

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE FUTURE OF EDUCATIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS LEFT BEHIND BY EMIGRANTS IN ZIMBABWE

Findings of the present study were extensively discussed in the previous chapter and juxtaposed to the theoretical frame of the study and to existing literature and related studies on educational needs provisions for learners left behind by emigrants. This chapter summarises the whole research process that produced the findings presented in the previous chapter. Challenges encountered during gathering data are also highlighted. Further, a report on suggested new knowledge generated from the findings and some recommendations to policy makers, policy implementers, biological parents and guardians and to the learners left behind is given.

This study sought to establish how the educational needs of learners left behind by emigrants from the Mwenezi District of Zimbabwe were catered for. This section summarises the whole process undertaken to produce this report. Therefore, motivation of the study, the theoretical framework of the study, some reviewed literature and the methodology used are briefly presented. The summary of the key findings of the study, suggested knowledge generated from the study and recommendations for further research are presented too.

Based on the literature survey, the researcher established that there was a dearth of research on the educational circumstances of rural primary school learners left behind by emigrants in Zimbabwe since studies of that nature were centralised to urban areas and on adolescents (Filippa, 2011; Filippa *et al.*, 2013; Mabharani, 2014; Moyo, 2017; Chakombera & Mubikwa, 2018; Tawedzera & Themane, 2019). Conducting a study of this nature was therefore unique as it was going

to reveal some taken-for-granted issues about how primary school learners left behind were experiencing schooling in a rural set-up of a developing country such as Zimbabwe. Further, motivation to find out how the education of learners left behind by emigrants in the Mwenezi District was catered for subsisted from the researcher's background of being a Mwenezi District resident since birth and who was witnessing many able-bodied parents from the district going out of the country leaving the children behind.

To carry out the study on the educational welfare of learners left behind by emigrants, the researcher consulted the family systems theory for enrichment and truly was inspired. The theory helped the researcher to understand that a family is a single unit which is connected by emotions. The theory further revealed that the migration of parents leaving learners behind disturbs the family functionality. Once the original state of the family is disturbed, there is bound to be anxiety among the members of the family because as Moreno (2013) opines, a system's behaviour affects its environment and so does the environment. Knowledge about the development of anxiety among family members and possible changed roles that come about when members of a family separate helped the researcher to understand what it meant for the learners left behind in terms of their education when the biological parents were away and in most cases when the parents were participating minimally on the education of the learners.

The present study revealed that some primary school learners assumed caregiving roles to their minor siblings and to some old sick relatives left under their care on parental migration, an arrangement which negatively affected the learners' capacity in education leading to abscondment, dropping out of school and failure in most cases.

Also changing roles were old grannies who at times became responsible for the day-to-day parenting of the learners left under their

care by emigrants which unfortunately strained them leading to poor health, especially in cases where the biological parents were participating minimally in the education of the learners as rightly put by one of the guardians;

“my son has never remitted its only me and how do you think I can manage at my age.” (G2SS).

It also emerged from the study that most of the old grannies were illiterate and therefore could not assist the learners under their care with schoolwork. The caregiving challenges experienced by the guardians and some learners left behind’s schooling challenges indicate that the biological parents’ decision to migrate may be regarded as not having adequately saved its purpose of reducing family poverty but simply that the parental problems have been projected onto others as postulated in family systems theorisation (ISSFI, 2015). One granny, however, revealed that she had high hopes for her granddaughter even though she was illiterate, every time the granddaughter brought homework she would ask her to;

“find someone to assist.” (G1SS).

This particular granny’s reaction to the homework concerns of her granddaughter may better be explained in the spirit of the triangulation argument of the family systems theory that postulates that a third party should be called upon to assist whenever two parties are in disagreement (Johnson, 2010; ISSFI, 2015). However, while the teacher participants indicated that it was important for a consultation to ease some challenges such as learner absenteeism and inappropriate use of cell phones, they lamented that most guardians were not forthcoming citing the distance between their homes and the schools..

Literature gathered indicates that the phenomenon of learners left behind by emigrant biological parents was a common feature across the world as people run away from poverty, war, natural disasters,

and poor social services in their countries among other push factors (Makina, 2012; ACP, 2012; Portner, 2014; Guendell *et al.*, 2013; IFFD, 2017; Crush *et al.*, 2017; UNDESA, 2020). The present study reveals that most the emigrants were pushed out of the country by poverty since the respondents reported that the emigrants wanted to improve their families' economic status when they out-migrated and that revelation was aptly given by LISS who said that;

"When they went out they wanted to find employment so that we would live a normal life."

According to ACP (2012) in Southern Europe, twice as many grandparents were caring for their grandchildren as in the Nordic countries. Wang (2013) also reports that young children were left alone or living with their relatives or neighbours in China. It appeared as if it has become a norm the world over that when one wishes to emigrate, one may leave own children under the care of old grandparents or other relatives because Southern Europe, and the Chinese experiences, were similar to what obtained in the present study.

The impact of parental migration on the education of learners left behind differs depending on the individual country of origin's educational policies on learners left behind, the status of the migrant, remitting and returning patterns of the migrant, age of the learner left behind, sex of the learner and whether the learner left behind is living in an urban setup or a rural one.

While positive outcomes were noted in countries such as China (Bai *et al.*, 2015) and Colorado (Antman, 2012), negative outcomes were reported in most countries where the migrants were undocumented such as Ecuador (Guendell *et al.*, 2013) and Mexico (Moreno, 2013). Dube (2014) in a study in Beitbridge found that migration of parents or relatives had no positive impact on the education of the learners left behind because migration was perceived as more important than

education hence learners left behind tended to despise education since most of the migrants in their areas were not highly educated but seemed to have better life chances than more educated people back home in Zimbabwe. The negative implications of migration on undocumented emigrants such as prolonged period of stay in the destination countries without remitting necessitated by the emigrant's fear of apprehension by law enforcement agents reported in Mexico and Dube's 2014 study in Beitbridge featured a lot in the present study where it emerged too that a good number of the emigrants were primary school dropouts who crossed into South Africa illegally as revealed by one participant who said that;

"most these emigrants are border jumpers who cross to South Africa after Grade Seven so they don't value education." (T1 FGDSN).

