

CHAPTER TWO: FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE QUESTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF LEARNERS LEFT BEHIND BY EMIGRANTS

This chapter critically maps out the theoretical strands underpinning and grounding this study. The Family Systems theory was used to analyse the impact of parental migration on the education of learners left behind. An overview of the role of the theoretical framework in research is furnished before a detailed analysis of family systems theory is laid out and immensely canvassed. Some implications of the Family Systems theory that pertain to how disruptions of family structures due to parents-children separation because of migration affect the academic performance of the learners left behind are articulated concomitantly with a discussion of major tenets of the theory. Despite the discussions on some implications of the Family Systems theory to some specific aspects of the study, there is a section devoted to the general implications of the theory to the study as well.

Articulating one's theoretical framework is one of the key benchmarks for any successful research report or any plausible research output. A theory is a set of ideas that attempt to locate general characteristics or properties that explain regularly observed phenomena (Giddens, 2009; Haralambos & Horlborn, 2010). Macionis (2012) says a theory is a statement of how and why specific facts are related. Related to Macionis's (2012) conceptualisation of a theory, Henslin (2015) defines a theory as a general statement that explains how two or more facts are related to one another. He further alludes that a theory is like a lens through which one can view social life, it is a way of conceiving a phenomena. In a more elaborative elucidation of the word 'theory', Creswell (2014) observes that the word can be used interchangeably with patterns, theoretical lens or naturalistic generalisations all meaning the broader explanations used or developed in studies.

Drawing from the definition of theory as given above, Grant and Osanloo (2014) conceptualise a theoretical framework as the blueprint for the entire dissertation inquiry that serves as the guide on which to build and support one's study and provides the structure to philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically and analytically conceptualise the approach of the whole monograph.

Grant and Osanloo (2014) further observe that selection of a theoretical framework requires a deep and thoughtful understanding of one's problem, purpose, significance and research questions. In addition to that, the theories should be able to give adequate assumptions from which responses to the research question could be derived. Ganga (2013) observes that a theoretical framework connects the researcher to the existing knowledge thus providing the basis of a hypothesis or research methods to follow. As a way of summarising the utility of the theoretical framework in research, Creswell (2014) says the theoretical lens; shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analysed, provides a call for action or change, guides researchers as to what issues are important to examine, identifies the people who need to be studied and indicates how the researcher positions himself or herself in the study.

Guided by the above ideas on the functions of theoretical framework in research, this study was informed by family systems theory which expounds on the influence of family structure on family functionality a phenomenon under the spotlight in the present study where an evaluation of the role of biological parents, caregivers, teachers and government on the provision of educational needs to learners whose parents have migrated out of Mwenezi District into other countries was done.

This study sought to evaluate the role played by biological parents, guardians, government and other stakeholders in education such as

teachers in the provision of educational needs to learners left behind by parents who have migrated out of Mwenezi District into other countries. The role of the stated stakeholders was scrutinised against a backdrop of a repertoire of noted challenges affecting this group of learners for instance exclusion from welfare programmes such as BEAM based on some beliefs by some programme implementers that parents in the diaspora were well up economically and ought to support their children independently without seeking any assistance from government or other well-wishers (TARSC, 2012). Against this background, however, research indicates that some learners with parents in the diaspora faced challenges exhibited by other orphans and vulnerable learners which included non-payment of fees, absenteeism, dropping out of school, and a high rate of academic failure, among other related challenges (Ganga, 2013; Filippa, 2011; Zirima, 2016). Since the identified challenges partly resulted from the effects of disorientation of nuclear family structure due to parental migration where school-going age children were left under the care of others, it was construed that the problem could be better tackled from the lenses of theoretical foundations that relate to how families function thus in the present study how families provided for the education of their children hence the choice of family systems theory which expounds on how families are structured and function (Johnson, 2010).

Family systems theory was derived from general systems theory (Johnson, 2010). The author further observes that general systems theory proposes that human experiences, social, and scientific problems should be thought of as if they were systems. The theory was founded by Bertalanffy (1968) on the assumption that the entirety of a system is different from the arithmetic sum of its parts considered in isolation (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000; Johnson, 2010). In systems thinking therefore phenomena are analysed holistically and

components are only considered with reference to how they contribute to the whole system.

According to Morgaine (2001), a system is a set of interrelated elements showing coherent behaviours. From this view, therefore, a system should be seen as something consisting of components that are observable inclusive of rules that bind it together. Since a family is a composition of members who interact coherently as it is like with General Systems theory, Bowen (1988) founded Family Systems theory on similar assumptions to General Systems theory (Johnson, 2010).

