model is the participation of all learners in the learning process. This way of looking at inclusion describes inclusion in a way that contrasts with special education. We framed our study within the context of the latter type of inclusivity.

In doing so, we needed to grasp the conceptual issues surrounding access to education regarding various groups of disadvantaged learners. We also looked at how the education system in Zimbabwe dealt with issues of vulnerability of particular

groups of learners. Our approach is in line with that of Nhemachena, Kusangaya and Gwitira (2012) who argue that the process of inclusion focuses on the system in order to make it welcoming to all pupils, especially those disadvantaged and vulnerable.

The social model of inclusivity stresses educational inclusion and the culpability of the broader environment in the negative experiences faced by vulnerable learners. The approach sees inclusion and exclusion as being socially constructed or caused by the way society is organised, rather than a person's impairment or difference. The social model of disability identifies systemic barriers, negative attitudes, and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently), suggesting that society is the main contributory factor in disabling people.

The social model encourages the removal of these barriers within society, or the reduction of their effects, rather than trying to fix an individual's impairment. This approach takes the focus away from what is wrong and puts emphasis on what should be done in alliance to identify and remove barriers or to reduce their effects.

The model focuses on changes required in society – change in attitudes and in the provision of support and information to vulnerable people. In the case of LBC, this approach seeks to understand what society may contribute in terms of the creation of a conducive environment towards the improvement of experiences of these vulnerable groups of learners. This means removing the barriers in the classroom and school so that all learners, despite their differences and vulnerability, are included (Le Poidevin, 2011).

Within the social model we used Bourdieu's (1987) concept of social capital, which advocates for learners to have access to education in order to experience a well-rounded and inclusive education. In his work, Bourdieu (1987) identifies three forms of capital – economic, social, and cultural capital. He argues that for learners to do well in school, they need to have access to these capitals, without which they will struggle to fulfil their goals of learning in an environment that is constrained of the necessary support. Bourdieu (1987) further argues "that families possess different amounts and composition of capital and that each type of capital, invested in children, may yield a comparative advantage in the educational system" (Møllegaard & Jæger, 2015:12). Thus, in terms of LBC, their schooling experiences are moderated and negatively influenced because of the lack of the necessary forms of capital due to absent parents. To this end, various studies (Abdulloev, 2013; Bakker et al., 2009) have proven that while most LBC are generally economically advantaged because of remittances received from diaspora parents, they nevertheless lack cultural and social capitals that are requisites for good educational experiences. Thus,

Bourdieu (1987) and Coleman (1988) are of the view that in addition to economic resources, parents use different types of non-monetary resources to promote children's educational success.

### Methodology

#### Design

This study adopted and used a qualitative research approach within the interpretive phenomenological research design to understand experiences from the participants' viewpoint (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). In qualitative research individuals are generally selected to participate based on their experience of a phenomenon of interest (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). The issue of left-behind children could thus be best captured in a qualitative way where knowledge, feelings, and even perceptions are expressed freely in a manner that avails more understanding.

#### Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select participants to the study. These participants were chosen on the basis that they would be able to provide adequate information on guardianship, challenges faced by LBC, and the learners' perceptions regarding interactions with teachers. Two high schools in Harare were purposively selected for the study. As capital city, Harare has experienced and continues to experience high emigration rates as parents leave the country for international destinations. School A was in a low-income residential area and School B in a high-income residential area. The selection of schools from different income areas was designed to capture varying experiences as these schools had different levels of resource endowment and facilities, and also generally enrolled learners of comparatively different economic and social backgrounds. Additionally, the operational challenges and opportunities at these schools were also envisaged to be different. At each school, six LBC, one from each form, were selected into the sample. The parents of nine of these learners were in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia, while the parents of the other three learners were in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia. All the parents of the sampled learners had been out of the country for a minimum of five years. The sampling frame, at both schools, consisted of all learners with both parents living in the diaspora, aged between 12 and 18 years and in Forms 1–6. Both parents of 36 learners at School 1 and 49 learners at School 2 with both parents in the diaspora. Eight of the 12 learners that were interviewed were girls while four were boys. The dominance of girls in the sample is explained by the fact that there were more girls in the target population than boys.

#### Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth face-to-face

single interviews. The interview schedules were translated into the local vernacular so that participants would easily and fully understand the questions. The participants shared narratives on their challenges and interactions with teachers, hence providing an in-depth understanding of this new phenomenon of LBC and how it impacted on their schooling. Permission to interview the selected learners was sought from and granted by the guardians. Guidance and counselling teachers were on hand to provide any counselling or support and the district child psychologists could be called upon if required. The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) granted ethical clearance for the study after we requested for assent from the guardians. Also, permission was granted by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education for the teacher education institutions and The Ministry of Primary Education for schools in Zimbabwe. Permission was also sought from the respective districts and individual schools.

#### Data Analysis

Analytical procedures followed entailed transcribing and translating interviews, going through transcripts and highlighting significant statements (horizontalisation), grouping clustered statements into themes, coding, removing overlapping and repetitive statements, establishing themes, and writing textual description on the varying experiences of LBC. The structural descriptions were then linked to make sense of the underlying meanings, experiences, and linkages made with the wider literature.

#### Trustworthiness of the Research

Issues of trustworthiness in qualitative research are always debatable. Therefore, to ensure this we undertook at least five steps (credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and subjectivity) as advised by Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011), among others.

In terms of **credibility** we ensured that the participants felt that the findings represented their experiences. For example, we read out the transcript to them and asked whether the views we had captured represented their views accurately or not. Where there were doubts or discontent, we rephrased the expressions to suite the participants. In addition, we tried to prolong our engagement. In some cases where clarity was needed, we returned to conduct follow-up interviews. Lastly, we allowed participants to correct the narrative, where needed, once the transcripts were read to them.

Regarding the **transferability** of the findings, being conscious that they were not generalisable to a larger population, we nevertheless endeavoured to ensure rigour by collecting rich data. We took effort to describe the learners' responses as thickly as possible. This permitted us to make informed

interpretations, which could allow transferability of the findings to other contexts and thus reach naturalistic generalisation.

To ensure **dependability** we asked ourselves whether similar findings would be arrived at if someone followed our methods to conduct the same study. To answer this, we used multiple methods of data collection. We supplemented the interviews with document analysis where we looked at the learners' classwork and homework books to corroborate what they had told us. We found this approach very helpful (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

To guard against our own biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives (**subjectivity**) we subjected our findings to an audit and produced a more transparent report – a product of participants' and our responses. However, we were not in search for objectivity. Thus, we used our subjectivity as a resource rather than a deficit in order to understand the learners' experiences and the meaning they gave to their experiences. We engaged in what others call (Holmes, 2017; Xie, 2018) intersubjectivity (the state between objectivity and subjectivity).

#### Ethics

Permission to conduct the research was sought from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe and the Harare Provincial Education Offices. The other critical ethical issues dealt with in this research included informed consent, discontinuance, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect. The subject of this study was an emotional one, especially to LBC. The interview process had the potential to make learners re-live their experiences and raise anxiety. We thus enlisted the services of guidance and counselling teachers to prepare the learners before the interviews, and to attend to any issues arising thereafter. Two child psychologists at district level were on hand to assist should the need arise. The primary concern for this was the safety of the research participants.

#### Findings and Discussion

While the voices of children are frequently ignored in studies that concern them (Filippa, 2011), this study allowed them to tell their story through their own voices by using verbatim quotes. The first section of the analysis deals with guardianship as this affects schooling experiences of LBC. The second looks at the challenges faced by LBC while the third section focuses on the children's perspectives of their interaction with teachers within the realm of inclusive education.

#### Guardianship

In developing countries families rarely migrate as a unit (Halpern-Manners, 2011), but rather, some members move first and settle before calling upon

other family members to follow. Whereas one parent may move and leave the other parent with the children back home, this Zimbabwean study concentrated only on children whose parents had both emigrated, regardless of whether they had moved together at the same time or one after the other. It was envisaged that this group would be most affected because of the absence of both parents. Study results show that the learners were left in the care of various guardians: relatives, non-relatives, or alone.