While the literature sought pointed to some similarities with the findings of the present study in terms of the factors that normally motivate migration such as the need to improve family economic life, one unique factor that emerged in the present study was the need to relieve stress after divorce or death in the family. However, in terms of the constraints that normally inhibit emigrants to return frequently, the present study concurred with earlier studies done elsewhere that also cited fear of apprehension by law enforcement agents especially when one stays in a foreign country illegally (Dube, 2014; Tawodzera, 2019; Rupande, 2014; Zirima, 2016). Literature suggests that most illegal emigrants were poorly remunerated in the countries of destination (Dube, 2014), and that observation concurred with findings in the present study where one respondent argued that learners with emigrant biological parents needed to be considered for educational welfare because;

"Remember those people are in a foreign country and they can be forced to work for nothing for the whole month." (G1SN).

While literature largely expounds on psycho-social experiences and challenges encountered by adolescents left behind and learners at the secondary school level (Filippa, 2011; Filippa *et al.*, 2013), the present study appeared to add more depth to migration literature because it revealed that even toddlers were left by their mothers in the name of diaspora and a case in that respect was revealed by one guardian who lamented;

“Look, this child is three years old, she is as good as mine because her mother left her when she was fifteen months old.” (G3SS).

Since the intention was to gather detailed natural data about the experiences and challenges faced by learners with parents in the diaspora, the researcher employed the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research approach as data gathering frameworks (Creswell, 2014; Gray, 2014; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In that respect, a case study design was adopted where face-to-face key participant interviews were held with school heads, guardians of learners left behind by emigrants and the learners themselves. Data were also gathered by engaging teachers in focus group discussions. The researcher also analysed some attendance registers and admission registers to check on attendance and admission trends of learners with absent parents respectively. The learners’ exercise books and academic reports were also analysed to corroborate data from interviews and focus group discussions. In some instances where it became difficult to gather data, for example in the cases of L1SS and L3SN who cried at some point in the interviews, data about their progress in school were collected upon analysing their exercise books hence the research techniques adopted by the researcher managed to gather sufficient data for the study. Even though, the researcher noted that there was a need to include traditional leadership and members of school development committees as respondents to get their stories regarding the criteria they used to select vulnerable learners for educational welfare programmes since the participants of the study revealed that it was the responsibilities of

those leaders. . Generally, however, the research techniques and the participants were a perfect fit because sufficient data that helped in answering the research questions were gathered.

After gathering the data, the thematic content analysis technique which links with the adopted qualitative case study design as advised by Vaismoradi *et al.* (2016) and Creswell (2014) was used to produce themes that guided the identification and discussion of results of the study. The themes are further highlighted in the section on summary of the findings.

A statement is given too to indicate the conclusion drawn from the analysis of the key findings and the objective of each research sub-question.

The study revealed that there were two groups of learners left behind, those left under the care of old guardians most particularly grandmothers and the other group left under the care of young guardians comprising aunties and house girls. Learners under the care of grandmothers rarely completed their homework because most the grandmothers were illiterate and could not assist and those under the care of young guardians also rarely completed schoolwork because their attitude was negative and the guardians could not control them. The findings on the negative impact of compromised guardians on learners' education reported in the present study share similarities with a study in West Africa where it was also established that lack of parental authority led to delinquent behaviour among learners left behind (Rupande, 2014).

Most the biological parents went out of the country to seek economic fortunes after realising that they could hardly get rewarding jobs in Zimbabwe. The participants stated that in addition to being pushed by the harsh economic situation in Zimbabwe, most of the learners left

behind would have had their parents left for the diaspora after family disintegration due to divorce or the death of a spouse. While the need to seek better economic fortunes is recorded as one of the key push factors in migration literature (Tawodzera, 2019; IOM, 2018; Chakombera & Mubikwa, 2018), it was the issue of relieving stress that was unique to the present study.

It emerged from the study that all classes from ECD to Grade 7 at both schools where the study was conducted had learners left behind. School heads, teachers and guardians who participated in the study condemned the practice of leaving learners under the care of non-biological parents since the learners tended to be less cared for by the guardians who in most cases were inadequately prepared to provide educational, social and economic support to the learners left behind.

Some parents were returning and remitting occasionally whilst others were neither remitting nor returning. Where the biological parents of the learners were remitting and returning, the learners were more powerful than the guardians and at times had control over how the remittances sent were supposed to be used, this group was described as showy at school and never took education seriously. On the other hand, the learners under the care of old grandmothers somehow showed a positive attitude towards education although absenteeism among them was high because they too lacked proper guidance and assistance since the grandmothers were either illiterate or too old to engage with the teachers.

Evidence derived from the narratives of guardians, school heads, teachers and learners pointed to the fact that there was poor networking among biological parents, teachers, guardians and learners which unfortunately impacted negatively on the educational needs of the learners left behind.

A great concern which was raised by the teacher participants and corroborated by documentary evidence was that learners left behind did not participate in schoolwork satisfactorily. Overall, it emerged that the school attendance of learners left behind, attitude towards education, completion rate, the accomplishment of academic school tasks and performance were in most cases disgraceful and based on the data gathered it was concluded that learners left behind by emigrants in Mwenezi District were experiencing schooling harshly hence calls for a combined effort from the schools, parents, guardians, the government and other interested parties to seek ways to improve the situation of the learners . According to UNICEF (2013), the Sri Lankan government after realising that learners with absent parents faced educational challenges similar to the ones cited in the present study, established NGO Atikha programmes whose terms of reference included training of children and families left behind to be self-reliant and to include such programmes in school curricula. A trial of programmes related to the Sri Lankan NGO Atikha ones could as well be run in Zimbabwe.

The major setback cited by the participants with regards to the education of learners left behind was inadequate educational material support. It was reported that learners left behind rarely had their school fees paid or paid late in some cases which had negative implications on both the learners and the administration of the schools. In some cases, the participants revealed that learners left behind had inadequate stationery, uniforms, food and poor shelter and all of these disadvantaged the learners in their schooling leading to poor grades.

Other than inadequate educational material support, most learners left behind were also reported to be largely in-disciplined, engaged in violence, disregarded school authority, absconded lessons and all sorts of truants as rightly expressed by HSS;

“In most cases when we get reports of bullying, they involve these learners with absent parents.”

