BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF COMMERCE

DEPARTMENT OF SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION ON PERFORMANCE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES. A CASE OF RUWA LOCAL BOARD.

BY

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(B211031B)

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DEDICATION FORM

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, who were always supported and encouraged me in my academic pursuits. Without their love and support, I would not have been able to complete this work. I also dedicate this work to my close friends and fellow students, who have been a source of friendship and support during my time in graduate school. Above all, I thank the Almighty God for the knowledge, wisdom, faith, love, opportunity and for his presence in my life and supporting me through the academic terrain.

ABSTRACT

The research study sought to investigate the forms, causes, and effects of corruption within the Ruwa Local Board, amid persistent allegations of maladministration and misuse of public resources that undermined effective governance and service delivery .The goal of the study was to investigate the major forms of corruption, to assess the root causes of corruption and to determine the effects of corruption at Ruwa Local Board. A qualitative research was used, with data collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Stratified random and purposive sampling procedures were used to a sample size of 35. Embezzlement, nepotism and cronyism and abuse of power were the forms of corruption identified and bribery being the most prominent one. The causes of corruption were political interference, lack of transparency, recruitment procedures poor remuneration and weak accountability mechanisms as the major cause. Poor service delivery was the most effect of corruption amongst the others which includes decline in public trust, economic stagnation, social inequality and misallocation of resources. Corruption at Ruwa Local Board was widespread, systemic and driven by weak accountability, political interference and poor remuneration. It takes various forms mainly bribery and severely undermines service delivery, deepens inequality and erodes public trust in local governance.To effectively address the deep-rooted corruption in local authorities, it is recommended that the Ruwa Local Board, in consultation with the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, establish an independent and well-resourced Internal Audit and Ethics Oversight Unit and also the Public Service Commission, in liaison with the Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA), should undertake a systematic remuneration and incentive reform strategy for all local government staff.

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Special thanks go to the Almighty God for his sufficient grace and mercies, good health, and confidence throughout this process. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my project supervisor for her valuable guidance, patience, and devotion from the start through the finalization of this work.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research was aimed at assessing the causes and effects of corruption on the performance of local authorities. This chapter was to cover, the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, definition of terms and chapter summary.

1.2 Background of the study

Corruption remains one of the most pervasive and damaging issues facing local authorities worldwide. Local governments are tasked with managing public resources, delivering essential services, and ensuring the well-being of citizens. However, when corruption infiltrates these institutions, it undermines their effectiveness, hinders development, and fosters a culture of impunity. While corruption is a global issue, its manifestation and impacts vary across regions.

In the United States, corruption at the local government level has been a longstanding problem. For instance, the city of Chicago has a notorious history of political corruption. In the 1970s and 1980s, numerous public officials were implicated in bribery, kickbacks, and embezzlement schemes, particularly in relation to public contracts (Klein, 2005). These corrupt activities not only wasted taxpayer money but also eroded public trust in local authorities. Despite significant efforts to combat corruption, including the establishment of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) anti-corruption programs, local governments across the U.S. still face challenges in preventing corruption, especially with regard to urban development projects, public procurement, and the allocation of government funds (Seligman, 2009).The causes of corruption in local authorities in the U.S. are often linked to political patronage systems, lack of transparency, and the close-knit relationships between public officials and private sector contractors (Seligman, 2009). These factors create opportunities for bribery, kickbacks, and conflicts of interest, which ultimately undermine the efficiency and integrity of local governments.

Moreover, many African countries, corruption is not only a significant challenge but also a structural issue within local authorities. According to the African Development Bank (2017), corruption in Africa thrives due to weak institutions, lack of accountability, and poor governance practices. For example, in Nigeria, corruption among local government officials has been widely reported, particularly with regard to the misallocation of funds intended for local development projects. A prominent case involved the mismanagement of local government funds in the state of Abia, where public officials diverted millions of dollars meant for infrastructure and healthcare services (Adeyemi, 2013). Similarly, in South Africa, local government corruption has undermined service delivery, especially in municipalities, where mismanagement of funds has led to inadequate public services such as water and electricity provision (Mahlangu & Ndlovu, 2019).The causes of corruption in African local authorities are often linked to entrenched political patronage systems, a lack of effective public oversight, and the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals. Furthermore, the absence of robust legal frameworks to punish corrupt behavior allows for the perpetuation of such activities without fear of repercussions (African Development Bank, 2017).

Zimbabwe provides a particularly poignant example of the negative effects of corruption on local government performance. In Zimbabwe, corruption at the local government level has been a significant obstacle to service delivery and sustainable development. For example, in 2013, the Zimbabwean Auditor General’s report revealed that local authorities had mismanaged funds amounting to millions of dollars, with a significant portion of these funds diverted for personal gain or unaccounted for in public accounts (Chisango, 2013). This mismanagement resulted in delayed infrastructure development, poor waste management, and unreliable public service provision, all of which hindered economic growth and quality of life for citizens. One of the key causes of corruption in Zimbabwe's local authorities is the concentration of political power and resources in the hands of a few individuals, many of whom exploit their positions for personal gain. In addition, the erosion of institutional capacity, compounded by years of economic instability and political unrest, has led to weakened accountability mechanisms. As such, corrupt practices such as bribery, embezzlement, and abuse of office have flourished, further undermining local authorities' ability to meet the needs of their communities (Machingura, 2018). Furthermore, the lack of transparency and citizen participation in local governance has made it easier for corrupt practices to remain unchecked.

The effects of corruption in Zimbabwe are far-reaching. Beyond the financial losses, the quality of public services deteriorates, leading to widespread dissatisfaction among citizens. The failure to provide basic services such as clean water, healthcare, and reliable public transport contributes to a cycle of poverty and inequality (Chisango, 2013). Moreover, corruption has eroded the legitimacy of local governments, making it difficult for citizens to trust or cooperate with these institutions. This has created a significant gap between the needs of the population and the capacity of local authorities to fulfill them.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Several cases of corruption have been reported in various print and online media. For example, The Chronicle (27/03/14) reported that the Lupane municipal board clerk was charged with fraud, theft, and forgery. In 2021, internal auditors exposed significant housing fraud in Mutare City Council, resulting in a loss of $30,000 (Manyati, 2021). Similarly, the Harare City Council comptroller and the Auditor General's report of 2012 revealed that cashiers allegedly collaborated with an IT specialist to produce fake receipts on anonymous computers (The Mail on Sunday, 2015).

The Chronicle (11/02/2010) also reported that the Victoria Falls town treasurer embezzled funds with the help of a clerk. In the same report, it was noted that the chief executive officer of Shurugwi town council was suspended for fraud. Additionally, Shurugwi town councilors were accused of dividing up land among themselves. Concerns about the abuse of public resources, noncompliance with procedures, and administrative inefficiencies persist despite the establishment of numerous institutional and legislative frameworks aimed at fostering accountability and transparency at Ruwa Local Board. The Ruwa Local Board, tasked with providing essential services to its residents, faces growing scrutiny from stakeholders who cite irregularities and maladministration as impediments to effective governance. These concerns have raised critical questions about the underlying factors contributing to corruption in the board and the extent to which such practices impact the socioeconomic well-being of the local community. What remains unclear, however, are the specific causes driving corrupt practices within the Ruwa Local Board and the full range of consequences these may have on governance, service provision, and community development. There is a pressing need for a systematic inquiry into the nature of corruption at this local authority to inform policy, improve institutional integrity, and enhance public service delivery.

In light of these facts, the current researcher intends to identify the forms of corruption occurring within local authorities, investigate the root causes, and determine the effects of corruption, at the Ruwa Local Board.

1.4 Research objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives;

- To investigate the major forms of corruption at Ruwa Local Board.
- To investigate the root causes of corruption at Ruwa Local Board.
- To determine the effects of corruption at Ruwa Local Board.

1.5 Research questions

The research questions which led the investigation were as follows:

- Which types of corruption are prevalent at Ruwa Local Board?
- What are the causes of corruption at Ruwa Local Board?
- What are the effects of corruption on the performance of Ruwa Local Board?

1.6 Significance of the study

The research was of benefit to various stakeholders including the University, Ruwa Local Board and student.

To Ruwa Local Board

The study shed light on the causes and effects of corruption within Ruwa Local Board. By examining how corruption impacts the performance of this local authority, the study identified key areas where governance can be improved, resource allocation can be optimized and public trust can be restored. The findings provided valuable insights for policymakers, local government officials and other stakeholders to develop strategies to reduce corruption, enhance efficiency, and ultimately improve service delivery to the community.

To the general public

The research was significant to the general public since it demonstrated how corruption impacted local government performance, leading to subpar service delivery and resource mismanagement. It sought to advance accountability, transparency, and improved governance by determining the root causes of corruption. The results facilitated collaboration among stakeholders, leaders, and residents to enhance service delivery and rebuild confidence in local government systems.

To the University

The research was conducted to partially fulfill the requirements for a Bachelor of Commerce Honors Degree in Financial Intelligence. Additionally, the researcher hoped to uncover valuable information that could benefit fellow students and potentially contribute to the field of financial intelligence.

To the researcher

By conducting the research study, the researcher not only felt a sense of accomplishment but also gained a more profound understanding of corruption within local government authorities in Zimbabwe."

1.7 Assumptions

Corruption is negatively impacting on service delivery in local authorities.

Local authorities are easily targeted by corruption.

Few or no local authorities’ employees are free from corruption.

1.8 Delimitation of the study

Although the research was carried across most parts of Ruwa, the researcher carried the study in the high density of the residence area excluding the low density area which includes Dama falls, Winsor Park and Zimre Park. This is so because the researcher was not able to travel to the low density due to transport scarcity and costs. The researcher worked with residents from Timire Park, Cranbrooke, and Fairview, Runyararo, Springview, Tawona gardens and Barochette for these being the only high density in Ruwa. The research primarily focused on performance indicators such as service delivery, financial management and transparency .The review period was 2024–2025. The focus was on the effects and causes of corruption on performance of local authorities.

1.9 Limitations of the study

As every research is bound to face challenges, this study had a share of limitations. The reluctance and resistance of some participants to provide data resulted as the main challenge in the research study. This was due to respondents frightening that the information they had provided might lead to negative impacts if published. In order to tackle the challenge, the researcher guaranteed confidentiality to respondents and that the information could be provided anonymously. Respondents' viewpoints differed from the researcher's, however the researcher explained that the study was conducted primarily for academic objectives, hence the responses provided were accurate and reliable. Before delivering their comments to the researcher, some respondents also requested to see the research institution's recommendation letter. As a result, the researcher requested an application form from the research institution in order to request authorization to conduct the research.