#### Relatives as guardians

It is a common cultural practice in Africa for children to be fostered and cared for temporarily by the extended family, especially during difficult times (Owusu, 2011), hence the common African saying that "it takes a whole village to raise a child." Whereas the migration of a single parent to the diaspora, leaving the children in the care of the spouse, especially the mother, is fairly common in Zimbabwe, the current trend where both parents migrate internationally, leaving their children for much longer periods, is recent. This study found that many children were left in the care of grandparents, aunts and uncles for relatively long periods:

*Ever since my parents departed to South Africa five years ago, I have been staying with my paternal grandparents (Learner 2, School B, Harare, 19 September 2017).*

While some LBC may periodically visit their parents in the diaspora, such visits are temporary as most parents do not earn enough money to look after children in a foreign land.

*My mother once invited me to Cape Town during school holidays. I saw for myself how my mother is struggling to make ends meet in South Africa (Learner 5, School A, 13 September 2017).*

While emigrated parents live under conditions of economic distress in the diaspora, LBC are unlikely to follow their parents permanently as initially envisaged. These children stay with guardians in Zimbabwe, hoping that economic conditions in the country may improve to allow the return of their parents. There is no sign, however, that the environment may improve soon, making the prospects of parental return dim and the phenomenon of LBC an enduring one in the country.

#### Non-relatives as guardians

While the majority of emigrating parents favour relatives as guardians, situations force parents to entrust their children to non-relatives, especially where close relatives have also migrated. Thus, some LBC in the study reported being left in the custody of non-relatives:

*Our parents migrated long back. I am staying with my younger brother and a housemaid (Learner 3, School B, 19 September 2017).*

The issue of parents entrusting the upbringing of children to maids is a recent phenomenon in Zimbabwe. On one hand, it is about parents either having no close relations or ones they can trust. On the other hand, it is a status symbol where emigrant parents show their newly-acquired wealth status by employing a maid. The disadvantage, however, is that maids are generally unable to exercise full control over the LBC, some of whom may end up being delinquent and lacking essential social support.

#### Children Left on Their Own

Child-headed households are not a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. Foster, Makufa, Drew and Kralovec (1997) report an increase in child-headed households in the country in the early 1990s resulting from the death of parents due to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), leaving elder children in the household to assume parental roles. The recent increase in child-headed households, however, resulted from the emigration of both parents, leaving children on their own:

*We are staying on our own for the past 4 years: my cousin, sister, my brother, and myself* (Learner 5, School A, 13 September 2017).

There is much concern that LBC living alone are vulnerable, susceptible to abuse and have no social support networks.

#### Challenges Faced by LBC

While parental migration is generally undertaken with the intention to improve the welfare of LBC, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] (2010) posits that such migration may serve as a catalyst for various challenges that will negatively affect the LBC. Such challenges occur both at home and at school.

#### Challenges at home

Typically, household migration is considered a livelihood strategy that is taken to improve the well-being of the whole family, particularly the children (Kufakurirane, Pasura & McGregor, 2014). Findings from this research, however, indicate that LBC face numerous challenges at home. The first challenge is that of variable economic support as parental migration has not always brought the envisaged economic benefits for the children:

*My grandfather receives the money from my parents. However, he usually pays only half and uses the rest* (Learner 2, School A, 13 September 2017).

Guardians who abuse remittances defeat the rationale behind parental emigration, which is to improve the well-being of LBC. This finding resonates with that of Mabharani (2014) who reports on some guardians who convert remittances to personal use. In this study, the misuse of remittances was more prevalent among guardians in low-income areas than in high income areas, because guardians in the latter areas were generally well-off economi-

cally, and thus had no reason to misuse remittances. Besides the misuse of remittances, the study also found that some migrant parents were not sending enough money for the upkeep of their children:

*My father does not send any school fees. My aunt pays my school fees with her own money. My mother just sends some money to help here and there* (Learner 2, School B, 19 September 2017).

It may be that some parents in the diaspora are economically struggling due to unemployment, intermittent employment, or high costs of living and are thus unable to remit as expected and to support their children well. However, with little or no improvement in Zimbabwe's economic situation in the past decade, and no prospects of successful recovery in the near future, most parents remain in the diaspora, hoping that their situation will improve. While Zhao (2017) argues that remittances from migrant parents increase educational opportunities for the LBC, the findings of this study are somewhat inconclusive, as some LBC were worse off than they were before the emigration of their parents.