In line with the learners` negative behaviour, they too adopted a negative attitude towards schooling resulting in failure and dropping out of school.

The participants cited background factors to the challenges faced by learners left behind and these included inadequate firm authority from the guardians, inadequate educational guidance, inconsistent remission and return by biological parents, inadequate resource management skills by both the guardians and the learners, a ramification of negative parental conduct and exposure to and use of negative social media by the learners left behind.. The inadequacy of material support and indiscipline challenges cited to be characteristic of the learners left behind in the present study are not unique since earlier studies elsewhere also raised similar concerns (UNICEF, 2013; Moreno, 2013; IFFD, 2018; UN, 2020).

Upon realising the challenges and the background factors of the challenges, the participants suggested that the government ought to help ease the challenges by resuscitating the economy so that parents work in the country and refrain from emigrating and leaving the learners unattended . Related to the suggested government role to improve the economy, was that communication infrastructure needed upgrading in the remote areas of Zimbabwe such as in the Mwenezi District where the study was conducted so that parents in the diaspora could communicate with their children back home more conveniently. It was also suggested that the government should put in place training programmes in the communities on new parenting styles commensurate with the current family setup. Furthermore, the government was advised to address legislation provisions pertaining to the issuing of birth certificates to make it easier for children born outside the country to access birth certificates and to transfer from

schools they attend while abroad into the local schools. The participants recommended that migration studies be introduced in the education system in Zimbabwe from ECD up to the tertiary level so that society appreciates circumstances that befall emigrants and the impact of emigration on families left behind. .

The biological parents of the learners were advised to be in contact with the school authorities so that they could have correct information about school requirements and purchase the correct specifications given by the schools. Secondly, the biological parents were advised to recruit socially and academically responsible guardians who could assist the learners accordingly. The participants also submitted that the biological parents needed to link with teachers teaching their children at each particular period so that the concerns of the teachers regarding the education of the learners could be quickly addressed. In addition to that, the biological parents also needed to heed the advice they received from the teachers pertaining to the education of their children.

It was suggested too that guardians ought to be very responsible and treated the learners left behind fairly and authoritatively as if they were their biological children. In that regard, the guardians were supposed to counsel the learners, monitor the learners' school attendance and accomplishment of schoolwork, attend school meetings, and consult with teachers and lead model lifestyles.

School heads were deemed to be a cog in redressing challenges faced by learners left behind due to their technical expertise in the management of learners. Thus, it was suggested that the heads ought to evaluate every learner for possible recommendations for welfare programmes. The heads could also assist by engaging parents in awareness programmes, especially in parent meetings on the challenges the learners left behind faced so that collective decisions could be taken. It was suggested too that the heads could open up

communication channels that link parents in the diaspora, the schools and the guardians so that all the stakeholders share a common understanding of learners left behind's schooling experiences.

The community, more particularly the leadership could also assist by taking statistics of learners left behind whose parents rarely returned and remitted so that they recommend them for welfare support. Also, the communities needed not to segregate learners on the basis that their parents were in the diaspora since it was revealed that some emigrants were not remitting.

For the teachers of the learners left behind, it was suggested that they ought to prioritise counselling of all the learners, monitor lesson attendance and consult both guardians and biological parents of the learners left behind. It was also suggested that the teachers ought to teach *Ubuntu/unhu/vumunhu* to help the learners improve on the moral values of the society and this was emphasised by HSS who said that;

"Teachers should teach moral values in learning areas such as Family and Religious Studies to guide the learners since there are no parents at home who can take that role."

It was suggested too that other learners without parents in the diaspora could help by providing model behaviour to the learners with parents based in the diaspora. Other than behaviour setting, the participants opined that it was also important for the learners with parents based in the country to treat those with absent parents as their friends and share life experiences accordingly. What the respondents suggested on the role other learners could take were largely in line with what some of the learner participants revealed because according to L3SS, her friends encouraged her to work hard at school irrespective of the absence of her parents thus;

"the other learners say please friend continue working hard so that your parents will be happy knowing that you attain position 2."

Based on the views given by the participants, one can conclude that learners left behind in the Mwenezi District faced challenges such as inadequate educational materials provisions which include fees, uniforms, shelter and stationery. Also, the learners had non-material challenges such as in-discipline behaviour due to inadequate guidance and control by both biological parents and guardians and inadequate home assistance in their schoolwork. Considering that some of the educational concerns of learners left behind by emigrants raised in the present study also emerged in earlier studies though the studies were conducted in towns and on adolescents (Tawodzera, 2019; Filippa *et al.*, 2013; Kufakurinani *et al.*, 2014; Chakombera & Mubikwa, 2018; Munyonda, 2020), one may suggest that the government take a leaf from other countries that used to face similar challenges but have since managed to improve the educational welfare of emigrants' children through the enactment of protective laws and inclusive educational policies. Examples of such countries are China (the People's Republic of China Law on the protection of minors); the Philippines (Migrant workers and Overseas Philippines Act of 1992, Philippines Overseas Employment Administration) and the Sri Lankan NGO Atikha initiative explained elsewhere in this report (UNICEF, 2013; Wang, 2013).

It was established that learners left behind's educational orientation was to some extent influenced by their local communities' social practices. For example, it emerged from the observations made that guardianship was largely the responsibility of females since all the guardians in the present study were females. The belief that females were responsible for guardianship was linked to domestic chores that seemed to be allocated on gender lines too.

The arrangement where duties to do with guardianship and home chores were performed along gender lines meant that girls and boys in

the communities of the Mwenezi District where the study was conducted were exposed to different educational experiences..

The other social activities that negatively impacted the education of learners left behind were sports tournaments, harvesting Mopani worms and marketing events. These activities affected the learners left behind by stealing the learners' schooling time. Other than losing schooling time as the learners left behind participated in these events, the learners were also exposed to immoral activities and violence that characterised the events.

It was also reported that learners left behind lost out on initiation ceremonies since the communities rarely considered them in such events. However, while the exclusion of learners left behind in initiation ceremonies ensured that such learners would not be able to lead in the future, it afforded them time to be in class during the month-long period per annum when the other learners would be tied up with the activities and that was revealed by HSN who said that;

"It is good on their part because they will be in school when others are engaged in those programmes."