International Social Service Family Institute (2015) observes that Family Systems theory is a theoretical framework about human behaviour and treatment of human problems which should be addressed from the view that humans are not emotional units but function collectively in emotional relationships. From this view, individuality is negated by relational analysis of human problems. In the context of this book on the educational needs of learners left behind by parents, an evaluative analysis was thus made considering the impact of effort made by biological parents, guardians, government and teachers who supposedly should work collectively in a systematic way as should rightly be the case in the family set up.

ISSFI (2015) also takes an organic analogy on human relationships to the natural world where a disturbance to one part will have ripple effects on the other parts and eventually on the whole ecosystem. Related to an analysis of educational experiences of learners left behind by emigrants, the assumption is that parent-child separation has caused some disturbance in one way or the other since such separation has resulted in new family arrangements whose parenting styles could be different from the original nuclear one hence the relevance of family systems theory as a guiding theoretical framework.

The Family Systems theory is founded on four concepts, namely anxiety, two basic life forces, the emotional system and the family as an emotional unit (Brown, 1999; ISSFI, 2015) and these are articulated below to show how they informed the present study on family functionality in the context of the provision of education to learners left behind by parents who lived in other countries.

One of the key concepts of the family systems theory is anxiety. Anxiety is an organisation's response to a real or current threat and is split into acute and chronic anxiety (Johnson, 1999). Acute anxiety occurs when there is a real threat and when the threat is short-lived while chronic anxiety is about our response to other people's reactions to stress (Bowen, 1988). Brown (1999) observes that chronic anxiety results when members of a family are incapacitated to think through their responses to relationship dilemmas but rather react anxiously to perceived emotional demands. The author further states that the Bowenian theory's major goal is to reduce chronic anxiety through facilitating awareness of how the emotional system functions, increasing levels of differentiation by focussing on changing self rather than changing others. In essence, life is characterised by fear and in most cases fear of the unknown resulting from how we are socialised. This fear governs the way we manage our emotional health. The separation of children from their biological parents due to migration could have an emotional impact on the children which may influence how the children learn in school. In that sense, family systems theory was useful to analyse the role played by biological parents, teachers, caregivers and government on the educational welfare of learners left behind considering the fact that parent-child separation presented new challenges and new anxieties in families. The theory provided a lens to visualise possible challenges for learners that came with altered family structures. It helped the researcher tap into the learners' educational experiences and their reactions to parental migration.

Filippa (2011) argues that when faced with the possibility of separating from a loved one, infants or older children undergo three phases of separation responses namely protest, despair (grief and mourning) then denial or detachment (Filippa, 2011). The concept of anxiety thus helped the researcher to generate questions that sought to get the reactions of learners to parental migration and in that way also evaluate the learners' adaptation to the new family structure and the extent to which the new family structure functioned to fulfil the educational needs of the learners.

The second foundational concept of Family Systems theory is the two basic life forces which assume that organisms are controlled by two opposing forces one for togetherness and the other one for individuality (Brown, 1999). It explains that while we all need company and to influence others to be alike, sometimes we desire to be independent. Consistent with the concept of chronic anxiety articulated earlier on, the force towards togetherness increases with increasing chronic anxiety (Morgaine, 2001). The two opposing forces are therefore both important as they regulate our contact. While we may pursue individual egos, and develop our principles relating to our contact, we ought to be responsible for our actions and account for the welfare of others within our relationship circles (Bowen, 1988; Johnson, 2010). In this thinking, therefore, family members, teachers and the government may be held responsible both individually and/or collectively for the educational provision to learners who have been left by parents who are in the diaspora. The role these stakeholders were taking in Mwenezi District thus needed to be evaluated since so many learners have been deserted by parents who were working in other countries. Similarly, the role the emigrants played in the provision of educational needs to their children also needed scrutiny, of course, in the present study, this was done through interacting with learners and caregivers.

Consulting the two basic life forces was thus relevant in this study since it made the researcher understand that while members of families ought to work towards collective conscience, they were also governed and driven by personal judgements and values towards their decisions. In that light therefore the researcher formulated questions that directed the respondents to give their views on the role of individual family members and the collective family in the provision of educational needs to learners left behind thereby providing information relevant to evaluating the educational needs of learners with parents in the diaspora.

The emotional system is the third foundational concept of family systems theory. According to Johnson (2010), this concept posits that human functioning both individually and in families is regulated by innate guidance mechanisms which evolve with time. Furthermore, the author further ascertained that above the emotional system, humans also have feelings and intellectual systems and all are useful depending on the conditions facing the person. The intellectual system which explains one's ability to comprehend and communicate is one of the basic foundations in learning where learners are tested after learning to see whether they have grasped the concept taught (Johnson, 2010). Since intellectualism is affected by the emotional system as it were, it follows that learners' learning experiences ought to be scrutinised by borrowing ideas from family systems theory which stresses the importance of examining the impact of the emotional functioning of individuals and groups. Furthermore, based on such propositions, the researcher inquired from learners left behind how emotions triggered by parental migration impacted their intellectual capacity and this was done by analysing learners' performances both before parental out-migration of Mwenzi District and after parental migration. Analyses of the learners' performance were done through scrutinising academic reports and through

interviewing teachers and caregivers to establish how opinions of all these integrated as should be the case in systems arrangement.