The second challenge centred on parents substituting money for love. Filippa (2011) contends that money may sometimes act as a strong social presence of migrant parents who are making ends meet and are able to remit back home as LBC accept it as a currency of love. The concern is that some of these parents overcompensate by supplying excessive money and goods to the detriment of the children who tend to abuse the material resources. This is particularly true of parents from high-income suburbs who are most likely to find better paying professional jobs in the diaspora. These may include teachers, professors, and doctors.

The lack of psycho-social support was another challenge. Dreby (2010) argues that LBC often pay the emotional price of separation from parents as the family environment created after parental emigration often offers insufficient protection. The findings from this study validate this observation as some LBC interviewee reported that there were issues that needed parents rather than friends or relatives:

*There are times I miss talking face-to-face with my mother, sharing problems and life experiences. No one can really replace motherly love* (Learner 3, School A, 14 September 2017).

In the absence of parents, most LBC suffer in silence. They often bottle up their emotions, become withdrawn, and do not do well in school.

The fourth challenge related to role change and addition, where LBC are expected to carry out duties within the household. Girls, particularly, pointed out that they had become more involved in household chores, leaving them with little time for schoolwork:

*I live with my aunt. I do everything at home from cleaning, cooking, fetching water, and repair work*

*before and after school. My aunt doesn't help at all* (Learner 4, School B, 19 September 2017).

The fifth challenge centred on learners' acrimonious relationships with guardians, as revealed by some of the LBC:

*I don't have a voice in the home and the people I live with don't listen to my concerns. I am ill-treated as compared to my aunt's child* (Learner 2, School B, 19 September 2017).

This finding is contrary to the assertion by Brady, Lowe and Lauritzen (2015) that children are active social agents with power and agency, and co-constructors of their world. The majority of LBC interviewees felt powerless, abandoned, and without rights or voices in the homes in which they were living.

The sixth challenge related to communication breakdown with migrant parents. Some LBC exhibited high levels of anxiety when they were unable to keep connected with their parents.

*Since 2010 I have never communicated with my father. Some people might not understand it, but it's a difficult situation. Parents should always be there for their children* (Learner 2, School B, 19 September 2017).

This lack of communication aggravates the children's emotional problems. Most of the LBC interviewees had no phones to communicate with their parents. Even those that communicated with their parents frequently reported that they yearned for the physical presence of their parents. Parental absence was therefore psychologically affecting LBC and impacting negatively on their well-being, which in turn would also negatively impact on their schooling.

#### *Educational challenges*

Although the emigration of parents is generally posited to improve educational experiences of LBC through increased remittances (Zhao, 2017), the findings of this study indicate that most LBC were negatively affected. Firstly, the increased roles adopted by LBC at home after the emigration of their parents were making it difficult for these children to perform better in school:

*I am always late for school. Sometimes I get to school when I am already tired because I do many household chores before going to school* (Learner 6, School B, 19 September 2017).

While most children generally grow up doing work at home, it is the additional work that is problematic as it reduces both time for schoolwork and concentration at school through tiredness.

The second challenge was about help with schoolwork. Mabharani (2014) points out that the lack of parental supervision and monitoring is often the cause of declining school performance among children of emigrant parents as few guardians can be relied upon to successfully supervise homework and monitor performance. The results of this study concur with this assertion:

*My aunt never assists me .... She is rarely home. When it comes to my homework, I do it alone or come to school early so that my classmates can assist me* (Learner 1, School A, 13 September 2017).

Without adequate help from guardians, some LBC resorted to self-help or to seeking assistance from neighbours, exposing them to potential abuse.

The third challenge related to school meetings. The findings of this study indicate that some guardians do not care or are too young or too old to attend meetings and to effectively help learners. One of the children living in a child-headed family said:

*My cousin sister comes for consultations, but it's difficult for me to really benefit because of the one year age difference between us. She is not always free to share intimate things with me. Some issues need consultation with a mature person.* (Learner 5, School A, 13 September 2017)

It was further reported that some guardians did not follow up on feedback. Spera (2005) argues that parental involvement robustly improves academic achievement, and its absence has a negative impact on learners as progress cannot be tracked or monitored.