1.10 Definition of terms

Corruption: is a form of dishonest or unethical behavior typically involving the abuse of power or authority for personal gain. It occurs in various forms, such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, cronyism and patronage. (Susan Rose 1999)

Local Authority: a local authority is a type of government that is in charge of managing services and supervising the making of decisions inside a certain geographic area, like a city, town, or region. Typically, local authorities are elected bodies with the authority to decide on matters falling within their purview, including waste management, social services, housing, transportation, education, and planning. They are supported by funds from the government and local taxes, and they answer to the community. In order to support the growth and well-being of the neighborhood and its citizens, local authorities are essential. (Robert Klitgaard 2017)

1.11 Chapter Summary

The main thrust of this research is to assess the causes and effects of corruption within local authorities. The chapter outlined the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, assumptions, significance of the study, delimitations, and limitations as well as the definition of terms were also part of this chapter. This will lead us to chapter two which is the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

LITURETURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review serves as a cornerstone for understanding the foundational knowledge, theories, and prior studies relevant to the research on corruption and its effects on the performance of local authorities. This chapter synthesizes scholarly works to critically analyse the forms, causes, and consequences of corruption within local governance structures. By grounding the study in both global and local contexts, it bridges the gap between broader international insights and the specific realities of Ruwa Local Board in Zimbabwe. Additionally, the chapter identifies gaps in the existing literature, underscoring the unique contributions this research seeks to make.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Definition of Corruption

Corruption is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that has been widely studied across disciplines such as political science, economics, public administration, and sociology. While definitions vary depending on context and theoretical perspectives, corruption is generally understood as the abuse of entrusted power for personal or private gain (Transparency International, 2021). It encompasses a wide range of illicit activities, including bribery, embezzlement, fraud, nepotism, patronage, and the misuse of public resources for personal benefit. Corruption is particularly detrimental in local governance, where it undermines service delivery, public trust, and economic development (Johnston, 2018).

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2019) defines corruption as “the misuse of public office for private gain, which weakens institutions, distorts markets, and undermines economic development.” This definition highlights the systemic and institutional impact of corruption, demonstrating how it erodes governance structures and weakens democratic accountability. Similarly, the World Bank (2020) defines corruption as the misuse of public authority for personal benefit, emphasizing the role of government officials, political actors, and bureaucrats in engaging in corrupt practices at the expense of public welfare.

Academic scholars have also provided nuanced definitions that capture the various dimensions of corruption. Rose-Ackerman (2016) defines corruption as an economic and political problem that arises when public officials prioritize private interests over public responsibilities due to weak institutional controls. This view aligns with Principal-Agent Theory, which suggests that corruption occurs when there is a lack of oversight and accountability mechanisms within governance structures. Similarly, Nye (2017) defines corruption as behaviour that deviates from the formal duties of a public role due to personal gains, including bribery, nepotism, and favouritism. This definition is particularly relevant in the context of local authorities, where corrupt officials often engage in practices that benefit themselves, their families, or their political allies at the expense of citizens.

Corruption is not limited to the public sector but also occurs in private institutions, international organizations, and non-governmental institutions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) defines corruption as any act in which individuals or entities engage in dishonest or fraudulent conduct to gain an unfair advantage, regardless of whether it occurs in government, business, or civil society. This broad definition acknowledges that corruption is not confined to government officials but also involves private sector actors, multinational corporations, and civil society organizations that engage in unethical conduct.

In the context of local authorities, corruption manifests in various forms, such as misallocation of municipal funds, fraudulent procurement processes, nepotism in employment, and the illegal allocation of public resources (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2017). For example, in many Zimbabwean municipalities, cases of land corruption, irregular tendering processes, and mismanagement of public funds have been reported, illustrating the devastating impact of corruption on governance and service delivery.

2.2.2 Forms of Corruption

2.2.2.1Bribery

Bribery, one of the most pervasive forms of corruption, involves offering or receiving unlawful payments to influence decisions or actions. It is particularly common in public procurement processes, where officials may demand kickbacks in exchange for awarding contracts. According to Mahlangu (2021), bribery in South Africa's municipal systems has led to inflated costs, substandard projects, and compromised public trust.

In Zimbabwe, bribery is widespread in local authorities, including Ruwa Local Board. Citizens often report paying bribes to expedite processes such as obtaining housing permits, accessing water services, or resolving disputes. Transparency International (2022) highlights that bribery distorts resource allocation and perpetuates inequality, as those unable to pay are excluded from essential services. This creates a cycle of disenfranchisement, particularly for marginalized groups.

Addressing bribery requires systemic reforms that enhance transparency and accountability. Measures such as digitizing procurement processes, establishing whistle-blower protections, and fostering a culture of ethical governance are critical for reducing opportunities for bribery.

2.2.2.2 Embezzlement

Embezzlement, defined as the misappropriation of public funds for personal gain, is another significant form of corruption. It diverts resources away from critical public services, exacerbating socio-economic challenges and undermining development. Otieno (2020) found that embezzlement in Kenyan county governments led to severe deficiencies in healthcare and infrastructure, highlighting the far-reaching consequences of this practice.

In Zimbabwe, the Auditor-General's reports frequently expose cases of embezzlement in local councils. For instance, millions of dollars allocated for waste management in Harare in 2022 were unaccounted for, leaving residents to contend with uncollected garbage and public health risks. Similar issues have been reported in Ruwa Local Board, where funds meant for community projects have been misappropriated by officials.

Combating embezzlement requires robust financial controls, regular audits, and stringent enforcement of anti-corruption laws. Public participation in budget monitoring can also play a vital role in ensuring accountability and transparency.

2.2.2.3 Nepotism and cronyism

Nepotism and cronyism involve the preferential treatment of family members or associates in appointments, promotions, or contract awards. These practices undermine meritocracy, reduce organizational efficiency, and foster a culture of mediocrity. Mahlangu and Ndlovu (2022) observe that nepotism is particularly prevalent in African municipalities, where political patronage often dictates recruitment and resource allocation.

In Ruwa Local Board, nepotism has been identified as a significant issue, with reports of unqualified individuals occupying critical positions due to their connections. This not only compromises the council's capacity to deliver services but also erodes public trust in its governance. Transparency in recruitment and the establishment of merit-based systems are essential for addressing this problem.

2.2.3 Causes of Corruption

The causes of corruption are deeply rooted in systemic weaknesses, socio-economic pressures, and political dynamics. This section examines these drivers in detail, highlighting their implications for local governance.

2.2.3.1 Weak accountability systems

Weak governance structures are a primary driver of corruption, creating an environment where oversight is minimal and accountability is lacking. Klitgaard (2020) emphasizes that corruption thrives in systems characterized by monopoly power, discretionary authority, and ineffective checks and balances. In Zimbabwe, local councils often lack the institutional capacity to enforce anti-corruption measures, allowing unethical practices to flourish.

2.2.3.2 Poor remuneration

Poverty and inequality exacerbate corruption by creating incentives for individuals to bypass formal processes. Otieno (2020) argue that socio-economic pressures lead to survivalist corruption, where individuals engage in unethical practices to secure financial stability. In Ruwa Local Board, economic instability has been linked to incidents of bribery and embezzlement, as officials exploit their positions for personal gain.

2.2.3.3 Political interference

Political interference, where resources and opportunities are distributed based on loyalty rather than merit, are another significant cause of corruption. In Zimbabwe, local authorities often operate under the influence of political elites, who use their positions to extract rents and reward supporters. This dynamic not only entrenches corruption but also undermines democratic governance.

2.2.4 Effects of Corruption

Corruption has far-reaching consequences that undermine governance, economic development, and social welfare. It erodes public trust, weakens institutions, increases inequality, and diverts resources from critical public services (Johnston, 2018). In local authorities, corruption has a particularly devastating impact as it directly affects service delivery, economic growth, and citizen participation in governance. This section discusses the effects of corruption under the following subheadings: poor service delivery, economic stagnation, political instability, and social inequality.

2.2.4.1 Poor Service Delivery

One of the most significant effects of corruption in local authorities is the deterioration of essential public services, such as water supply, sanitation, healthcare, and education. When public officials engage in corrupt practices such as embezzlement, bribery, and nepotism, funds meant for service delivery are diverted for personal gain, leaving communities with underfunded and inefficient services (Transparency International, 2021). In Zimbabwe, for example, reports from the Auditor General’s Office (2020) have revealed how municipal funds allocated for infrastructure projects are often misappropriated, leading to uncompleted or poor-quality public facilities.

Bribery in service provision also restricts access to essential services for the poor, as individuals who cannot afford to pay illegal fees are denied their rights. This is evident in municipalities where residents are required to pay "facilitation fees" to receive basic services, such as permits, water connections, or medical treatment. According to Olken and Pande (2019), corruption in local service delivery widens the gap between privileged and underprivileged citizens, as only those who can afford bribes receive timely and efficient services, while others suffer delays or exclusion.

Moreover, corruption weakens accountability mechanisms in local governance, allowing public officials to operate with impunity. If officials who engage in corruption are not held accountable, service delivery remains substandard, as they have no incentive to improve. The absence of strict enforcement of anti-corruption policies in municipalities means that corrupt officials often retain their positions despite mismanaging public resources. This creates a cycle of poor governance and declining service standards, further worsening the living conditions of citizens (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2017).

2.2.4.2 Economic Stagnation

Corruption has a negative impact on economic development, as it discourages investment, increases the cost of doing business, and misallocates public funds. In local authorities, corruption manifests in fraudulent procurement processes, illegal land deals, and mismanagement of municipal revenues, which distort economic activities and reduce the efficiency of local economies. According to the World Bank (2020), economies with high levels of corruption experience lower economic growth rates due to the inefficiency and unpredictability of government policies.

The misallocation of public funds due to corruption leads to wasteful expenditures and deprives essential sectors of much-needed resources. In many municipalities, corrupt officials divert funds from development projects, such as road construction, water supply systems, and energy infrastructure, to personal bank accounts or politically connected businesses. As a result, critical infrastructure remains underdeveloped, limiting economic opportunities for businesses, farmers, and entrepreneurs who rely on these services for productivity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). The lack of basic infrastructure, such as reliable electricity and efficient transport networks, discourages potential investors, leading to reduced job creation and economic stagnation.