The last but not least important foundational concept of family systems theory that applies to the present study is 'the family as an emotional unit'. According to ISSFI (2015), Bowen relates the family to an organism and states that the family has properties that are greater than its parts. Furthermore, Bowen (1988) posits that the parts of a family are emotionally dependent on each other thus a change in one affects the other parts and the entire system (Johnson, 2010). Since this study examined the role of absent biological parents among other family members on the educational welfare of their children, the family as an emotional unit proposition of the family systems theory was thus informative and suitable in the analysis of the impact of parent-child separation in that separation itself induces emotions on both parents and the children (Boss, 2008) whose impact on learner performance needed to be evaluated so that appropriate parenting styles could be suggested. On that note, it was, therefore, necessary to interview learners left behind to establish how they were emotionally affected by their parental absence. In the Family Systems theory, Bowen (1988) states that there tended to be emotions in relationships that bind members together and the emotional processes are outlined below to illustrate how they relate to this study on educational provisions for learners with biological parents in the diaspora.

Differentiation of one self is a positive attribute in building quality relations within families. By differentiation of self, Bowen referred to one's ability to separate thinking from feelings, guided by rational capacity and the ability to maintain a solid sense of self regardless of social pressure to conform, while at the same time being able to maintain an intimate meaningful relationship to others (ISSFI, 2015). In Bowenian analysis, people depending on how they were socialised at the primary socialisation stage, have either a high level of

differentiation or a low level of differentiation. The levels of differentiation, therefore, influence how individuals relate, make decisions and cope with life challenges. It was because of such propositions that the concept was incorporated to inform this study which analysed the impact of family separation due to migration on the educational experiences of learners left behind since it is also the responsibility of families to socialise members hence an integral institution in determining one's differentiation of self-levels.

On differentiation of self, Bowen (1988) further talks about emotions where he states that people with a low level of differentiation tended to be overwhelmed by emotions and lead lives dominated by frustration while on the other hand those with a high level of differentiation can control their emotions and make rational decisions. Considering that the present study intended to establish how learners left behind coped with school life after disruption of the nuclear family set up following parental migration, it was important to incorporate this concept of family systems theory since it helped in the generation of questions relating to emotional effects of parental migration on the education of learners left behind. Such endeavour was found necessary because it became a prelude to the generation of ideas that could be used to build up a strong new family structure in response to challenges experienced by learners left behind and who found themselves in new family setups.

The other proposition of the differentiation of self-canvassed within the context of the present study was the aspect of roles, boundaries and personal responsibilities that characterise family functionality (Moreno, 2013). Without a doubt, these aforementioned were altered on all members of the families that were affected by migration hence how particular members managed life while staying away from their parents or children depended on their level of differentiation whereas those highly differentiated tended to manage roles and work in the

families boundaries quite well. In this sense, Family Systems theory helped one to establish how various families in Mwenezi District affected by migration responded to such and this was established through face-to-face key participant interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis that further helped the researcher extract qualitative data on roles and responsibilities assumed by learners after their parents migrated out of the country.

Differentiation of self also talks about delineating individuals based on life principles where those highly differentiated can live according to their principles as opposed to the lowly differentiated who may succumb to pressure and discard their own opinions thereby showing contrasting behaviour (ISSFI, 2015). The parenting styles of the emigrants could have been influenced by the social circumstances they experienced once they left the Mwenezi District and this could be seen from the level of support they rendered to their families back home as given by the participants. The concept also helped the researcher to evaluate the learners' coping strategies or learners' independence in decision making, especially on issues relating to their education such as attendance, completion, doing schoolwork and respecting school rules. In this regard, the concept also helped the researcher evaluate the influence of social pressure on both learners and their biological parents with respect to attitudinal changes towards education because of changes in family structure and the provision of educational welfare to learners respectively.