Based on the above social activities in which the learners left behind were largely exposed, it was concluded that the Mwenezi community where the study was conducted had a major negative influence on the education of the learners left behind. While the issue of feminisation of guardianship may not be unique to the present study as other researchers also talk about it for example (Brown & Ginter, 2014; Bhamain, 2012), what was peculiar about the present study was the issue of biological parental conduct, harvesting *Mopani* worms, marketing events and sporting activities being some of the prime sources of children violent behaviour and negative attitude towards education.

There was a poor understanding of the policy provisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of learners with parents in the diaspora in welfare programmes such as BEAM. Such was revealed by the participants when they narrated that the learners with parents in the diaspora needed to be considered in welfare programmes irrespective of the fact that their parents were still alive. In the participants' appreciation of the policy provisions, BEAM was a programme for orphans. This shows that there was a gap in community awareness programmes on how the BEAM programme operated. As for the BEAM manual (2016), learners with parents in the diaspora were ranked in the pink category representing the second tier after the red category which is the first class for consideration when it comes to BEAM beneficiary selection. The selection of learners with parents in the diaspora into BEAM was therefore not supposed to be a result of the benevolence of the members responsible for selection but a right provided that those learners were poor. The learners with parents in the diaspora were thus not meaningfully benefitting from welfare programmes in schools where the study was carried out because the communities thought that those learners were better off economically as compared to the other learners whose parents were based in the country.

School heads, teachers, guardians and learners left behind all identified non-school initiated programmes that were meant to help vulnerable learners in schools. Some organisations that reportedly provided educational assistance to the vulnerable learners at the two schools where the study was conducted were Solon Foundation, PLAN International, Bubey Valley Conservancy and the government of Zimbabwe initiated BEAM programme.

The learners left behind revealed that they understood the mandate of the organisations they identified as for the payment of fees and provision of exercise books to orphans. Similar views about the

operational guidelines of the organisations were also shared by the guardians. However, the guardians further stated that learner welfare ought to include food provisions for the learners left behind.

It emerged from the focus group discussions and interviews held that teacher knowledge about operations of organisations that provided educational assistance to vulnerable learners depended on one's level of responsibility at school. For example, school administrators chronicled how the BEAM programme was implemented in schools while the teachers indicated that they were not fully aware of the operational guidelines of the programme as illustrated by T4 FGDSN who lamented that;

"It's only that we don't know how the BEAM beneficiaries are selected but there are other deserving learners that are excluded on the basis that their parents are in the diaspora yet some who seem to be well off are benefiting."

Other than articulating knowledge about existing welfare programmes in schools, the participants also gave their views regarding the suitability for inclusion of learners left behind by emigrants in the welfare programmes. On that issue, there was divided opinion where some participants asserted that learners left behind needed to be assisted in welfare programmes because most the parents rarely returned once they crossed into South Africa thereby exposing the learners left behind to extreme challenges back home because;

"at times the parents may not have the money even though they are working in South Africa." (GISN).

From that thinking, the participants who advocated the inclusion of learners left behind into welfare programme consideration reasoned that excluding the learners were akin to a violation of the learners' right to education. On the contrary, those who felt that the learners left behind needed not to be included in welfare programmes argued that;

“the economic situation is worse for the resident parents than for the emigrants hence the former’s children ought to be considered ahead of the latter.” (HSS).

Generally, though school heads and teacher participants mentioned that learners left behind needed psycho-social assistance, the bulk of the guardians seemed to centralise their debate on material needs provisions.

Considering the aim of this sub-research question which sought to establish how educational welfare programmes were implemented in the Mwenezi District and what ensued in the empirical study, the conclusion arrived at was that implementation modalities of welfare programmes in the Mwenezi District were riddled with obscurities. Further to that, it may be argued that the future of educational welfare of learners left behind rested on the learners, community and school authorities' attitude towards the programmes.

The conclusions arrived at in respect of the research questions, objectives of the study and the participants’ contributions are hereby presented.

The findings of the study reveal that most of the learners left behind in the Mwenezi District were exposed to unfriendly schooling experiences due to the negative effects of parental emigration. Largely it was reported that the completion rate of some learners left behind’s, school attendance and performance were poor. Considering the harsh experiences that the learners left behind faced in the Mwenezi District, it was concluded that leaving learners under the care of non-biological parents was not good for their education.

The major educational challenges affecting learners left behind in the Mwenezi District as articulated by the respondents in the present

study included inadequate educational material support and behavioural ones. These factors emanate from inadequate parental control of the learners. Though the government, school authorities, community leadership and guardians may devise strategies to ease some of the challenges that affect the learners left behind, biological parents' presence remains an undisputable cog in the education of the learner.

The participants reported that while a few biological parents provided some educational support to their children back home through sending fees and initiating communication episodes with their children, their involvement in the education of the learners remained superficial, minimal and insignificant to have any positive influence on the education of the learners. Notwithstanding those few who attempt to involve themselves in the education of their children, most the biological parents were non-committal to the education of their children hence it can be safely concluded that largely parents in the diaspora from the Mwenezi District were not catering for the educational needs of their children.

The participants reported that the guardians and the communities at large seemed to value education less and cherished migration more. Such beliefs manifested in some identified community practices such as the feminisation of guardianship, sports galas, and harvesting *Mopani* worms where school-going age children including learners left behind were exposed to during learning time, limited home and community positive influence on the education of learners left behind. Therefore, the conclusion one may draw from the participants' responses with respect to how learners left behind were assisted in the home is that little positive support was coming for them from home.

It emerged from the research participants' responses that knowledge about implementation guidelines of educational welfare programmes

in schools was privileged to school administrators. Both guardians and non-administrative teachers had little knowledge about the operation of existing welfare programmes such as the BEAM and seemed preoccupied to think about other means through which they could extend a hand in helping learners left behind enjoy education in similar ways to their counterparts with resident parents. Debate arose where some participants opined that learners left behind ought to be included in welfare programmes since some of their parents were not returning and remitting while others argued that whatever the case, the economic life of a rural Mwenezi resident was comparably poorer than that of the one in the diaspora hence learners left behind needed not to benefit from welfare programmes ahead of learners whose parents remained in the country. Conclusively one may observe that educational welfare programmes in the Mwenezi District were riddled with controversy.