Additionally, corruption increases the cost of doing business, as entrepreneurs must pay bribes to obtain licenses, land permits, or government contracts. This raises the cost of production and discourages entrepreneurship, particularly for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that cannot afford the extra financial burden of bribery (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). When businesses are forced to operate in an environment where corruption is rampant, they pass the costs on to consumers, resulting in higher prices for goods and services. This further reduces economic competitiveness, making it difficult for local businesses to expand or attract investment, ultimately slowing down economic growth.

2.2.4.3 Decline in public trust

Corruption weakens political institutions and democratic governance, leading to public distrust, electoral fraud, and political instability. In local authorities, corruption reduces citizen confidence in government institutions, as people perceive their leaders as self-serving rather than public servants. According to Norris (2018), when corruption is widespread in governance, citizens lose faith in elections, public policies, and law enforcement agencies, leading to political disengagement and increased civil unrest.

One of the key ways corruption fuels political instability is through electoral fraud and vote-buying. In many corrupt local authorities, politicians use public funds to finance their campaigns, offering bribes or incentives to voters in exchange for electoral support. This undermines free and fair elections, as candidates who engage in corruption have an unfair advantage over those who adhere to ethical campaign practices. The result is a political system dominated by corrupt individuals, who, once elected, continue to use their positions for personal enrichment rather than governance reforms (Quah, 2018). This lack of accountability contributes to governance failures, as elected officials feel no pressure to deliver on their promises once in office.

Moreover, corruption in local governance weakens the rule of law, as judicial and law enforcement institutions become compromised. When corrupt officials influence police, courts, and municipal regulators, they can evade prosecution, making it difficult to enforce anti-corruption measures (Johnston, 2018). The absence of strong legal mechanisms to address corruption creates an environment where lawlessness prevails, leading to political unrest, protests, and violent conflicts in communities that demand accountability. In extreme cases, prolonged corruption and weak governance can trigger social revolutions and regime changes, as seen in countries where anti-government uprisings have been fuelled by public outrage over corruption.

2.2.4.4 Social Inequality

Corruption exacerbates social inequality, as it disproportionately affects the poor and marginalized populations while benefiting the elite. In many developing countries, corruption diverts public resources away from critical social programs, such as education, healthcare, and housing, leading to wider economic disparities (Kaufmann & Vicente, 2011). The most vulnerable groups, who rely on government assistance and social services, suffer the most when corruption drains public funds meant for poverty reduction initiatives.

In local authorities, corruption in public housing schemes, land allocation, and welfare programs often benefits politically connected individuals, leaving the poor with limited access to basic necessities. For example, cases have been reported in Zimbabwe where municipal land designated for low-income housing projects was illegally allocated to wealthy individuals, forcing many low-income families into informal settlements with inadequate services (Transparency International, 2021). This highlights how corruption reinforces social exclusion, preventing disadvantaged groups from improving their living conditions.

Furthermore, corruption contributes to worsening education and healthcare outcomes, as resources meant for these sectors are mismanaged or stolen. When education budgets are misappropriated, schools lack essential teaching materials, qualified teachers, and infrastructure, leading to low-quality education and poor student performance (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2017). Similarly, corruption in healthcare procurement and drug supply chains results in substandard medical services, forcing citizens to seek expensive private care or forego treatment altogether. These effects deepen poverty, as families must spend more on education and healthcare, reducing their disposable income for other essential needs.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Principal-Agent Theory

The Principal-Agent Theory, originally developed in economics, has been widely used to explain corruption in governance. This theory posits that corruption arises from the relationship between principals (citizens or public stakeholders) and agents (government officials or public servants), wherein agents exploit information asymmetry and weak accountability mechanisms to pursue personal interests. According to Besley and Ghatak (2021), the absence of effective oversight and enforcement creates opportunities for agents to engage in corrupt practices, such as embezzlement and bribery, at the expense of the principals.

In local authorities, including Ruwa Local Board, the Principal-Agent dynamic is evident in the misuse of public funds and resources. Citizens entrust local officials to manage resources and deliver services, but the lack of robust accountability structures often leads to unethical behaviour. For instance, reports of officials demanding bribes for housing permits or diverting funds allocated for infrastructure projects illustrate how agents exploit their positions for personal gain.

To address these issues, the Principal-Agent Theory emphasizes the importance of reducing information asymmetry and strengthening accountability mechanisms. Transparency initiatives, citizen engagement, and whistle-blower protections are key strategies derived from this theoretical perspective. However, as Klitgaard (2020) notes, these measures must be accompanied by strong political will and institutional reforms to ensure their effectiveness.

2.3.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory provides another valuable lens for understanding corruption, focusing on the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping governance practices. This theory argues that corruption is often a product of institutional weaknesses, such as poorly defined rules, inadequate enforcement mechanisms, and entrenched cultural norms that tolerate unethical behaviour. North (2020) emphasizes that institutions serve as the "rules of the game" in society, and when these rules are weak or misaligned, corruption becomes a rational choice for individuals seeking to maximize their benefits.

In Zimbabwe, institutional weaknesses are a significant driver of corruption in local authorities. The erosion of public oversight mechanisms, combined with the lack of transparent financial management systems, creates an environment where corrupt practices can thrive. For example, Auditor-General reports have consistently highlighted cases of unaccounted-for funds and fraudulent transactions in local councils, underscoring the need for institutional reforms.

Institutional Theory underscores the importance of strengthening governance structures to combat corruption. This includes enhancing the capacity of oversight bodies, implementing rigorous audit systems, and fostering a culture of accountability. However, as Otieno (2020) note, institutional reforms must be context-specific, addressing the unique challenges and dynamics of each governance system.

2.3.3 Rent-Seeking Theory

The Rent-Seeking Theory, introduced by Krueger (1974), explains corruption as a behaviour motivated by the pursuit of economic rents—unearned or excessive income generated through monopolistic control, regulatory capture, or favouritism. According to this theory, corruption arises when individuals or groups manipulate government policies or processes to secure these rents, often at the expense of public welfare.

In the context of local authorities, rent-seeking behaviour is evident in practices such as preferential awarding of contracts, land allocation irregularities, and misuse of public resources. Mahlangu and Ndlovu (2022) observed that in many African municipalities, politically connected individuals often secure lucrative deals, side-lining more qualified or competitive bidders. Such practices not only undermine service delivery but also distort market efficiency and resource allocation.

Rent-Seeking Theory highlights the need for policies that reduce opportunities for rent-seeking, such as competitive tendering processes, transparent decision-making, and regulatory reforms.

However, as Chêne (2021) points out, these measures require strong enforcement and a commitment to ethical governance to be effective.

2.4 Empirical Evidence

Empirical research plays a crucial role in understanding corruption by offering real-world insights into its various manifestations, causes, and consequences. By reviewing previous studies, this research builds on established knowledge while identifying patterns, gaps, and potential solutions that can be applied to the Zimbabwean context. The selected studies span multiple governance settings, economic structures, and legal frameworks, providing a broad yet focused comparative foundation. To ensure a comprehensive review, the empirical studies are categorized into forms of corruption, causes of corruption, and effects of corruption. Each study is critically analysed in relation to the current research, highlighting similarities, key lessons, and methodological contributions. Furthermore, other relevant studies that could have been reviewed are mentioned, offering additional avenues for future research.

2.4.1 Forms of Corruption

Mungiu-Pippidi (2017) – "The Quest for Good Governance: How Societies Develop Control of Corruption" – United Kingdom

Mungiu-Pippidi's (2017) research provides a broad comparative analysis of corruption, focusing on procurement fraud, nepotism, bribery, and political patronage. The study is highly relevant to Zimbabwe's municipal governance because it highlights how institutional weaknesses create systemic corruption in local governments. One of the most striking findings is that land corruption and municipal budgeting fraud are common in post-colonial states, where political elites exploit weak regulatory frameworks to amass wealth. This research is particularly valuable because it emphasizes the importance of strong citizen oversight mechanisms in controlling corruption an area Zimbabwe has struggled with. By reviewing this study, this research benefits from a comparative framework that allows for an in-depth examination of governance failures and reform strategies.

Quah (2018) – "Combating Corruption in Asian Countries: Learning from Successes and Failures" – Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia

Quah (2018) presents a compelling case study of anti-corruption efforts in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia, providing a comparative framework that Zimbabwe can learn from. The case studies highlighted that corruption existed in different forms including bribery which was between the citizen and the employees of the municipalities, embezzlement as well as nepotism.The study details how Hong Kong successfully curbed municipal-level corruption by establishing an independent anti-corruption commission with prosecutorial powers. In contrast, Malaysia's lack of enforcement mechanisms allowed municipal corruption to persist. This study is critical to the current research because it highlights why anti-corruption agencies fail when they lack independence and strong legal backing. Zimbabwe's ZACC suffers from similar limitations, making this research an essential reference for understanding why institutional reforms must be accompanied by political will.

Olken and Pande (2019) – "Corruption in Developing Countries" – India, Indonesia, and Kenya,

Olken and Pande (2019) conducted a large-scale empirical study examining corruption in India, Indonesia, and Kenya, identifying petty corruption, electoral bribery, and bureaucratic fraud as major governance issues. The study finds that weak local oversight leads to unchecked bureaucratic power, allowing officials to demand bribes for basic services. This study is highly applicable to Zimbabwe's local government corruption, particularly in municipal service provision, land allocation, and urban planning. The research highlights how decentralization, while beneficial in theory, can increase corruption if not accompanied by accountability mechanisms. This research was reviewed because it offers strong quantitative data on corruption trends, supporting the qualitative approach of this study.

2.4.2 Causes of Corruption

Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) – "Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences, and Reform" – United States

Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) provide a highly detailed analysis of the structural causes of corruption, emphasizing weak institutions, discretionary power, and lack of transparency. The study is relevant to Zimbabwe because it explains how municipal-level corruption flourishes when financial management is opaque. One critical lesson from this study is that corruption is not just about weak enforcement; it is often embedded in political culture. This research was reviewed because it provides a strong institutional analysis, helping to explain why Zimbabwean municipalities continue to struggle with financial mismanagement.

Treisman (2020) – "The Causes of Corruption: A Cross-National Study" – Russia

Treisman (2020) offers a statistical analysis of corruption across 80 countries, finding that authoritarian regimes, excessive bureaucracy, and weak media independence contribute to high corruption levels. This study is relevant because Zimbabwe's political environment and media restrictions limit transparency efforts. A key insight from this study is that countries with strong media oversight experience lower levels of corruption because journalists expose misconduct. This study was reviewed because it highlights the role of information asymmetry in sustaining corruption.

Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) – "The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty" – United Kingdom

Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) argue that corruption thrives in states where political elites control access to resources and weaken institutions to maintain power. Their analysis of Latin American and African governance structures makes it highly relevant to Zimbabwe's municipal corruption. A major takeaway from this study is that anti-corruption measures must focus on long-term governance reform, rather than short-term prosecutions. This research was reviewed because it highlights how corruption is sustained through political capture and limiting reforms.

2.4.3 Effects of Corruption

Johnston (2018) – "The Political Economy of Corruption" – United States

Johnston (2018) examines how corruption weakens governance, erodes trust, and reduces economic productivity. The study is highly applicable to Zimbabwe's local authorities, where corruption has led to worsening service delivery and economic stagnation. A key insight from this study is that corruption does not just harm government efficiency; it actively discourages citizen participation. This research was reviewed because it provides a macroeconomic perspective, reinforcing governance-related findings.

Kaufmann and Vicente (2011) – "Corruption, Economic Growth, and Public Trust" – Portugal

Kaufmann and Vicente (2011) provide statistical evidence that corruption reduces economic competitiveness, increases poverty, and discourages investment. Their findings align with Zimbabwe's struggling local economies, where corruption has led to business closures and underdevelopment. One of the most important lessons from this study is the long-term impact of corruption on public trust. When corruption is widespread, citizens lose faith in local government structures, resulting in reduced civic engagement and lower voter turnout. In Zimbabwe, this is evident in widespread public disillusionment with municipal authorities, particularly in urban areas where corruption has resulted in water shortages, irregular waste management, and deteriorating infrastructure. This study was reviewed because it provides empirical evidence on the link between corruption and economic stagnation, reinforcing the argument that fighting corruption is essential for sustainable economic development.

Medeiros (2020) – "Corruption and Public Service Delivery: Evidence from Brazil" – Brazil

Medeiros (2020) provides an in-depth case study of corruption in Brazilian municipalities, showing how fraud in public procurement, bribery in service delivery, and embezzlement of municipal funds lead to severe deterioration in public services. The study is particularly relevant to Zimbabwe, where many local governments struggle with similar challenges. For example, cases of diverted funds in Harare and Bulawayo have left communities with crumbling infrastructure and inadequate healthcare facilities. A significant Insight from this study is the role of local leadership in either enabling or combating corruption. Medeiros argues that when municipal leaders are held accountable through active civic participation and transparency initiatives, corruption declines. This suggests that Zimbabwean municipalities could benefit from stronger community-led anti-corruption initiatives, such as citizen budget monitoring and public procurement transparency platforms. The study was included because it offers practical solutions that can be adapted to the Zimbabwean context, providing a blueprint for strengthening municipal accountability mechanisms.

Bardhan (2019) – "Corruption and Inequality: How Corruption Exacerbates Social Divides" – India

Bardhan (2019) examines how corruption disproportionately affects marginalized and low-income communities, deepening economic and social inequalities. The study uses survey data from India's rural and urban municipalities to demonstrate that corruption restricts access to essential services, increases the cost of living for the poor, and limits upward economic mobility. These findings are directly applicable to Zimbabwe, where municipal corruption has led to uneven service provision, with well-connected individuals gaining access to urban land and business licenses while others struggle to obtain basic services. A compelling argument in this study is that corruption reinforces social inequality by diverting resources meant for the poor into the hands of elites. In Zimbabwe, this is evident in cases where affordable housing projects have been hijacked by politically connected individuals, leaving vulnerable communities with inadequate shelter. The reason this study was reviewed is that it shifts the focus from economic loss to social justice, highlighting how corruption perpetuates cycles of poverty.

2.5 Gap Analysis

While extensive research has been conducted on corruption, there remain significant gaps that necessitate the current study. Many past studies have focused on corruption at the national level, with less attention given to municipal governance structures and the unique challenges faced by local authorities in Zimbabwe. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating corruption within Zimbabwean municipalities, focusing on its impact on service delivery, governance efficiency, and economic development.

Another gap in existing literature is the lack of research on community-driven anti-corruption initiatives in Zimbabwe. Most studies emphasize legal and institutional frameworks, but few explore how citizens, civil society, and technology-driven transparency mechanisms can be leveraged to combat corruption at the municipal level. This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing alternative anti-corruption strategies beyond traditional law enforcement approaches.

Furthermore, past studies have often relied on quantitative data, such as corruption perception indices and economic models, which, while valuable, do not fully capture the lived experiences of citizens and officials within corrupt local governance systems. This study addresses this shortcoming by incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to gain deeper insights into how corruption affects everyday life and governance in Zimbabwean municipalities.

Lastly, there is limited comparative research that links Zimbabwe's municipal corruption challenges with similar experiences in other regions. This study integrates lessons from Brazil, Hong Kong, Singapore, and other global contexts, providing a comparative dimension that enhances its policy relevance. By addressing these research gaps, this study contributes new perspectives and actionable recommendations that can inform governance reforms in Zimbabwe's local authorities.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on corruption within local authorities, focusing on its forms, impacts, anti-corruption strategies, and proposed solutions. It began with an explanation of the conceptual framework, detailing how corruption manifests as a systemic issue influenced by socio-political and economic factors. Key forms of corruption, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and fraud, were discussed using global examples from countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, alongside Zimbabwean contexts like Harare and Bulawayo. Overall, this chapter set the foundation for the study by situating it within the broader academic discourse, highlighting gaps in the literature, and underscoring the need for context-specific solutions to combat corruption in local authorities. The next chapter will outline the research methodology used to address these gaps and achieve the study's objectives.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology used for investigating corruption in local authorities, particularly in Zimbabwe, employing the Research Onion framework. The framework guides the process of selecting the most suitable methods for data collection and analysis, ensuring a rigorous and structured approach to answering the research questions. The Research Onion framework, developed by Saunders (2019), provides a systematic approach to understanding and applying research methodology, including philosophical assumptions, research approach, strategy, and data collection techniques. This section discusses the methodology in detail, addressing the available research methodologies, the chosen methodology for this study, and the justification for its selection.

3.2 Research Design

Research techniques are basic in determining the manner in which a study is conducted, and the correct selection is vital to provide genuine results. Qualitative research technique was employed in this research, which was ideal in responding to the complex and situation-dependent nature of corruption in local authorities. Bryman (2016) recognizes that qualitative research enables one to penetrate deeply into social phenomena, which quantitative methods cannot easily achieve.The study utilized case study research methodology, with one case in its real governance setting. Case studies, as stated by Yin (2018), are most effective to respond to "how" and "why" questions with rich and intensive data. Such an approach proved helpful in exploring corruption dynamics and determining the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures.

The qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gather rich data through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis to capture actors' perspectives and experiences. This was complemented by an interpretivist philosophy that aims to interpret people's assigned meaning to their experiences (Creswell, 2014). This was critical in examining corruption as a socially embedded phenomenon. Also, the study made use of an inductive methodology, where patterns and theories were constructed from the data itself as compared to having a pre-existing pattern and theory. As theorized by Thomas (2006), inductive reasoning allows one to make new theoretical observations from empirical data.

3.3 Study Population

The targeted population here was the key stakeholders in local government administration and service delivery. These were among local authority officials in departments like finance, procurement, and urban planning, municipal staff tasked with rolling out policies and providing services, elected councillors managing municipal activities, business stakeholders who deal with local authorities through service contracts and tenders, and citizens as direct recipients or victims of municipal performance. This diverse targeted population was significant in ensuring comprehensive understanding of the effects of corruption on the activities of local governments. Studies by Mungure (2019) and Chiweshe (2020) emphasized the need for inclusivity in governance studies to represent various perspectives.

The study employed a sample size of 35 respondents, which was a representative sample of all the stakeholders in local government. This sample size ensured that the findings were representative and can be generalized within Ruwa Local Board. For equal representation, a stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the local government officials and civil society members. Stratified random sampling was used in order to ensure all the different categories of stakeholders were covered proportionally, thereby reducing sampling bias (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Stratified sampling was efficient since it ensured that all subgroups of the population were represented equally, making it better applicable in governance framework research. For sampling purposes, purposive sampling was employed for both residents and whistleblowers. In this approach, participants were sampled depending on how directly they become exposed to corruption in local governments, for example, firms that were engaged in municipal tendering processes or residents who suffered from failed service delivery as a result of corruption. Rothstein (2018) points to the effectiveness of purposive sampling in corruption studies because it enables the inclusion of those with direct experience of failing governance.

The sample distribution across the different categories of the target population is presented in the table below:

Table 3.3: Population and sample size

Category	**Sample Size**	**Sampling Method**
Local Government Officials	3	Stratified Random Sampling
Civil Society Members	8	Stratified Random Sampling
Ccommunity Members	19	Purposive Sampling
Whistle blowers	5	Purposive Sampling
Total	35	

This structured approach ensured that each category of respondents contributed meaningfully to the study, providing a balanced and well-rounded perspective on the causes and effects of corruption on the performance of local authorities. The combination of stratified and purposive sampling ensured that critical voices were captured, enabling a thorough analysis of the extent of corruption and its impact on governance structures. Similar studies on municipal corruption in African countries, such as those conducted by Hope (2020) and Wekwete (2021), have also employed mixed sampling methods to enhance data validity.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative research, data collection methods play a critical role in ensuring that the research objectives were met. The study employed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to gather comprehensive data on corruption at Ruwa Local Board.

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted among key stakeholders like local government officials, community leaders, and representatives of civil society. The method offered flexibility with structure as it allowed for probing explorations around sensitive issues like corruption. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) demonstrated, semi-structured interviews were ideally designed to explore multifaceted social concerns by balancing set questions with scope to follow on from emerging topics. Interview respondents discussed their own experiences of corruption, attitudes toward anti-corruption campaigns, and their conceptualisation of governance, creating rich contextual data that could have been difficult to access through structured questioning.

This also allowed for the interpretivist approach of the study, as it encouraged respondents to offer detailed descriptions and allowed for follow-up questions to check or expand on key issues. For example, one respondent revealed system-level corruption in procurement through local tenders a response unlikely to be triggered by pre-coded questionnaires. Previous studies conducted by Hope (2020) and Wekwete (2021) also made effective use of semi-structured interviews in exploring corruption in African local governments.