Differentiation of self also helped the researcher dig deeper from participants what they thought about the emigrants' decision to leave children without close parental control considering that such practices had the potential of affecting family cohesion and subsequently learner achievement in education. Such a view was arrived at because differentiation of self has it that decision making is influenced by one's level of differentiation where those with a high level of differentiation

tended to make appropriate decisions after due consideration to facts and alternatives on the ground while on the other hand individuals with a low level of differentiation tended to make poor decisions since they normally act without gathering enough facts on any issue (Johnson, 2010; Moreno, 2013). While migrating out of the country was the decision taken by the parents, it was important too to gather from the participants especially the guardians of learners left behind whether there were no other alternatives that the parents could have considered that could have eased challenges related to family disintegration due to members living apart. The influences of the two levels of differentiation are summarised below:

Table 2.1: Properties of levels of differentiation (*International Social Service Family Institute, 2015*)

Low level of differentiation	High level of differentiation
1. has difficulties differentiating feelings from thinking	1. has good awareness of both thinking and feelings
2. acts based on feelings without rational thinking	2. can express emotions freely and spontaneously
3. overwhelmed by emotions	3. acts after gathering relevant facts
4. leads a life dominated by emotions	4. makes appropriate decisions and leads a fulfilling life
5. ever stressed and unstable	5. can state 'I' position calmly and act according to own life principles
6. easily yields to social pressure	6. enjoy meaningful and intimate relationships with other people
7. provides up own opinion in favour of others`	
8. may show contrasting behaviour of being dogmatic and intolerance	
9. rigidity of roles, blurring of personal boundaries and responsibilities	

When one sets to critically examine the roles played by biological parents, guardians, teachers and the government in providing educational welfare to learners left behind by parents who have migrated out of Mwenezi District to countries beyond Zimbabwean borders, one realises that all these stakeholders view learner welfare differently depending on their social orientation and the value they put on education. In that light, therefore, one ought to treat them accordingly hence the qualitative approach adopted in the study which enabled the researcher to interview the participants who were willing to express their views on their roles and the roles of others. Further to this, the concept guided in formulating sub-research questions on educational experiences of learners left behind as these are linked to the home background, a pinnacle of primary child socialisation. Differentiation of self also taught the researcher that individuals need to be rational if ever they are to function effectively in the family hence the need for education. Above all, differentiation of self was found perfectly informing to an evaluation of various stakeholders' responses to the educational welfare of learners left by parents who migrated out of Mwenezi District since it clearly showed how family socialisation affects emotional unit within the family structure and subsequently family members' ability to differentiate thinking from emotions two aspects that are important when analysing learners' readiness in education where rationality tend to yield more positive outcomes than emotions.

Bowen (1988) avers that when two people in a relationship are in dispute and it often happens, their dispute can be successfully resolved if they approach the third party who would help the disputing pair to settle their disagreement thus triangling (Bowen, 1988). Related to the present study where it was noted that learners with parents in the diaspora were left out of welfare programmes such as BEAM despite

evidence of some of them failing to raise school levies resulting in high dropout rates, academic failure, school absenteeism among other related challenges (Zirima, 2016; Runhare, 2004; Filippa & Cronje, 2013; Ganga, 2013) one would want to know where these learners report their harsh schooling experiences and how those confided in helping the learners face the challenges. Triangling reveals the importance of seeking counselling when in challenges. By engaging learners in face-to-face key participant interviews where they shared with the researcher their experiences of learning without close assistance and monitoring from their biological parents, the researcher discovered that in some instances counselling of the learners could be a possible measure to ease the learners' challenges associated with acceptability of the new family arrangements necessitated by outmigration of the parents hence the importance of triangling. Gathering information about whether learners left behind were counselled and the quality of counselling they received helped the researcher familiarise himself with learners' social and emotional experiences, how these experiences were catered for and the impact of such efforts on the quality of education received by those learners who lived in nuclear families disintegrated by parental migration. While triangling largely relates to families in a conflict which may not be purely characteristic of the current problem, the major attribute that made it possible to be applicable in this study is that of emphasising the need to reach out to third parties to resolve challenges between individuals and between groups wherein learners left behind are sometimes left out in welfare programmes such as BEAM thereby complicating their schooling opportunities.

Triangulation can be illustrated diagrammatically as follows:

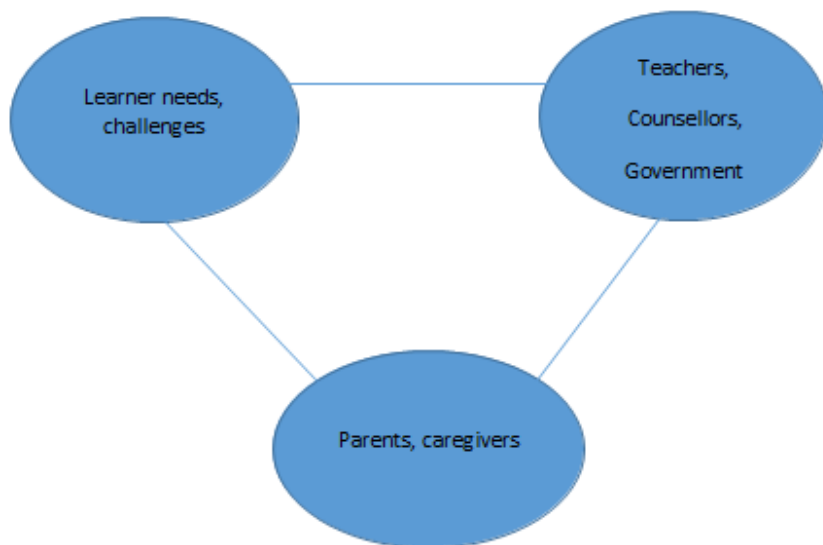


Figure 2.1: Triangulating Learner Challenges in the Context of Parental Migration