The fourth challenge involved the late or non-payment of fees and related educational expenses:

*Sometimes my aunt doesn't pay all the school fees at once, yet my parents would have sent all the money. She pays part and uses the rest for other things* (Learner 3, School A, 13 September 2017).

This abuse of LBC remittances results in failure to meet the needs of LBC. Some LBC may even drop out of school, further damaging their future.

The fifth challenge concerned some LBC having excess money, clothes, and electrical gadgets. Kufakurinane et al. (2014) argue that those learners with access to too much money and material goods experience moments of "financial grandeur" – an elevated status which diverts their attention away from schooling. Teachers may also end up ignoring the learner and not providing support.

#### *LBC's Views on their Interaction with Teachers and Accessing Education*

LBC face challenges due to parental absence. In order to understand how equity and social justice is being met, it is prudent to explore how these children view their interactions and experiences with teachers.

#### *Interaction with teachers*

For effective inclusive education to be achieved, teachers acting in loco parentis are supposed to holistically interact with and accommodate all learners. A school following a rights-based approach should respect and respond to diversity among its learners, ensure equal opportunities for all and treat diversity as an opportunity to improve the quality of education, and go beyond the parameters of a school timetable and subjects to be taught



(Themane, 2017). However, this study found that most teachers were mainly concerned with academic results. Issues of vulnerable learners such as LBC were regarded as peripheral. One LBC pointed out:

*Some teachers are not approachable when you have social issues. They worry much about your academic performance. If you confide in them, they gossip about you with other teachers instead of helping you. So, I just keep issues to myself until I can talk to my mother. (Learner 2, School B, 19 September 2017)*

Moro and Cassibba (2015) note that the problem of a content-laden and examination-oriented curriculum is also experienced in countries such as Namibia and Botswana, and forces teachers to concentrate on a narrow curriculum and academically able learners. Such curricula are usually inflexible and leave little time for teachers to concentrate on challenges faced by vulnerable learners (Mafa & Makuba, 2013). The curriculum thus becomes a major source of segregation and exclusion. This runs counter to inclusive education and discourages teaching practices that allow for learner diversity in an inclusive set-up (Chimhenga, 2014). In the current set-up, vulnerable learners run the risk of being ignored and have negative schooling experiences. This, despite the fact that inclusive education mandates teachers to be concerned about what happens to learners in and beyond the classroom. This study found that non-academic issues affecting vulnerable learners were being relegated to a few teachers in the Guidance and Counselling department. Yet inclusive education is a mandate of all teachers:

*All teachers, not only for G and C should be approachable and try to help all learners with challenges. Teachers should listen more because learners expect advice when they bring their problem to a teacher. Some teachers, however, don't listen to learners' problems. (Learner 1, School B, 19 September 2017)*

The above shows that some learners notice inequality and injustice within the school. Even though the concept of inclusive education may not be openly defined and understood by these learners, the study results show that some teachers are not practising inclusive education, leaving learners wanting.

#### *Teachers' attitudes towards LBC*

People's perceptions determine their actions (Williams & Finnegan, 2003). Teachers' attitudes to inclusive education may thus influence their intentions and behaviours, which may negatively affect vulnerable learners' schooling experiences. The study results indicate that some teachers negatively label LBC, much to the detriment of these children:

*Some teachers think we are spoiled brats and delinquent, but it's not all of us (Learner 6, School B, 19 September 2017).*

Labelling and stereotyping are detrimental to achieving inclusive education because labels can lead to discrimination, neglect, and exclusion of

concerned learners (Mbengwa, 2010). A label can stick to individuals such that they live according to it in what is referred to as a self-fulfilling prophecy. For learners, negative labels can lead to more negative behaviour and consequently, negative schooling experiences. One learner had this to say:

*What's the point of trying to do good if you have already been labelled naughty, out of control, and disobedient both at home and school? (Learner 6, School A, 19 September 2017).*

Positive attitudes towards learners by teachers create a sense of belonging of LBC and the development of positive self-esteem, which improves schooling experiences. Themane (2017) argues that schools should be child-friendly with learners free from embarrassment, harassment, stigmatisation, and other forms of humiliation. As Mbengwa (2010) contends, successful inclusion can only be achieved if teachers hold a positive attitude towards inclusive education and follow practices that embrace all learners regardless of their differences.