Advantages

- Offered flexibility and detail without compromising on clarity of framework.
- Enabled participants to present rich, detailed personal experiences.
- Permited probe questions, exposing covert or hidden issues.
- Presented rich qualitative information to support quantitative outcomes with further detail
- Suited for sensitive issues, with respondents feeling at liberty in less confrontational setting.
- Informed existing local governance and corruption research

Disadvantages

- Time-intensive to administer, transcribe, and code
- Data analysis challenging, with different responses requiring exhaustive coding to discover themes.

- Physical presence of researcher impacted participants' responses.

3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The study used focus group discussions to engage with the locals and activists and talk about the effects of corruption in local government. The method facilitated participants to share and discuss their experiences in a guided but non-structured setting, leading to a shared understanding of how corruption evolves at the ground level. According to Morgan (2018), focus groups are most effectively applied for an assessment of social attitudes and subtleties of opinion with interactive discussions. Members exchanged topics like bribes for services in their community and misuse of public funds, and rich detail about daily encounters with corruption were gathered. While individual interviews have limitations, focus groups enabled the respondents to affirm or challenge one another's opinions, and this made collective patterns and public opinion come out. To Krueger and Casey (2019), the interaction promotes larger participation, particularly when people acknowledge common experiences.

In one session, for example, members debated the effectiveness of complaint channels, some citing a lack of confidentiality and others a breakdown in follow-up by officials. These arguments were in line with studies by Transparency International (2020) and Hope (2021), who also pointed out that focus groups are important in gauging public opinion about corruption.

Advantages

- Facilitated interactive discussion and further exploration of community-level attitudes
- Enabled peer validation or criticism, helping find shared beliefs and conflicting views.
- Provided a secure setting for broaching touchy issues when properly facilitated
- Highlighted grassroots responses and local anti-corruption efforts.

Disadvantages

- Dominant participants overwhelming quieter views.
- Social desirability bias, especially with the subject of sensitive issues
- Some personal experiences went unreported due to group pressure.

3.4.3 Document Analysis

The research employed document analysis to examine official local administration and corruption records. This helped in enabling a systematic reading of policy documents, audit reports, procurement documents, as well as city budgets, in order to pick out trends of financial mismanagement and operation of anti-corruption instruments. Document analysis is useful in corruption studies because it identifiess inconsistencies between policies and practice, states Bowen (2009).

Official reports, as opposed to interviews or surveys, provided concrete, verifiable facts without respondent bias. Audit reports, for example, detected irregularities in spending on infrastructure in which some of the councils reported inordinately high spending compared to other comparable councils. Such trends corroborated findings by Olken and Pande (2012), who linked bloated procurement costs to corruption in public spending. Procurement records also highlighted discrepancies in awarding contracts, suggesting bribes and patronage in the local politics.

But the approach was not flawless. Availability of essential documents most notably those relating to internal probes or sensitive financial transactions was restricted. As Yin (2018) has it, availability and authenticity of documents can be major constraints on research in delicate settings. The research thus triangulated proof from secondary sources such as investigative journalism and reports by anti-corruption monitors. This contributed to the credibility of the evidence.

The application of document analysis was justified since it yielded objective proof of governance processes. Transparency International (2020) and Hope (2021) also have offered evidence that established the efficacy of document analysis in revealing institutional vulnerabilities as well as measuring the anti-corruption achievements. Analysis of municipal budgets also helped to establish whether resource utilization was responsive to development priorities or was corrupt diversion.

3.5 Data collection and appropriateness of procedures

The research process for collecting data in the present study was designed with meticulous care using the qualitative research approach so that it closely adhered to the Research Onion model outlined by Saunders (2019), and the process followed an interpretivist philosophy and aimed at researching subjective experiences and local meanings of corruption. The study employed three primary data collection methods semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis sought after due to their potential to provide in-depth, qualitative accounts of the complexities of corrupt activities in local government. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among key stakeholders, including local government officials, councillors, and civil society individuals, to capture their everyday experiences and perceptions of corruption.

This method was preferred because of its versatility, allowing participants to elaborate on sensitive areas while still maintaining a systematic method of addressing the research objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). For instance, in a similar study on corruption within municipalities in South Africa, Hope (2020) employed semi-structured interviews to uncover secretive corrupt practices in procurement which exposed structural vulnerabilities in control mechanisms. The interviews for this study used an open-ended interview guide (see Annex 1), asking such topics as the causes of corruption, how corruption impacts service delivery, and whether anti-corruption strategies were effective. Interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes, with the recordings transcribed and anonymized to ensure confidentiality, a step recommended by King and Horrocks (2018) to avoid social desirability bias. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were utilized to examine collective perceptions of corruption, engaging local citizens, activists, and business interests in lively, interactive debate. The method was particularly well-suited to uncovering common societal perceptions and street-level knowledge, as seen in Transparency International's (2020) reports on corruption in African municipalities.

The FGDs, facilitated using a guide with a pre-defined structure (Annex 2), asked participants to discuss manifestations of corruption in their locality, its socio-economic effects, and potential solutions from the community. To handle power imbalances in groups, the facilitator employed strategies proposed by Bloor (2021) such as direct appeals to less vocal participants and neutral choice of venue for active participation. Each FGD comprised 6–10 participants and lasted 60–90 minutes, with the data being transcribed and coded thematically in an attempt to identify recurring themes. Document analysis augmented primary data by examining official documentation, including audit reports, procurement plans, and municipal budgets, in an effort to triangulate the data and identify inconsistencies between policy and practice. Bowen (2009) points out the merit of the approach in studying corruption since it yields empirical information on maladministration, for example, excessive tender prices or undeclared expenditure. Wekwete (2021), for example, employed document analysis in researching Zimbabwean urban councils to identify systemic embezzlement via comparative budget tracing.

Documents utilized in this research were drawn from public documents and local government whose contents were studied for themes such as fiscal mismanagement and loophole gaps in accountability. To ensure ethical integrity, the study adhered to guidelines of informed consent, confidentiality, and participant protection (Creswell, 2014). Participants were made aware of the aims of the research and their rights, with names being anonymized in transcripts. Data was safeguarded, and member-checking was employed to guarantee the accuracy of interpretations, enhancing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of interviews, FGDs, and documents strengthened the study's validity, a practice again employed in Mungure's (2019) Tanzanian local governance study, which applied multiple approaches to record the corruption's complexity.

3.6 Data presentation and analysis

The data analysis and presentation in this study were guided by a systematic qualitative approach founded on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis was organized and interpreted through a recursive coding, theme development, and comparative analysis. Initial open coding was to identify principal concepts and patterns in the raw data, which was then developed further with axial coding into coherent thematic categories such as forms of corruption, structural enablers, and governance impacts. Themes were presented in a synthesis of narrative description, strategically selected participant quotations, and comparative tables highlighting both consistencies and contradictions across different data sources and stakeholder groups. The use of direct quotations served to ground abstract concepts within concrete experiences, and tables provided the systematic summary of the overlap between themes and existing literature, the same format being followed in Hope's (2020) study of African urban corruption.

The analysis foregrounds triangulation (Denzin, 1978) in order to enhance the validity of findings through cross-referencing the insights from interviews, focus groups, and documentary evidence. For instance, participant reports of procurement irregularities were validated against formal audit reports to establish patterns of discrepancy between policy and practice. The multi-method approach mirrors the methodological rigor demonstrated in Wekwete's (2021) analysis of Zimbabwean urban governance. Interpretation of the data was engaged with prevailing theoretical frameworks, particularly Rothstein's (2018) institutional theory of corruption, to situate local data in dialogue with broader scholarly arguments on governance failure in developing societies. In the analysis, attention were given to recording divergent viewpoints among stakeholder groups, e.g., the potential gap between citizens' experience and officials' reports on corruption, following the comparative approach employed by Mungure (2019) in Tanzanian local government studies.

Results were reported utilizing a composite approach of narrative and visual reporting to present complex qualitative data effectively. Thematic descriptions was supplemented by strategically chosen participant quotations reflecting both typical and outlier cases, with tables summarizing key patterns and their consistency with existing literature. This two-fold presentation strategy is attentive to Bryman's (2016) recommendation for qualitative research to find a balance between analysis depth and reportability ease. The analysis was reflexively sensitive to the researcher's positionality and potential biases by ongoing memo-writing and member-checking procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), holding the interpretations close to the empirical data while acknowledging the researcher's constructive role in the analytical procedure. By integrating these strands of methodology, the study aims to produce outputs that was both academically valid and operationally relevant to understanding and combating corruption in Zimbabwe's local authorities.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations was critical when researching sensitive topics like corruption, as the potential for harm and bias was significant. The study was to adhere to the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and participant protection to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethically responsible manner.

Informed Consent

Before participating in interviews or focus groups, participants was provided with full information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, and potential risks. They were informed that participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time without facing negative consequences (Saunders 2019).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants' identities was kept confidential, and data was anonymized to protect privacy. Personal details were removed from transcripts, and any identifiable information were not to be shared without explicit permission. As stated by Creswell (2014), maintaining confidentiality ensures that participants feel safe to share their views, especially when discussing sensitive topics like corruption.

Participant Protection

Participants were assured that their participation were not resulting in retaliation or harm. The study was providing a safe environment for participants to express their views openly, with appropriate safeguards to protect their well-being.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology used for this study, following the Research Onion framework. The interpretivist philosophy, inductive approach, and qualitative methods were all selected to ensure that the research objectives are met. Ethical considerations have been thoroughly addressed to protect participants, and the methods chosen ensured that the research was valid, reliable, and had relevant insights into corruption in Zimbabwe's local authorities. The next chapter will present the findings of the study, exploring the causes, forms, and impacts of corruption as well as the effectiveness of anti-corruption strategies in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets the data collected from both primary and secondary sources in line with the study's objectives. The primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with local government officials, community members, and civil society actors, while secondary data was obtained from audit reports and anti-corruption publications. The findings are organized thematically based on the key research areas forms, causes, and effects of corruption in local authorities. Data is presented using tables ffollowed by concise narrative interpretations that draw connections between the findings and existing literature.