Henslin (2015) conceptualises a nuclear family as a family composed of a husband, wife and children. In a related definition, a nuclear family is also referred to as a conjugal family which means a family that results from marriage (Macionis, 2012). Giddens (2009) elaborates and says a nuclear family should have two adults who live together in a household with their own or adopted children. The present study examined the nuclear family through the lenses of the family systems theory where consideration was made to evaluate the impact of parental migration on the educational welfare of learners left behind. To do that, emotional processes that characterise nuclear family were expounded to show how they could help us better understand learner educational welfare in the absence of biological parents. While a family is defined in the context of kin relations as posited above, this study also sought views of other people outside the family structure such as teachers since their duties involve working with children who hail

from different family backgrounds and in this way were perceived to be well positioned in the collection of data that related to how learners left behind by emigrants experienced schooling.

According to Bowen (1988), four patterns emerge within a nuclear family when there is high chronic anxiety and these are reactive distance, marital conflict, reciprocal functioning and projection of problems onto a child (Bowen, 1988). These patterns and their impact on the education of learners left behind by parents who lived in the diaspora are hereby explicated.

Reactive distance is when a couple in discomfort decides to live physically apart from each other through such things as work, travel or other things or they may stay together but not emotionally connected and hence will not be communicating or planning family issues together (Bowen, 1988). This concept was found relevant in the analysis of educational experiences of learners left behind by parents in that in some scenarios it is either the father who migrates whilst the mother remains with the children or vice versa but still, the learners may fail to pursue their education due to constraints related to parental neglect. An arrangement where parents live apart or cease to plan for the family collectively alters family functionality inclusive of socialisation and moral support roles that are important in educating children since parental support and motivation have positive impacts on children's academic achievement. Macionis (2012) appraises the nuclear family as a good example of the ideal family for children in school due to child-parent intimacy that fosters discipline in school. Since this study sought to inquire how the educational needs of learners with parents who lived away from the children were catered for, the concept of reactive distance was found informative in that it helped the researcher evaluate this emerging family arrangement which is divergent from the commonly known nuclear family where parents and their children lived and planned family affairs collectively.

The other dimension of the nuclear family emotional process is marital conflict. ISSFI (2015) outlines the following behaviour characteristics of couples in conflict; being critical, blaming and accusatory of each other, focussing on the other person's faults/shortcomings (other-focused) rather than focusing on one's part in the problem (self-focused), rigid and insistent on one's viewpoint, behave abusively towards each other and reflects emotional dependency between the couple.

Since this study examined families in separation due to migration for periods stretching from six months up to over five years, it was prudent to establish the role either of the parents played in fulfilling the educational requirements of the learners even when the parents were separated by distance from their children. In the face-to-face key participant interviews with the learners, the researcher, therefore, sought to get the role played by each parent in meeting the learners' educational needs.

Nuclear family emotional processes also involve reciprocal functioning when one spouse is the caretaking partner in full control of the relationship while the other partner becomes the yielding partner who depends wholly on the caretaking partner (ISSFI, 2015). In such a situation, both partners experience challenges, for instance, the caretaking partner feels overwhelmed by responsibilities while the yielding partner feels abused and controlled resulting in physical and emotional dysfunction (Bowen, 1988). Should such relationship experiences happen in situations that mirror family arrangements under the current investigation where the members are geographically separated, the quality of schooling support provided to the children left behind could be compromised. It was thus befitting that when evaluating parental contribution to the educational needs of learners left behind, one also employed qualitative approach and interview techniques that allowed the respondents to empty their vivid experiences when parents lived apart.

Projection of a problem onto a child is another element of nuclear family emotional processes (Johnson, 2010). This happens when a feuding couple spills its challenges to a particular child within the family thus the child becomes the focus of parental anxiety (ISSFI, 2015). If this happens, the child's functioning will be impaired due to the inability to handle increased reactivity and sensitivity towards him/her by the parents. Bowen (1988), however, observes that such scenarios would result in parents finding common ground so that they can help the child together (Bowen, 1988). Since this book indicates that parental migration results in schooling challenges for the learners left behind questions also needed to be directed at the respondents, especially the learners themselves regarding their views on the contribution of both parents to educational provision and to briefly give their opinion on how the relationship of their parents could impact on the way they were supported. The importance of such information was to enable one to suggest parenting strategies that could be inclusive of the children's input hence most likely to get the support of the children, something indisputable in family functionality and in the current world order where children's rights are regarded so highly.