While every effort was made to ensure that the results of the study were credible, it was noticed that there were still some grey areas that could have compromised the credibility of the results. Though it was established that every class at the two schools where the study was carried out had learners left behind by emigrants, the researcher only stuck to the qualitative research approach where a case study design was used involving twenty-seven participants inclusive of six learners left behind, two school heads, six guardians and thirteen teachers. Such a small sample may not reflect the views of a larger section of society regarding how learners left behind were experiencing schooling. Related to the issue of sample size, it also became apparent during the data collection that participants could have been extended to include community leadership namely traditional leaders and members of school development committees since it was reported that they also participated in the selection of welfare programmes beneficiaries in schools. However, the cited limitations could not have had many negative effects on the findings because data saturation was

achieved through prolonging stay in the field and triangulation of participants, data gathering instruments and data collection techniques.

It was also realised during interviewing that some of the guardians and the learners treated the subject of leaving learners behind as sensitive so much so that some were hesitant to supply data. The deadlock was however served by the fact that the researcher had experience working in the area so the participants consented to supply data after some persuasion.

It was also difficult to trace academic performance trends for all the six participants since there were no records to establish how the learners were performing prior to their parents' emigration. Some teachers however gave general comments about the learners without corroborating with documentary evidence.

The other limitation emanated from the researcher's inability to visit and observe activities taking place at sports tournaments and marketing events because the data collection period could not coincide with the events. As it was reported that most learners left behind visited such events during learning time and were exposed to immoral behaviour, direct observations from such events could have helped corroborate the data obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions.

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) delayed data collection which initially was scheduled for 2020 but was later moved to 2021 since schools were shut during the larger part of 2020 and such prolonged school closure could have presented fluctuating experiences to the participants thereby compromising data authenticity. Despite that drawback, data were finally gathered from candidate classes (Grade Seven learners of 2021). There was no gender

equity in terms of participant representation. Of the six learner participants, all except one were girls while all the guardians were females as well. The views of males regarding experiences and challenges faced by learners with parents in the diaspora were therefore limited to teachers where there were eight males against seven females. While the gender disparity was noted, it did not affect the quality of the study much since the questions asked were gender neutral and those who participated responded in clear detail.

Some of the learner participants were however overwhelmed by emotions and cried during the interview sessions. The researcher, however, managed to counsel the learners and completed the interviews. Though the responses of such participants were short, were insightful and were interpreted to mean that the learners had psychological challenges induced by anxiety necessitated by parental absence (Johnson, 2010; Makusha & Ritcher, 2015; Zirima, 2016).

While studies have been carried out before in Zimbabwe on the educational experiences and challenges faced by learners left behind by emigrants, the previous studies mainly looked at the situation of adolescents above primary school level and as such little was known about the primary school learners left behind's educational experiences (Filippa, 2011; Filippa *et al.*, 2013; Dube, 2014; Mashawi, 2017; Tawodzera, 2019). Therefore, if ever there were government and non-governmental agencies that could have invested resources to ameliorate challenges faced by learners left behind, such as excluding the primary school going age since not much has ever been talked about by researchers. The present study, therefore, tapped into territory not familiar to most contemporary researchers hence its results narrowed the knowledge gap in that respect.

Another emergent finding in the present study is that biological parents were reported to disregard informing their children on the

decision to leave for the diaspora on the assumption that it was good for the children, mistakenly however violating the children's right to information as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As the results of the present study reveal, many learners from as early as ECD level were left behind fendng for themselves or under the care of grandparents or non-relatives whilst the parents went into the diaspora from the Mwenezi District.

Unlike the case in most urban settlements in Zimbabwe where ECD centres are sprouting all over to support the education of learners from as early as the age of three, learners left behind of that age were not attending school in the Mwenezi District because other than the schools that were too far apart in most cases, there were no such alternative learning centres. Furthermore, the parents based in the diaspora were not committed to the education of the learners in the lower grades as they neither paid levies nor provided uniforms and other school necessities. Rather the parents were supporting the learners in the upper grades. The current research findings on parental preferences on the education of learners in the upper primary level to the ECD learners were in sharp contrast to findings from a study conducted in Nigeria where Fagbeminiyi (2011) found that most parents had more interest in the education of very young learners. Interestingly in the present study, it emerged that emigrants' educational support to the learners in the upper primary was not genuine but meant to buy favours from the children who at upper primary school level were now seen as potentially reaching maturity level to be able to emigrate from upon which the learners would be expected to return the favour of supporting the parents once they settled in the diaspora.

The other new dimension in the present study was the use of the family systems theory to embrace the ideas of learners, guardians, school heads and teachers as if these were members of a nuclear

family. Continued use of such an approach in analysing the educational welfare of learners left behind may result in the identification of an emerging triangulated family whose tenets may stretch beyond the usual blood and marriage factors but also to the functions and dependability of each member to the other. In that respect, it is proposed that if such a triangulated family must meet the educational needs of a learner affected by parental migration, it should be modelled and have its members equipped with the skills illustrated below:

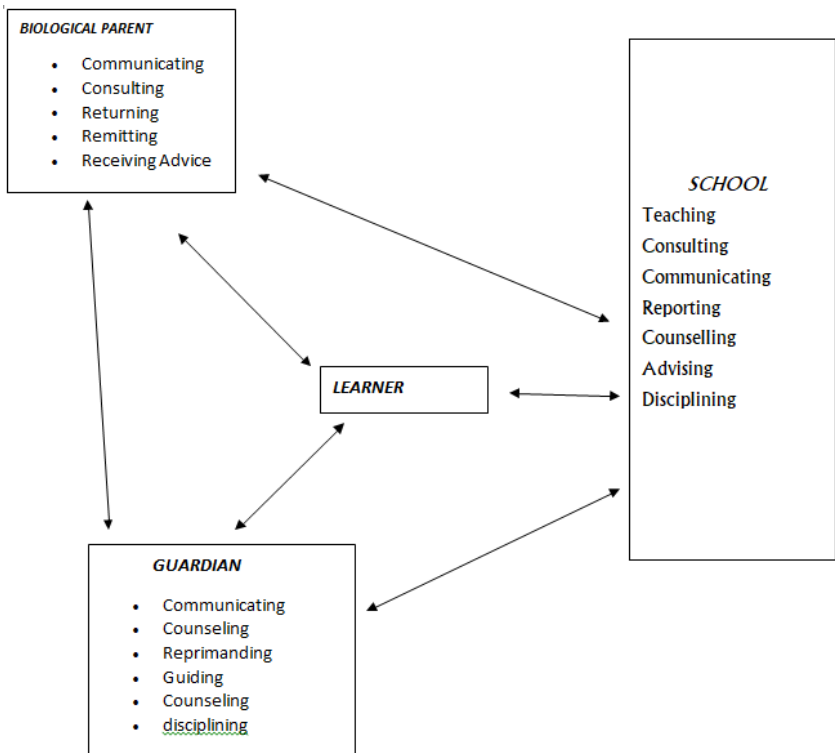


Figure 7.1: Modern triangulated family

Studies in Mexico, China, Romania, Philippines, Nigeria and Zimbabwe among other countries reveal that most emigrants run away from calamities such as war and natural disasters (Moreno, 2013; UNICEF, 2013; Dube, 2014; Sanduleasa & Matei, 2015; Bai *et al.*, 2015; Moyo, 2017; Cruch *et al.*, 2017; Chakombera & Mubika, 2018; UNDESA, 2020). This study added an unfamiliar factor of relieving stress away from the home country after family disintegration due to spousal death or divorce. Again, the present study unlike the previous studies that gave a whole sum analysis of the educational experiences of learners left behind, revealed that learners left behind experienced educational life differently depending on their age, educational qualifications, socio-economic status, character and motivation of the guardian. This revelation comes with the suggestion that guardians should meet certain minimum attributes if the learners left behind are going to benefit in the long run. Furthermore, while studies elsewhere indicate that teachers have been vital in assisting learners left behind realise their educational goals through counselling and giving professional advice to both the learners and the biological parents, the present study reveals that some biological parents had little respect for teachers and directed the teachers and school authorities on which grades their children ought to be placed. This finding calls for stakeholders' involvement in strategies to socialise the communities about the role of both the parent and the teacher in the provision of advice to the parents with respect to the education of the learners.

It emerged from the study that school administrators at the two schools where the study was carried out were not cascading updated information about policy guidelines on the implementation of the BEAM programme since there was a huge knowledge gap about the programme between the administrative and non-administrative members of staff. For instance, both teachers and guardians indicated that they only had some scant information about the BEAM implementation guidelines as per the 2001 framework when the

programme was initiated even though there is a 2016 updated document which accommodates learners left behind though in the second-tier category. Reports on inconsistency in the implementation of the BEAM programme indicate that there were no follow-ups from the responsible authorities to check if the pro-forma guidelines were followed in the schools.

While it is widely reported in other research studies that parental involvement helped mould good behaviour in the learners (Fagbeminiyi, 2011; Brown & Grinter, 2014; Moreno, 2013; Sanduleasa & Matei, 2015; UNESCO, 2018), this study revealed that most of the learners left behind emulated bad behaviour from their parents who displayed such wayward behaviour inclusive of violence whenever they returned from the diaspora. Related to this finding was another about the guardians who were reported to be perpetuating immoral behaviour among girls left behind.

The other unfamiliar finding from the present study was that traditional leaders whose role in communities included custodianship of the community rules and fostering order were at the forefront of perpetuating bad conduct of biological parents of learners left behind by accepting bribes to cover up for the biological parents' ill-treatment of the learners left behind. The schooling challenges of learners left behind were thus difficult to resolve because some of the emigrants did not want society to perceive them as poor and irresponsible.

This study was also unique in that unlike several studies on the educational issues of learners left behind that limited respondents' views on the experiences and challenges the learners left behind were facing (Makina, 2012; Chakombera & Mubika, 2018; Dube, 2014; Filippa *et al.*, 2013; Zirima, 2016; Tawodzera, 2019), it went further and sought views of the primary school learners left behind themselves on what they thought could be done to ease challenges they faced thus

added depth to the literature on the issue of educational needs of learners left behind by emigrants from rural settings in developing countries.

The other unique finding from the present study is that sporting activities done in the communities were reported to harm the behaviour of learners left behind because they took much of the learning time of the learners. Other than stealing the learning time of the learners, the participants reported that some bad behaviour noted in the learners left behind was associated with the learners' experiences at sporting galas and marketing events. Since some activities such as marketing events that were reported to negatively influence the education of learners left behind are administered by the Mwenezi Rural District Council which also is the responsible authority of most schools in the district, a collaboration between the council and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education could be mooted to draft policy guidelines that communicate to the schools and communities on the management of the events in such ways that learners are not disadvantaged by those events.

There was a concern raised that some learners with parents in the diaspora were not benefiting from welfare programmes such as BEAM because those responsible for selection argued that such learners were not entitled to the facility since their parents were perceived to be; *"the haves."* (T5, FGDSS). However, G1SN dismissed the notion that all learners with parents in the diaspora were affluent and vowed that;

"The government should ensure that such children are not segregated against..."

Considering the exclusionary concerns raised and the argument presented by G1SN, it is recommended that policy makers ought to formulate clear policies in line with what is practically obtaining in society. While the inclusion of learners with parents in the diaspora in

welfare programmes such as BEAM is implied under the pink category in the BEAM user manual, the policy should be very clear and state that learners with non-returning parents ought to be included in the welfare programmes under the red category since some of them are neglected and at times worse than some orphans whose parents could have left some treasures;

“because the reality in our community is that most children are left unattended.” (G3SS).

Learners with parents in the diaspora should be registered with the department of child welfare and that responsibility should be given to traditional leaders so that it becomes easier to trace them and establish their welfare. Besides, the government is advised to initiate programmes that target to educate guardians on new parenting styles so that the guardians may be able to handle the learners amid concerns raised by some guardians such as G2SN who lamented that the learners left behind were; “difficult to take care of.”