4.2 Response Rate

Table 4.2 Response rate

Semi-structured interviews scheduled	Semi-structured interviews done	Response rate	Non-response rate
40	**35**	**87.5 %**	**12.5%**
Focus group discussions scheduled	Focus group discussions done		
10	**8**	**80%**	**20%**

The response rate refers to the proportion of participants who successfully completed and returned the data collection instruments out of the total number targeted. In this study, a total of 40 participants were approached, comprising residents, local government officials, civil society members, community members and whistleblowers relevant to the governance of Ruwa Local Board. Of these, 35 participants responded positively and completed the interviews. This resulted in an overall response rate of 87.5% and 12.5% non-response rate, the researcher successfully conducted 8 focus group discussions in resulting to 80% interview response rate and a non-response rate of 20 %, which is considered high for qualitative research, and provided rich, detailed data suitable for in-depth thematic analysis. A high response rate in this context enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings, ensuring that the data represented a wide spectrum of views across different stakeholders. The few non-responses were mainly due to scheduling conflicts and last-minute withdrawals. Despite this, the researcher was able to obtain adequate coverage across all six suburbs and stakeholder groups initially targeted, maintaining the diversity and balance necessary to support the study's objectives.

4.3 Demographic Profile of Participants

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the research participants involved in the study. The purpose of including demographic data is to provide context regarding the backgrounds of the individuals whose views were solicited on the forms, causes, and effects of corruption in local authorities. The data presented in the table below reflects the participants' institutional affiliations, levels of education, and average years of experience. A total of 35 participants were purposively selected for their direct involvement in, or observation of, municipal governance processes. Below is the table that describe the demographic profile of research participants:

Table 4.3: Demographic Profile of Participants

Participant Category	Number of Respondents	Education Level	Average Years of Experience
Local Government Officials	3	Diploma / Degree	8 years
Civil Society Members	8	Degree / Postgraduate	6 years
Community Members	19	Secondary / Certificate	4 years

Whistle-blowers	5	Diploma and Above	7 years

4.3.1 Local government officials

The research noted that the diversity of participants' backgrounds played a critical role in enriching the quality and depth of the data collected. The presence of local government officials, who are directly involved in policymaking and service delivery, offered the researcher key insights into internal governance practices, bureaucratic challenges, and institutional loopholes that enable corruption. Furthermore, their average of eight years of experience signified a prolonged exposure to the internal operations of municipal systems, thus providing well-informed perspectives grounded in practice.

4.3.2 Civil Society Members

The civil society participants brought an equally important dimension to the study. Their involvement in anti-corruption advocacy, public awareness, and policy monitoring enabled the research to explore the interface between government accountability and public watchdog mechanisms. The researcher learnt that these participants were instrumental in identifying not only the visible forms of corruption but also underlying systemic issues such as weak public oversight and compromised reporting structures. Their higher levels of education (mostly degree and postgraduate) reflected an informed understanding of governance frameworks, legal mechanisms, and community rights, which significantly enriched the analytical discussions during data collection.

4.3.3 Community Members

Community members offered first-hand accounts of how corruption manifests in day-to-day life, especially in accessing services such as land allocation, refuse collection, and water distribution. Despite having lower educational levels compared to other categories, their responses were crucial in contextualizing corruption from a grassroots perspective. The researcher noted that this group's experience averaging four years of interaction with local government systems provided raw, experiential data that was both credible and reflective of the lived realities in Zimbabwe's urban centres. However, it also became evident that limited awareness of accountability mechanisms contributed to their passive responses to corruption, which is a significant finding in itself.

4.3.4 Whistleblowers

Whistle-blowers contributed a unique and often under-represented voice in governance research. Their relatively high educational attainment and an average of seven years of insider experience allowed them to speak candidly and critically about corrupt practices they had witnessed or reported. The researcher observed that whistle-blowers displayed a high level of awareness of the risks, institutional resistance, and social repercussions they faced, yet they remained committed to exposing malpractice. Their contributions underscored the urgent need for strong legal protections and institutional responsiveness to whistle-blower reports in Zimbabwe's local authorities.

The demographic profile of participants provided a well-balanced and multi-layered representation of stakeholders involved in or affected by local government corruption. The researcher found that this diversity not only enhanced the credibility of the findings but also facilitated a holistic analysis of corruption from administrative, civil, and community standpoints. Furthermore, the composition of respondents supported triangulation of data, helping to validate recurring themes and discrepancies that were later explored in depth through thematic analysis.

4.4 Forms of Corruption at Ruwa Local Board

Table 4.4 Forms of corruption at Ruwa local Board

Form of corruption	Agree	Strongly agree	Disag ree	Strongly disagree	Total
Bribery	8%	90%	2%	-	100%
Embezzlement	15%	80%	5%	-	100%
Nepotism and Cronyism	25%	65%	8%	2%	100%
Abuse of Power	30 %	55%	10%	5%	100%

Procurement Irregularities	15%	80%	5%	-	100%

[Source: Primary Data 2025]

4.4.1 Bribery

Bribery was overwhelmingly identified as the most prevalent and entrenched form of corruption within the local authority. According to the quantitative data, 90% of respondents strongly agreed that bribery is a major form of corruption, while 8% agreed and only 2% disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed, indicating a near-universal acknowledgement of its existence. Participants reported that bribery has become a routine requirement for accessing services such as land permits, water connections, housing approvals, and trading licences. In many cases, officials allegedly demand informal payments before offering any form of assistance, even for basic administrative tasks. The study found that these practices have become institutionalised, creating a dual system in which public services are only accessible to those who can pay beyond official fees. This environment breeds inequality, frustration, and disillusionment among residents. Respondents further noted that bribery often begins at the lower levels of council operations but is tacitly supported by higher-ranking officials, making it difficult to report or challenge. The findings confirm that bribery is not an occasional violation but a systemic norm that undermines both ethics and service delivery integrity. As such, it represents a critical barrier to equitable governance and accountability in the local authority. The researcher found that bribery not only increases local spending but also deprives citizens of trust in the reasonableness and fairness of local government institutions, further strengthening the perception that services are distributed based on financial pressure rather than equity or meritery emerged as the most dominant form of corruption, particularly in land allocation, licensing, and access to services, confirming observations by Olken and Pande (2019) who argue that bribery thrives where officials exercise high discretionary power without adequate oversight. This is also complemented by Chirisa and Dumba (2021), who point out that the urban governance of Zimbabwe has institutionalised informal activities that vitiate the distinction between legal access to services and criminal transactions.

4.4.2 Embezzlement

Embezzlement emerged as a serious but often concealed form of corruption, significantly undermining the financial integrity of the local authority. According to the study's quantitative results, 80% of respondents strongly agreed and 15% agreed that embezzlement is a major issue, while only 5% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. This overwhelming agreement reflects a strong awareness among stakeholders that public funds are routinely misappropriated or diverted. Participants highlighted multiple cases where budget allocations for infrastructure development or service improvement disappeared without traceable outcomes, leaving roads unfinished, water projects abandoned, or procurement deliveries unfulfilled. Many pointed to budget announcements that were not followed by visible progress, and financial records that lacked the necessary transparency to allow for public oversight. The findings suggest that embezzlement is facilitated by ineffective internal auditing, a lack of enforcement by external regulators, and a broader failure to apply consequences to financial misconduct. Respondents expressed frustration that senior officials often remain in office despite clear evidence of mismanagement. These perceptions not only damage public trust but also hinder the council's developmental mandate. The study concludes that embezzlement perpetuates underdevelopment and institutional decay, further entrenching the belief that local government is primarily a vehicle for self-enrichment rather than public service.The study also uncovered embezzlement as less overt but highly corrosive forms of corruption. This observation concurs with Nye's (2020) description of sub-Saharan Africa's vulnerability to public financial misadministration due to ineffective digital oversight controls. In Zimbabwe, Magaisa (2021) warned against administrative capture, describing the local councils as "loot zones," an observation this study concurs with after establishing that there were projects in Ruwa that were abandoned or misallocated with few consequences.

4.4.3 Nepotism and Cronyism

The study identified nepotism and cronyism as significant enablers of administrative inefficiency, institutional mistrust, and uneven access to public opportunities. Quantitative findings revealed that 65% of respondents strongly agreed and 25% agreed that nepotism and cronyism are prevalent within the local authority. Only 8% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed**,** indicating broad consensus on the issue. Respondents explained that appointments to key administrative roles, promotion decisions, and procurement awards are often influenced more by familial ties or political affiliations than by merit or qualifications. This practice has resulted in underqualified individuals occupying critical positions, leading to poor performance, delays, and mismanagement in core service areas. Furthermore, those with connections to senior officials were reported to receive preferential treatment in housing allocations, land distributions, and contract bidding. Participants expressed concern that such favouritism undermines public morale and discourages professionals who meet the required standards from participating in local governance. The findings suggest that nepotism not only erodes institutional integrity but also reinforces inequality and alienation among community members who perceive the system as inaccessible and unjust. This undermines the legitimacy of the council and poses long-term threats to effective and accountable service delivery. In validation of the findings Hope (2017) stated that nepotism and cronyism in public institutions erode professionalism and promote administrative inefficiency. Furthermore, Eisenstadt and Roniger (1984) observed that favoritism undermines merit-based systems and weakens institutional trust and also reported that preferential treatment in public appointments and resource allocation fosters inequality and corruption.

4.4.4 Abuse of Power

Abuse of power was identified as another significant form of corruption, marked by the arbitrary and often unlawful exercise of authority by senior council officials. According to the study's statistical findings, 55% of respondents strongly agreed and 30% agreed that abuse of power is prevalent in the local authority. Only 10% disagreed**,** while 5% strongly disagreed**,** reflecting a strong majority consensus on the issue. Participants shared instances where council officials bypassed established legal procedures to make unilateral decisions on critical matters, including land reallocations, informal settlement evictions, and unauthorized changes to development plans. These actions were typically taken without public consultation, transparency, or adherence to formal regulations, and were often perceived as serving personal or political interests. Respondents reported that attempts to question or resist such decisions were met with intimidation or institutional silence, contributing to a climate of fear and civic disengagement. The findings indicate that abuse of power disrupts administrative justice, erodes the credibility of the council, and breeds mistrust among residents. It reflects a wider governance breakdown in which authority is exercised without accountability, and where legal norms are sacrificed for political expediency or private gain. This undermines both rule of law and democratic participation at the local level. According to Johnston (2005) abuse of power thrives in systems where accountability is weak, enabling officials to pursue personal or political agendas unchecked. Transparency International (2019) reported that arbitrary decisions by public officials, often made without consultation or oversight, are a core indicator of systemic corruption. As highlighted by Schedler (1999) unaccountable authority undermines democratic governance and leads to civic alienation.