The family projection process is about the way parents convey their emotional problems to the child (Bowen, 1988). If the child is aware of the parental emotional anxieties, that child will have difficulties separating feelings from thinking and hence will display such behaviours as difficulties meeting others' expectations, a great need for recognition and approval, blaming others, feeling responsible for others' happiness or that others are responsible for his or her happiness and impulsiveness and lower functioning (ISSFI, 2015). While the present study examined the contribution of various stakeholders to the educational needs of learners left by parents in the diaspora, to note is the fact that these learners could at times communicate with their biological parents, conversations which could

have impacted the way the learners learnt in one way or the other. As this evaluation was done, therefore, one needed to gather data relating to issues that the learners discussed with their parents and that helped in understanding to some extent why this group of learners was associated with such schooling challenges as absenteeism, poor completion rate, academic failure and truancy among other related problems especially considering the fact that the parents could in some way have been providing social, emotional and educational support.

The multigenerational transmission process sets out the process of how chronic anxiety and roles are passed from one generation to the other (Bowen, 1988). It states that the most focused child will move towards the lower level of differentiation while the least focused moves towards a higher level of differentiation (Johnson, 2010). One could come to know the quality of roles exposed to the learners under the care of grandparents upon interviewing them and observing them as they interacted on day to day basis. Thus, the present study looked into both schooling experiences of the learners left behind and how they got assistance in schoolwork at home in addition to other duties that they were expected to accomplish by their caregivers. The level of education of the caregivers was scrutinised as well to establish how it impacted the assistance the learners needed doing homework or just motivation for studies.

Bowen (1988) concurs with Tomman (1976) that our personality and behaviour patterns are impacted by our sibling position (Bowen, 1988). In their view, both authorities posit that the eldest child usually develops leadership qualities, is more responsible and identifies with power and authority while the opposite is true for the youngest sibling. Furthermore, Bowen (1988) observes that in a family where there is only one child, the child normally enjoys maximum attention from parents and usually relates with elders. However, he also states that the youngest sibling can assume the role of the eldest sibling if the

eldest is incapacitated by illness. In a study in Ecuador on the life experiences of learners left behind by emigrants, Guendell *et al.* (2013) noted that older children usually assumed the roles of parents taking care of their young siblings. When evaluating the role played by biological parents, teachers, government and guardians in the provision of educational needs to learners left behind by emigrants, it could be better also to interview the learners themselves to get to gather data relating to their role in the absence of their parents. It is largely unquestionable that roles come with their related stress and time management challenges. In case some learners left behind assumed new roles commensurate with their positions in the family structure, the extent to which those roles impacted the learners' schooling experiences and their contribution to changing family patterns needed to be examined from the lens of Family Systems theory.

Emotional cut-off is emotional distancing where couples in dispute separate physically or decide to withdraw from each other psychologically by cutting all means of communication (ISSFI, 2015). While emotional cut-off is done to reduce anxiety among individuals, it usually yields more challenges since no one will be there to assist in times of need when family members are separated. In this study that sought to evaluate the role played by various stakeholders in fulfilling the educational needs of learners left behind, there was a need also to get deeper into analysing the circumstances that led the biological parents to remain away from their families for long periods. Since emotional cut-off could result in reducing anxiety or yielding more challenges, it was necessary to establish how separation due to migration which emotionally cut off learners from their parents in Mwenezi District impacted the performance of the learners through interviewing the learners rather than just assuming what the impact could be.

Societal emotional processes explain a situation whereby conditions of chronic stresses namely unemployment, natural disasters, political instability, and poverty induce pressure for togetherness and conformity as opposed to individuality (Bowen, 1988). This view resonates with the background of the present study where the government, biological parents, teachers and guardians' contribution to the educational welfare of learners left by parents in the diaspora was done by reflecting on the concept of togetherness. Further to this, the parents of the learners in question have also migrated because of social pressures in Zimbabwe including unemployment, poverty and political instability. Essentially the role of society to individuals and to groups in troubling times is revealed. Also, an evaluation of those roles was done resulting in improved strategies.

While some aspects of family systems theory were articulated above as far as they relate to the present study on an evaluation of the role of biological parents, caregivers, teachers and government in the provision of educational needs to learners with absent parents, this part summarises the major implications of the theory to the study.