There should be a policy that encourages biological parents to ensure that they entrust energetic and literate guardians to take care of their children. While the government, being the policy makers, is applauded for welfare initiatives such as BEAM as revealed by L2SN who pointed out that; “*their fees are paid...*” funds ought to be improved such that the assistance could be extended to uniforms and other stationery needs. It was revealed in the present study that learners who visited their biological parents during the school holidays tended to become difficult to manage both at school and home, as they changed behaviour upon their return, may be due to the influence of the learners’ parental conduct or exposure to negative social media they were exposed to. Therefore, considering the prevalence of migration both in Zimbabwe and in the Mwenezi District where the present study was conducted (Dube, 2014; Chakombera & Mubikwa, 2018; Tawodzera, 2019), one would propose that migration studies be

introduced in schools from ECD up to tertiary level so that both learners and teachers understand and appreciate its impact and circumstances of learners left behind by emigrants and probably handle the learners in a better way.

GISN asserted that it was ill-conceived to exclude learners with parents in the diaspora from accessing educational benefits from the government on the assumption that their parents were in the diaspora because;

“at times the parents may not have the money even though they are working in South Africa.”

Dube (2014) in a study in Beit-bridge also found out that most the emigrants to South Africa were not earning enough to sustain their families' general welfare back home since they were largely employed on farms where they were not paid handsomely. Based on such evidence, one would suggest that policies that accommodate all learners in public schools whose parents are in the diaspora be proclaimed. Attached to the policy on the vulnerability of learners left behind should be a proclamation that whoever segregates those learners should be liable for a punishment of some sort as a measure to monitor malpractices regarding the selection of educational welfare beneficiaries because those responsible for selection normally; “*target children of those they know.*” (G3SS). Again noting that both teachers and school heads who participated in the present study talked extensively about the importance of counselling the learners with absent parents and that counselling is done in schools with minimum success as evidenced by increasing cases of delinquency among the learners, it is recommended that qualified counsellors be employed in schools to provide services to learners, teachers and parents. Each school should have a comprehensive database of learners left behind so that assistance could be sought based on actual figures on the ground in

line with G3SS who asserted that learners left behind could be assisted if,

“there were persons responsible for collecting statistics of such in the communities.”

This category involves community leaders who are responsible for the distribution of stipends from the government and other well-wishers. Also falling in this category are school authorities that include school heads, teachers and members of the school development committees/associations. These policy implementers should consult extensively when they select welfare beneficiaries to ensure that learners who deserve assistance are accorded irrespective of whether their parents are in the diaspora or not . Records of returning patterns of parents who would have migrated out of the country ought to be kept especially when those parents have left their children under self-care or the care of old relatives. Platforms should be created in schools where learners with parents in the diaspora air out their schooling experiences in the absence of their biological parents.

Just as the case with recommendations of previous research studies, the present study recommends that counselling be done in schools as a way of guiding the learners left behind, most of them lack guidance from home. The present study reveals that migration is popular in Zimbabwe and very much so in the part of the Mwenezi District where the study was conducted because according to one participant;

“In this area when they talk about going to seek employment, they mean diaspora.” (T4 FGDSN).

In view of the reality that migration is now common in the larger section of Zimbabwe, it is recommended that teachers be inducted into migration studies so that they cascade the knowledge to the learners. Again noting the expansion of numbers of learners left behind by emigrants and those learners’ minimum participation in school

curricula due to reportedly provision of inadequate learning resources by the biological parents, it is recommended that the schools should not only rely on educational welfare programmes offered by the government and non-governmental organisations but should also initiate school-based programmes to assist learners left behind.

In response to the concern raised by some respondents that communication in the area studied was stalled by poor communication infrastructure, one would recommend that communication webs be set in schools to connect schools to the community and the parents in the diaspora so that frequent communication is made possible among schools, guardians and biological parents of the learners left behind for challenges to be solved early for the benefit of the learners..

The biological parents should be in regular contact with the school to ensure that they are informed of the experiences and challenges their children would be facing and show that they were responsible parents unlike the cases of some who were reported to abandon their children; *"once they crossed into South Africa their numbers become inaccessible."* (G3SS). Since it was reported that some guardians were inadequately educated and failed to provide appropriate educational advice to the learners, they are advised to attend school meetings and seek advice on the homework of learners from the teachers. It was also reported that in some situations, there was poor communication among the guardians, teachers and biological parents of the learners, a situation that complicated the management of the learners both at home and at school. To redress the challenge of the dearth of communication among the above-identified stakeholders, it is recommended that school authorities open up communication platforms such as WhatsApp groups to engage one another openly and speed up strategies of assisting the learner in cases of challenges. Guardians should also attend community awareness programmes on parenting

especially on the management of remittances because one finding pointed to the distressing fact that;

“sometimes they misappropriate the money.” (L2SS).

Some of the learners left behind were reported to be undisciplined and lacked a positive attitude towards education since;

“very few respected teachers...because of the influence of their parents.”

(T1 FGDSS).

Learners are advised to submit themselves to the guardians and seek the guardians' and teachers' counsel whenever they face challenges. The teacher participants bewailed the level of violent behaviour among some of the learners with parents in the diaspora citing some cases where the learners could;

“bring knobkerries and stones to stone the teachers.” (T3 FGDSN).

On this note, it is recommended that the learners should desist from accessing violent films on their phones because it was established that some of the bad behaviour emanated from exposure to such. Again in line with the negative influence of the social environment to which the learners were exposed such as sporting galas which were reported to be characterised by violence, it is recommended that the learners stop frequenting such events especially when the sports were for the adults.

Even though the present study covered a lot of ground on the educational experiences, challenges and welfare of learners left behind, there is still a need for research to gather more comprehensive data on the subject area if appropriate policies pertaining to the educational welfare of learners left behind and implementation mechanisms are to be realised. The suggested topics for interrogation may include:

- Comparative analysis of educational needs provision to rural and urban learners left behind by emigrants.

- ❑ Disaggregating educational needs male and female learners left behind by emigrants.
- ❑ Formulating an educational policy for learners left behind by emigrants.
- ❑ Assessing the knowledge gap on educational policy provisions between school administrators and teachers.
- ❑ Strategies to improve linkages among schools, guardians and biological parents of learners left behind.

In line with the input of all the participants in relation to the experiences and challenges faced by learners left behind and the suggested recommendations, a model for the learners is hereby proposed.