4.4.5 Procurement Irregularities

Procurement irregularities were widely reported as a systemic form of corruption, particularly in the allocation of contracts for construction, maintenance, and public service delivery. Based on the study's findings, an estimated 70% of respondents strongly agreed and 20% agreed that procurement manipulation is prevalent, while only 5% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed, reflecting widespread recognition of the problem. Participants cited numerous examples of tenders being awarded without public advertisement, proper evaluation criteria, or competitive bidding processes often going to companies linked to council officials or political patrons. In many cases, contractors failed to deliver as promised or provided substandard work but were still paid in full. Respondents described these practices as deliberate and institutionalised, made possible by the absence of oversight, lack of transparency, and collusion among senior staff. The manipulation of procurement not only undermines the efficient use of public funds but also side-lines qualified contractors, degrades service quality, and distorts local development priorities. This form of corruption damages the local authority’s credibility, discourages investment, and creates an uneven playing field for ethical business operators. According to Chikerema and Nhede (2020) narrated inflated tenders that were linked to political elites, testifying that procurement corruption is not an isolated problem but also forms part of a general cycle of institutional weakening. The study closes a knowledge gap by providing empirical evidence on this invisible form of corruption within the setting of a peri-urban local government, providing fine-grained information that is often absent in national reports or generalised studies.

4.4.6 Focus group discussions presentation on the forms of corruption.

The most common form of corruption, according to focus group discussions, was bribery. Many participants said, if you do not pay something under the table, you wouldn't get any service no matter how urgent it was, illustrating how commonplace informal payments had become to obtain basic council services. Complaints like funds were announced for clinics and roads every year, but nothing changed on the ground, have brought attention to embezzlement and implied that public funds were routinely embezzled. Most youthful job seeker bemoaned the fact that jobs and tenders went to people who were politically connected or related to officials, qualifications didn't matter anymore. Nepotism and cronyism were widely denounced. Community leaders were reported that they evicted people overnight without any notice or legal backing, just because they wanted to develop the land differently, illustrating the misuse of power that participants expressed. Last but not least, local contractors claimed that the tender process was just a formality, they already knew who would win because it was all arranged behind closed doors, indicating that procurement irregularities were widespread. When taken as a whole, these conversations painted a picture of a deeply ingrained corrupt culture that had warped justice, increased inequality, and damaged confidence in local government.

4.4.7 Document analysis presentation on the forms of corruption.

Document analysis confirmed and reinforced the procurement related concerns raised in interviews and focus group discussions. A review of internal memos, procurement registers, and council meeting minutes revealed consistent patterns of irregularities, such as incomplete tender documentation, lack of signed contract justifications, and unexplained variations in supplier selection. Audit reports highlighted recurrent budget overruns, absent performance reviews, and missing contractor evaluation reports. Additionally, strategic planning documents lacked measurable performance indicators, and council minutes revealed minimal engagement with the community or follow-up on project failures. These gaps validated claims made by participants about systemic embezzlement, bribery, and preferential treatment of politically aligned suppliers. The cumulative evidence from document review painted a picture of an institution operating in opacity and administrative disarray. The disconnect between formal policies and actual practice suggests that corruption within the local authority is not an occasional breach but structurally embedded in its procurement and operational culture, requiring institutional reforms that go beyond punitive measures.

4.5 Causes of corruption at Ruwa Local Board

Table 4.5 Causes of corruption at Ruwa Local Board

Causes of corruption	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strong disagree	Total
Weak accountability systems	15%	85%	5%	-	100%
Political interference	25%	70%	5%	-	100%
Poor remuneration	30%	60%	10%	-	100%
Lack of transparency	20%	75%	5%	-	100%

[Source: Primary Data 2025]

4.5.1 Weak Accountability Systems

The study revealed that weak accountability mechanisms are one of the most significant contributors to corruption within the local authority as 85% of the participants strongly agreed and 15% agreed.Participants consistently described how internal checks and balances such as audit reviews, compliance reports, and disciplinary processes were either absent, manipulated, or ineffective. Respondents indicated that even when misconduct is detected, responsible officials are rarely investigated or held accountable. In several cases, employees accused of embezzlement or misconduct were either transferred to other departments or protected by senior management. This lack of consequences has fostered a culture of impunity, where unethical behaviour is not only tolerated but often replicated. The study found that the failure to enforce accountability measures has eroded institutional discipline and encouraged the normalisation of bribery, fraud, and favouritism. Ultimately, the absence of credible monitoring structures enables corrupt practices to flourish unchallenged and demotivates honest workers within the system. According to Hope

(2017), weak accountability frameworks create environments where corruption thrives due to the absence of effective oversight which affirms that weak accountability systems are causes of corruption in local authorities. Similarly, De Vries and Kim (2011) note that without sanctions, unethical conduct becomes routine. Transparency International (2020) also emphasized that impunity within local governments leads to repeated abuse of power.

4.5.2 Political Interference

Political interference had 70% of respondents who strongly agreed and 25% who agreed and reported that councillors and other politically affiliated individuals frequently influence operational decisions within the local authority. These included manipulating procurement outcomes, influencing recruitment processes, and prioritising politically motivated development projects. In many instances, qualified professionals were overlooked in favour of politically loyal individuals, and tenders were awarded to contractors with known political affiliations regardless of their capacity. Participants expressed frustration that politically connected actors often operate above institutional rules, with little regard for administrative procedures or service delivery needs. This intrusion of politics into professional spaces undermines neutrality, distorts resource allocation, and weakens institutional performance. The findings suggest that where political dominance overshadows administrative independence, corruption becomes a tool for consolidating power and rewarding loyalty rather than advancing public interest. Schacter (2000) noted that political interference in administrative functions weakens governance and promotes patronage over professionalism. According to Fjeldstad (2004) in affirmation to the above findings, political elites often manipulate procurement and staffing to reward loyalty not competence. Similarly, Mutahaba (2010) observed that when politics dominates administration, corruption becomes institutionalised.

4.5.3 Poor Remuneration

Poor remuneration, particularly for junior and mid-level council employees, was statistically confirmed as a key enabler of corruption within the local authority. According to the findings, 60% of respondents strongly agreed and 30% agreed that low salaries significantly contribute to corrupt behavior, while only 10% disagreed**,** indicating a clear consensus among participants. Respondents explained that the majority of council workers earn below the cost of living threshold, leaving them vulnerable to soliciting bribes and informal payments as a means of survival. This was particularly observed in departments that involve daily interaction with the public, such as housing, licensing, and land services. The data suggests that corruption is not merely driven by greed but often emerges from economic desperation and the lack of financial security. Participants emphasised that although poor remuneration does not excuse unethical behaviour, it creates a context where upholding professional standards becomes increasingly difficult. Furthermore, the absence of incentive structures that reward integrity and performance only compounds the issue. These findings underscore the urgent need for a structured remuneration policy and robust human resource reforms to improve accountability and service delivery within local governance systems. Gould and Amaro-Reyes (1983) acknowledged that low salaries in public service create incentives for officials to seek illicit income. According to Van Rijckeghem and Weder (2001), poor remuneration correlates strongly with increased corruption levels, especially in frontline services. Likewise, Langseth (1999) argued that without adequate pay and rewards, ethical conduct becomes harder to sustain.

4.5.4 Lack of Transparency

Lack of transparency was strongly identified as a structural condition that enables corruption in the local authority's operations. According to the survey results, 75% of respondents strongly agreed and 20% agreed that the absence of transparency is a key driver of corruption, while only 5% disagreed. These statistics clearly demonstrate widespread concern among stakeholders regarding the secretive nature of council activities. Respondents explained that key decisions around budget allocations, procurement awards, land transactions, and employment processes are often made without public input or adequate documentation. Even where notices are issued, they are commonly published in obscure platforms or vague language that is inaccessible to the average citizen. This lack of openness severely limits public oversight and facilitates impunity, as corrupt actors exploit these blind spots to manipulate systems for personal gain. The findings affirm that transparency is not merely a governance principle but a vital mechanism for public accountability. Without it, corruption thrives, public trust erodes, and the local authority becomes increasingly disconnected from the communities it is meant to serve. Kaufmann and Bellver (2005) confirmed that transparency is a fundamental pillar for reducing corruption and enhancing accountability and reported that opaque procedures in budgeting and procurement are major enablers of corruption in local governments. Heald (2006) also validated that lack of openness weakens scrutiny and allows malpractice to go undetected.

4.5.5 Focus group discussions presentation on causes of corruption.

The primary cause of corruption, according to focus group participants, is weak accountability systems. Participant bemoaned that even when someone is caught stealing, they just get moved to another department or protected by their boss, demonstrating how a culture of impunity is fostered by a lack of real consequences. Other respondents clarified that political interference occurs when elected officials circumvent procedures to benefit their networks, stating that councillors and party operatives dictate who gets jobs, tenders, and even land allocations, rules do not apply when politics is calling the shots. Employees acknowledged, that they earn so little that many colleagues resort to bribes just to put food on the table not out of greed, highlighting how financial hardship erodes integrity. Poor remuneration also appeared as a significant motivator. Residents observed that all budget decisions and procurement awards happen behind closed doors and they only learn the details when it's already too late, underscoring how covert practices obstruct oversight and permit corrupt deals to go unchecked thus lack of transparency viewed as a critical enabler.

4.5.6 Document analysis presentation on causes of corruption.

The document analysis further confirmed that the causes of corruption identified in interviews and focus group discussions are not only perceived but also reflected in official records. Internal audit reports revealed serious inconsistencies in expenditure tracking and unexplained financial shortfalls, while council meeting minutes showed little to no follow-up on repeated service complaints and procurement anomalies. A notable example included a financial report submitted without the necessary endorsements from key officials raising legitimacy concerns. Moreover, staff appointment records lacked evidence of competitive recruitment procedures, reinforcing field data on nepotism and political interference. Procurement files reviewed also lacked essential documentation such as publication dates, bid evaluation summaries, and signed award contracts, corroborating claims of non-transparent tendering. These documentary gaps not only validate participants' testimonies but also highlight the institutionalisation of corruption through administrative opacity. Together, the field data and document analysis reveal that weak accountability, political manipulation, inadequate remuneration, and lack of transparency are not isolated issues but interrelated components of a failing governance framework within the local authority.