Giddens (2009) observes that the family is the basic social unit of all cultures responsible for nurturing, caring for and socialising children. Also, from birth, a child's quality of life is directly influenced by the kind of care, support, stimulation and education he or she receives from family members in the home (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013; Considine & Zappala, 2002; IFFD, 2017). From the conceptualisation of family systems, as enunciated above, one can say elements of the family that make up the system are the family members composed of parents, children and other relatives and rules and obligations that bind the family together. When one explores and evaluates the roles of parents and other caregivers with respect to the educational needs of learners there is, therefore, a need to do it with a clear understanding of what the family ought to do and be like for it to remain an intact

system (Holland *et al.*, 2008). It was in this respect that this study adopted family systems theory to establish the availability, adequacy and appropriateness of psycho-social, moral and socioeconomic provisions to learners whose parents were outside Zimbabwe with the view to possibly suggest ways of improving the welfare of such learners in their educational endeavour.

Primary socialisation influences and moulds one's character, and therefore the relations one has with others and ultimately one's mental health (Castaneda & Buck, 2011). It follows therefore that analysing strategies meant for the provision of educational needs to learners from this view ought to be done using qualitative data gathering techniques that involve the immersion of the researcher into the life-world of participants so that detailed data that leave us in a comprehensive picture regarding expectations of both guardians and learners left behind are established. In the process of gathering natural data by involving oneself in the life experiences of the participants, one could discern how the learners were socialised by substitute parents and the expected future behaviour as well. In the approach of establishing socialisation patterns, the learners were exposed to circumstances in which caregivers were responsible for the learners' educational welfare helped the researcher understand the causes of schooling challenges faced by such learners and it was construed that any suggestion for improved socialisation patterns could be done within the framework of existing ones hence the importance of consulting family systems theory that helps us appreciate the influence of primary socialisation on learner achievement.

Artico (2003) argues that when children are paired with inadequate substitute attachments (caregivers), they become vulnerable and susceptible to psychological challenges such as suicide, depression, substance abuse and conduct disorder identities. Learning from such observations, the role of guardians, therefore, needed to be established

to weigh their impact on the behaviour of the learners left behind in the Mwenezi District. In a study by Fillipa (2011) on experiences of urban adolescents whose parents lived in the diaspora, she noted that this group exhibited wayward behaviour and usually disrespectful advice from their caregivers because some of their biological parents spoiled those by giving them a lot of money which the children failed to manage. It was for such reasons that in the present study, respondents were also asked to state the kind of support the learners got from their biological parents and to commend them for the impact of such assistance with respect to the quality of relations that existed between guardians and the learners.

Moreno (2013) states that family systems theory is premised on the assumption that all parts of the system are interconnected. Related to that assumption, Fingerman and Bermann (2000) comment that in systems thinking, elements of a system interact with and shape one another and create a distinct whole. One may deduce, therefore, that the absence or non-participation of a family member in the affairs of the family impacts all the members of the family. Relating to the present study it might mean that the migration of the biological parent had had an impact on the whole family. The impact however remains unknown until one immerses self into the life worlds of those involved to see how they could have been affected. This proposition of the family systems theory thus helped the researcher adopt an interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach that is characterised by the idea of immersion as one seeks to gather data from subjective human beings (Creswell, 2014). Not only did the proposition inform the methodology adopted but also guided the researcher to generate questions that exclusively addressed the research question about how all the family members were affected and viewed the impact of family disintegration on the welfare of the learners left behind.

While the migrant misses other family members and suffers emotionally, the children left behind experience both emotional and social shock since the parent who used to be there for them is no longer there (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000). With respect to educational outcomes, the absence of the biological parent could impact the children negatively since the social parents are less involved in children's schooling than are the biological parents (Teja & Rutgers, 2017). As opined by interactionist Nell Keddie, poor parent-child relationships usually negatively impact the child's academic progress especially if the parent cannot assist the child with schoolwork (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013; Giddens, 2009). This proposition was found worth referring to in analysing the experiences of learners with parents in the diaspora in that these parents rarely returned or hardly supported their children thus exposing the children to psychological trauma. Understanding the learners left behind's educational experiences, therefore, meant an appreciation of how those learners managed stress that had been induced by parental absence and that was done through engaging them in interactive interviews hence the choice of focus group discussions as one of data gathering methods in the present study. Noting that stress could affect both learners and caregivers indebted for the upkeep of those learners, the researcher framed open-ended questions that allowed the respondents to give their actual experiences regarding the impact of parental absence on learner education and interviewing the caregivers in their homes so that they could open up more than they would have done had they been involved in focus group discussions.

The other assumption of the Family System theory is holism which dictates that the family should be understood as a whole and cannot be comprehended by examining its parts in isolation from one another (Considine & Zappala, 2002; Moreno, 2013). Problems faced by learners at school should therefore be resolved in consultation with the other members of the family where the concerned learner comes from.