Table.7.1: Learners left behind `s status checklist

| | Comments | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------|------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Guardian | Community leader | Class teacher | School head |
| Section A | | | | |
| Biological parents details | | | | |
| Parental departure period | | | | |
| Both parents emigrated | | | | |
| Father migrated | | | | |
| Mother migrated | | | | |
| Reasons for parental emigration | | | | |
| Parent(s)' level of education | | | | |
| Parent(s)' occupation | | | | |
| Parent(s)' returning patterns | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Parent(s)' remitting patterns | | | | |
| Parental engagement with school authorities | | | | |

Table.7.2 Learners left behind 's status checklist

| Section B Learners left behind details | Guardian | Community leader | Class teacher | School head |
|---|----------|------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Number of learners left behind in the family | | | | |
| Learner's position in the family | | | | |
| Gender of learner left behind | | | | |
| Age of learners left behind | | | | |
| Class/ Grade/ Form of learners left behind | | | | |
| Learner's participation in schoolwork | | | | |
| Behaviour of the learner | | | | |
| Learner's sources of school fees/levies | | | | |
| Learner's source of food | | | | |
| Section C Guardian's details | | | | |
| Guardian's relationship to the learners left behind | | | | |
| Sex of guardian | | | | |
| Age of guardian | | | | |
| Level of education of guardian | | | | |
| Guardian's history of engagement with school | | | | |
| Status of guardianship (Same household/ different households) | | | | |
| Guardian's economic status | | | | |

The motivation for the study namely the continued emigration of parents into the diaspora from the Mwenezi District and the dearth of research on the experiences, challenges and educational welfare of primary school learners left behind is given.

The study revealed that learners from as early as ECD were left under the care of house girls, self-care or under the care of old guardians most particularly grandmothers. Most of the biological parents of the learners left behind rarely returned or remitted and the few who returned did so for a very short time during the festive season which means the learners' contact with their parents was very minimum. To worsen the situation for the learners left behind, the biological parents of the learners were reported to rarely consult their children on parental departure resulting in the affected learners suffering anxiety problems as they remained unsure when they would reunite with their parents.

The participants reported that a good number of learners left behind did not relate well with teachers since the learners rarely participated in the school curriculum. The academic performance of most the learners left behind was said to be below average. It also emerged from the study that parents in the diaspora tended to commit themselves more to the education of children in the upper primary than to those in the infant level.

The learners with absent parents were reported to grapple with inadequate educational materials. The major challenges were none or late payment of fees which led to the learners sometimes being sent back home or paraded at school and all that negatively affected their schooling experiences. The other challenge was that the provision of stationery and uniforms was in some cases inadequate again impacting negatively on the education of the learners since;

“a kid can spend the whole term without a book...” (T3 FGDSN).

L3SN lamented that he found schooling cumbersome because;

“I come to school without food.”

Other than educational material needs challenges, the learners left behind were also reported to be undisciplined and to have a negative attitude towards education since;

“ they are pushed to go to school.” (T5 FGDSS).

Considering the harsh learning experiences and the challenges encountered by the learners with the parents based in the diaspora, most study participants opined that the learners ought to be considered in welfare programmes such as the BEAM because some of the biological parents were irresponsible. It was also suggested that schools needed to initiate income-generating projects such as gardening from where the proceeds could be channelled towards assisting vulnerable learners such as those with non-returning parents.

It appears out-migration of the biological parents of the learners who participated in the present study emotionally affected the learners because L1SS and L3SN cried uncontrollably when asked to comment on their parents` decision to migrate. L3SS who managed to verbalise her predicament of staying without her parents said that even though the parents were remitting;

“I just want to see them often.”

The reactions of the learners to their parents’ absence is better explained by the family systems theory concept of anxiety that postulates that family separation causes uneasiness among family members as they become uncertain whether they will reunite and is analogous to the ambiguous loss theory by Boss (Filippa, 2011). It was also revealed that learners with absent parents deteriorated in academic performance as they grow older, probably because of maturity they begin to be able to relate their schooling challenges to

their parental absence which means that their schooling life is now dominated by emotions rather than by reason. In the family systems theory proposition, one's adherence to the use of emotions ahead of reason indicates one's deteriorating level of differentiation and in-class, learners begin to perform poorly because of low concentration. Again, while the participants in the present study revealed that most of the emigrants went out of the country to reduce family economic poverty, the poverty in most such families was transferred to the learners as one respondent revealed that;

"My son has never remitted since he went, I must engage in piece jobs if his daughter is to have books." (G2SS).

Literature from earlier studies shows that most developing countries were losing citizens into the diaspora and in the process leaving learners under different arrangements ranging from staying alone or under the guardianship of other people either relatives or nonrelatives (Moreno, 2013; Tawodzera, 2019). Literature also revealed that most uneducated and undocumented emigrants had challenges securing well-paying jobs in the diaspora which in most cases led them to fail to support the education of their children back home (Dube, 2014). The literature findings on the movement of people from less developed countries into the more advanced ones for anticipated economic emancipation were similar to what subsists in the present study where the participants revealed that;

"he went to look for employment..." (L3SS).

Contrastingly it was also learnt that in situations where the emigrants were educated, well documented, had paying jobs and were returning and remitting, their children had improved in academic work.

The chapter also summarises the research methodology which incorporated the interpretive paradigm, qualitative approach and the case study design where face-to-face key participant interviews, focus

group discussions and document analysis was used to collect data from school heads, teachers and guardians, learners left behind and from admission registers, academic reports, attendance registers and exercise books of learners left behind. The thematic content analysis technique was used to analyse the qualitative data that was collected (Vaismoradi *et al.*, 2016).

Considering reports of non-returning and remission by some emigrants that normally lead to some learners left behind inadequately accessing education, the present study recommends that the government enact laws that accommodate all learners with absent parents in educational welfare programmes irrespective of the type of migration associated with the biological parents similar to what is done in other countries such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka (UNICEF, 2013). Schools were recommended to intensify counselling programmes and initiate income generating projects so that some assistance could be availed from within the schools. The study also recommends that migration studies be introduced at all learning levels so that both teachers and learners appreciate the circumstances of the learners left behind by emigrants and assist them accordingly. To mitigate some reported cases of illiterate guardians and those who modelled bad behaviour on learners, it was also recommended that there be set minimum academic and social qualifications for one to be considered for guardianship of learners with absent parents.