#### *Educational support from teachers*

The thrust of inclusive education is that teachers must holistically support all learners. Learners interviewed in this study complained that instead of being helped in class in their areas of weakness, some teachers were rather encouraging the academically less gifted learners to attend extra or private lessons where they pay extra money:

*I don't have money for extra lessons, but my teachers say they are necessary since last term my marks were low (Learner 6, School A, 13 September 2017).*

The practice of encouraging extra paid lessons outside normal school hours increased during Zimbabwe's economic crisis as teacher remuneration became inadequate. This stressed parents financially even further. Those LBC whose parents were not remitting much were thus suffering as they could not afford to pay normal school fees, let alone extra lessons. This defeats the thrust of inclusive education, where all learners are supposed to benefit regardless of their financial standing.

#### *LBC's access to financial assistance*

When learners are vulnerable due to poor socioeconomic backgrounds, they generally seek financial assistance from government and non-governmental organisations to pursue their education. LBC, however, have little recourse to such assistance because of the perception that they are well resourced. Only one out of all the LBC interviewed in this study was able to get assistance from a non-governmental organisation (NGO):

*My mother is not sending anything for our upkeep, so my school fees is being paid by Mavambo, an NGO. However, I struggle with other needs and my 14-year-old brother is sitting at home not going to school because there is no money. (Learner 6, School A, 13 September 2017)*

The learners argued that the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) programme, a government grant meant to assist learners in need of financial help, rarely assists them as they are perceived to be economically well off as their parents are in the diaspora. Teachers who were interviewed confirmed that the programme targeted orphans first and that it was rare for learners with parents in the diaspora to be assisted, especially as the fund was underfunded. This discrimination denies LBC access to many opportunities, leading to their general marginalisation. Rather, assistance is generally given to orphans, those living with old guardians, and those children considered to be from poor backgrounds. Regardless of the fact that LBC were vulnerable, they were not getting government assistance. This denied them access to many opportunities, resulting in their marginalisation. More focus is given to disabled learners and to orphans, who are the traditional vulnerabilities that the system easily recognises. However, those with hidden or subtle social, cultural, emotional, and psychological vulnerabilities also need to be accommodated for inclusive education to be holistic.

### Conclusion

The problem of LBC is recent in Zimbabwe. However, the continued economic problems in the country mean that the challenge is likely to continue for the foreseeable future as parents continue to emigrate. The findings of this study indicate that the major challenges faced by LBC were mainly the diversion of remittances by guardians, the lack of supervision of schoolwork at home, inadequate guidance on social and educational issues, excessive menial work at home, poor representation by guardians at school meetings, and late or non-payment of school expenses.

The challenges that these LBC encounter at home and at school interconnect and thus need to be managed properly in the absence of parents. Reduced social and cultural capital from emigrating parents has resulted in LBC facing numerous challenges, which would not have arisen in the presence of biological parents. Most LBC reported getting inadequate educational support at school. Rather, they were expected to enrol for paid extra lessons from their meagre remittances. LBC were also being negatively labelled and were not getting financial assistance because of the erroneous assumption that all LBC were financially better off. Whereas traditional vulnerabilities were getting attention, the new phenomenon of LBC was not understood and thus using inclusive education practices to encompass LBC was a challenge for teachers.

The study concludes that the phenomenon of LBC is still poorly understood in Zimbabwe, and that the education system is poorly configured to deal with the challenges facing LBC. The study

recommends the crafting of a specific inclusive education policy in the country, which will guide the implementation of inclusive education regarding what needs to be done, how it is to be done and what resources need to be leveraged to attain a holistic approach to inclusive education.

### Authors' Contributions

Mazvita Cecilia Tawodzera provided data for the paper and wrote the initial draft of the paper. Mahlapahlapana Themane worked on the second and third drafts. Both authors worked on the final manuscript.

### Notes

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