Teachers should understand and appreciate the way of life of each learner with respect to school provisions that can be afforded by each type of family (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013). While the learners may be under the care of non-biological parents, psychologically they could be thinking about when their biological parents will return (Moreno, 2013). In such circumstances therefore the learners may feel depressed and as a result fail to concentrate in class. For this reason, teachers ought to study learners and communicate with them so often to establish challenges early so that counselling could be done accordingly. These assumptions guided the researcher in seeking responses from teachers regarding their assessment of the role of both biological parents and caregivers in relation to their level of contribution in meeting the educational needs of learners left behind. The assumptions also revealed that teachers ought to study their learners if ever they would want to understand and assist them accordingly. In this regard, the researcher also asked teachers to evaluate their role in the provision of educational needs to learners left behind by emigrants.

The other assumption of the Family Systems theory that manifests from the discussion is that of self-reflexivity, that is, families can make themselves and their behaviour the object of examination and the target of explanation thereby establishing goals for themselves (Johnson, 2010; Moreno, 2013; Fingermann & Bermann, 2000). As one sets to investigate strategies used to educate learners with absent parents, one ought to be guided by the fact that it is from the family members and in this case the learners left behind and the caregivers from which one can get details about their schooling and parenting experiences respectively since it is them who experience the phenomena.

Changes in family structure also influence family processes that encompass family function, family communication and transactional

patterns, family conflict, separateness and connectedness among members, cohesion, integration and adoption to change (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000; Sun, 2017; Morgaine, 2001). Elucidating on this assumption, Considine and Zappala (2002) argue that in the case of migration of a family member, family processes ought to change. For example, the education of learners could be affected since some functions like visits to the school by parents, consultation with teachers, and celebration parties when a learner performs well among others will not be fulfilled under social parents (Teja & Rutger, 2017). Besides, some learners may at times assume roles previously performed by the parents who have migrated such as cooking for younger siblings and such roles may affect the way the learners learn. Since all these were just assumptions, the researcher did not assume the same for the present study but instead was guided and formulated questions that directed respondents to outline new roles and experiences that came with the out-migration of learners' biological parents.

Moreso (2013) observes that systems have boundaries and in a family set-up, these are the things that a family cannot do hence each family is identified by its behaviour. While the family may influence the school system through family values that are reproduced in schools, the school also influences the family and shapes relations among members of the family (Haralambos & Holborn, 2010). For example, homework given to learners at school affects interaction patterns between parents and children. Further to this, the authors further commend that the family can influence the environment and the environment can influence the family too. Since the concern of the present study was to get insight into the effects of migration of parents on children's education, it was also necessary that an analysis of contemporary issues that promote migration be done. In that respect, globalisation, transnationalism, multiculturalism and brain drain were articulated briefly since they also promote and shape migration and subsequently

reshape family structures in one way or the other (Levitt, 2004; SIRDC, 2003; Koser, 2007). For that reason, family systems theory was found applicable in the present study as it helped the researcher view circumstances leading to family structural changes from a broader perspective thus improving the scope of analysing the educational needs of learners left behind in the Mwenezi District.

In a family setup, the parents are responsible for ensuring that children are accorded safety. In the case of learners, parents should provide school uniforms commensurate with weather conditions so that learning takes place effectively. Lack of such provisions thus impacts negatively on motivating the learner and in some cases may lead to absenteeism or at worst dropping out of school (IFFD, 2017). The present study sought to establish how some such educational needs were provided in Mwenezi District to learners whose vulnerability has been necessitated by parental migration. In essence, the study sought to gather data from the affected learners by interviewing them and analysing their academic records. The Family Systems theory thus besides informing on the influence of structural changes in the family on the educability of learners left behind also helped the researcher to look into the influence of non-human materials such as uniforms when analysing factors that motivate learners. During the face-to-face interviews with the learners, the researcher could take note of the impact of the availability or non-availability of uniforms on learner motivation.

The assumptions of the Family Systems theory were aptly informative and gave direction on the questioning techniques and generation of the actual questions on the educational needs of learners left behind by emigrants. The assumption of holism was found to fit very well in the study since the object was to obtain the contributions of respondents involved in the schooling experiences of the learners.

The chapter has described and conceptualised the Family Systems theory that is premised on four major concepts namely anxiety, two basic life forces, the emotional system and the family as an emotional unit. All these concepts were extensively discussed to show how they inform the present study on an evaluation of the educational needs of learners left behind by emigrants from the Mwenezi District. The theory attests to the view that central to human existence and functioning is socialisation. It also states that human beings in general and learners in particular need company and are expectant of other humans for them to realise normal lives. In the event of disruption of family unity and the absence of social linkages with a trusted member, anxiety results and this may negate progress in one's life. All these assumptions were used to generate questions that guided the respondents namely learners left behind, caregivers, teachers and school heads to share their views on the schooling experiences of learners left behind.