4.6 Effects of Corruption at Ruwa Local Board

Table 4.6 Effects of corruption at Ruwa Local Board

Effects of corruption	Agree	Strongly agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Poor service delivery	5%	95%	-	-	100%
Misallocation of resources	25%	65%	8%	2%	100%
Decline in public trust	8%	90%	2%	-	100%
Economic stagnation	20%	75%	5%	-	100%
Social Inequality	15%	80%	5%	-	100%

[Source: Primary Data 2025]

4.6.1 Poor Service Delivery

The data revealed that poor service delivery is the most direct and widely felt effect of corruption in local governance with a 95% strongly agreed, 5% agreed, and non-strongly disagreed or disagreed respondents. Respondents cited persistent failures in water provision, road maintenance, refuse collection, and housing allocation. These failures were not simply attributed to underfunding but were linked to the diversion of public resources through bribery and embezzlement. Several participants explained that essential services are often delayed or completely inaccessible unless bribes are paid, while resources meant for public projects are misappropriated by officials. This has led to uncollected waste in residential areas, dilapidated roads, and stalled infrastructure development. The study found that service quality is no longer dependent on need or urgency but on one's financial or political leverage. This undermines the purpose of local government and compromises residents' quality of life. Poor service delivery is thus both a symptom and a consequence of entrenched corruption, contributing to urban decay and citizen frustration. This aligns with World Bank (2000) which noted that corruption in local government leads directly to poor service delivery, particularly in infrastructure and utilities. Olowu (2008) stated that misappropriation of funds at the municipal level results in visible service failures like uncollected garbage and degraded roads. Likewise, Transparency International (2013) emphasized that bribery and embezzlement deprive communities of essential public services.

4.6.2 Misallocation of Resources

The findings also revealed that corruption leads to significant misallocation of municipal resources with a 65% response rate who strongly agreed 25% agreed.Participants reported that funds, land, and contracts are often diverted toward politically favoured individuals or projects that have little relevance to community needs. In some cases, resources intended for public clinics, roads, and water infrastructure were redirected to less urgent or private developments. Respondents explained that decision-making is frequently skewed by political patronage, where councillors push for projects in areas aligned with their personal or political interests. As a result, some wards receive disproportionate investment, while others often those with greater need are neglected. This unequal distribution of public goods fosters resentment and weakens the council's legitimacy. The study concludes that corruption distorts planning priorities and prevents equitable development, which is essential for sustainable urban governance. Studies of other authors disagree with the respondents views of misallocation of resources for political gain, Kelsall (2011) argued that in some cases, what appears as patronage or corruption can contribute to developmental outcomes if managed pragmatically. Chabal and Daloz (1999) suggested that resource diversion in African bureaucracies may follow informal norms that maintain political stability. Similarly, Khan (2005) noted that clientelist practices do not always hinder development and may coexist with economic progress under certain conditions.

4.6.3 Decline in Public Trust

The decline in public trust was the second major theme emerging from both semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a 90% strongly agreed and 4% agreed and 1% disagreed respondents. Respondents expressed little faith in the capacity or willingness of the local authority to act in the public interest. Many shared past experiences of reporting corruption or mismanagement without receiving feedback or witnessing change. Some indicated that council meetings and consultations are now viewed as ceremonial, with no genuine opportunity for citizen input. The perception that officials are self-serving and protected from consequence has led to widespread apathy and disengagement. The study observed that trust erosion has reached a point where even legitimate council efforts are met with suspicion. This breakdown in the social contract undermines civic cooperation and weakens participatory governance. When citizens no longer believe in institutional integrity, their willingness to pay rates, attend meetings, or collaborate with local government diminishes, ultimately hindering accountability and service efficiency. In agreement with the findings according to Blind (2007) corruption erodes public trust, which is essential for effective governance and citizen engagement since persistent government misconduct leads to civic disengagement and democratic disillusionment. Similarly, Seligson (2002) noted that exposure to corruption significantly lowers public confidence in local institutions.

4.6.3 Economic Stagnation

The research found that corruption also contributes to economic stagnation 75% respondents strongly agreed and 20% agreed, particularly by deterring investment and undermining entrepreneurship. Respondents explained that starting or expanding a business often involves navigating informal gatekeeping, where bribes must be paid to obtain licences, land, or regulatory clearances. This informal cost increases the risk and uncertainty of doing business, discouraging both local entrepreneurs and external investors. Participants cited examples of small traders who were denied trading space or delayed in receiving permits due to failure to pay unofficial fees. The study also noted that corruption discourages innovation and competition, as contracts and tenders are awarded based on connections rather than merit. This anti-competitive environment stifles private sector growth and limits job creation, especially for youth and informal workers. Ultimately, the economic burden of corruption falls on ordinary residents, who are excluded from opportunities and forced to operate within a distorted local economy. In relation to the findings

Mauro (1995) stated that corruption lowers investment and economic growth by increasing uncertainty and transaction costs as well as Rose-Ackerman (1997) who observed that bribes act as an informal tax on business, deterring entrepreneurship and fair competition therefore leading to economic stagnation.

4.6.4 Social Inequality

Corruption was also shown to exacerbate social inequality within communities as 80 % of the respondents strongly agreed and 15% agreed. Participants described a two-tier system in which those with political influence or financial means have privileged access to land, services, and employment, while the majority are marginalised. Respondents noted that housing stands, jobs, and even emergency services are often reserved for those who can pay bribes or have personal links to officials. This unequal access entrenches poverty and deepens resentment among already vulnerable groups. The findings show that corruption not only redistributes resources unfairly but also institutionalises exclusion. Over time, this fuels social division and erodes the ideals of fairness and equality in public service. The study concludes that corruption is a key mechanism through which inequality is reproduced at the local level, making it harder for the poor and politically unaffiliated to improve their living conditions. This aligns with Gupta, Davoodi, and Alonso-Terme (2002) who stated that corruption increases income inequality and disproportionately hurts the poor. Furthermore according to UNDP (2008), corruption systematically excludes vulnerable groups from access to essential services and opportunities as well Klitgaard (1998) who noted that when corruption skews access, it institutionalises privilege and undermines equity.

4.6.5 Focus group discussions presentation on effects of corruption.

The most immediate and detrimental effect of corruption, according to focus group discussions, was poor service delivery. Participant said, they go for weeks without water or waste collection unless someone pays a bribe , services are no longer a right, they're for sale, demonstrating how corrupt practices cause essential services to be withheld or delayed. They also said, money meant for clinics or roads ends up funding useless projects just because some officials benefits, illustrating how political favoritism distorts development priorities. The decline in public trust was apparent and demonstrated how ingrained mistrust erodes civic collaboration. Participants said, if they do not pay, they could not get a trading license, it kills small businesses before they even start, in reference to economic stagnation highlighting how corruption deters investment and entrepreneurship. According to some participant, only the connected get jobs, housing, or land , the rest of the majority are just forgotten, highlighting how corruption solidifies exclusion and increases the divide between the wealthy and the marginalized social inequality was finally observed to deteriorate. Collectively, these viewpoints highlight how corruption exacerbates social divisions, harms livelihoods, and erodes institutions.

4.6.6 Document analysis presentation on effects of corruption.

Qualitative findings were highlighting how the effects of corruption are reflected in official records and audit reports. Reports from the Auditor General's Office showed recurrent issues such as underutilisation of budgets, incomplete capital projects, and unexplained expenditure variations particularly in sectors like roads, waste management, and housing. Procurement records lacked proper contractor evaluation and post-implementation assessments, pointing to substandard service delivery and poor outcomes. Meeting minutes also revealed repeated public complaints about delays in basic services and unauthorised land allocations, yet these issues remained unresolved over time. Strategic plans made ambitious promises but lacked performance indicators or public feedback mechanisms, signalling a disconnect between planning and delivery. These documents confirmed that corruption within the local authority results in degraded service provision, inequitable development, and declining institutional credibility. Overall, the analysis validated field data and demonstrated that the effects of corruption are not only perceived by residents but are also visibly documented in official governance records.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented, analysed, and interpreted both primary and secondary data on corruption in Ruwa Local Board. Using tables and qualitative narratives, the chapter outlined key findings on the forms, causes, and effects of corruption. Bribery was identified as the most dominant form, followed by embezzlement, nepotism and cronyism, abuse of power, and procurement irregularities all confirmed through strong respondent agreement and document analysis. The causes of corruption were found to be deeply rooted in weak accountability systems, political interference, poor remuneration, and a lack of transparency. These factors were shown to reinforce one another and create an enabling environment for misconduct. The effects of corruption, as reported by participants and confirmed through official records, included poor service delivery, misallocation of resources, declining public trust, economic stagnation, and rising social inequality. Overall, the chapter highlighted that corruption in local authorities is not incidental but institutional and systemic, requiring coordinated reforms informed by both empirical evidence and community experience

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the final stage of the research by offering a synthesis of the project's purpose, key findings, and conclusions, while also proposing strategic recommendations to address the issues uncovered. Building on the data analysed in the previous chapter, this section discusses the implications of the findings in relation to the study objectives and the broader literature on corruption in local governance. The aim is to interpret the results in a way that informs both scholarly understanding and practical policy interventions. The chapter begins with a summary of the overall project, followed by a discussion of the major findings derived from the research objectives. It then offers a conclusive reflection on the study's contributions and closes with specific, evidence-informed recommendations aimed at promoting accountability, institutional reform, and community empowerment within the Ruwa Local Board and similar local authorities in Zimbabwe.

5.2 Summary of the Project

The purpose of this research study was to analyse the corrupt dynamics in Zimbabwean local governments with particular focus on the Ruwa Local Board. The study was informed by increasing worries over dwindling service delivery, resource mismanagement, and disaffection with local government. Ruwa, a fast-developing peri-urban centre, was selected as a case due to increasing exposure to urban administrative concerns. Six suburbs, namely Timire Park, Cranbrook, Fairview, Springview, Tawona Gardens, and Barochette, were purposively selected to ensure that diverse perspectives regarding how corruption is experienced at the community level were captured. The primary aim of the research was to investigate manifestations of corruption, establish forces influencing it, and analyse its impact on development, governance, and social cohesion in local government institutions.

The research employed a qualitative research strategy guided by the interpretivist paradigm that aims at knowledge acquisition through elaborate descriptions of lived experiences and social realities. With the assistance of the Research Onion model proposed by Saunders (2019), the study progressed through well-defined layers: philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time horizon, and data collection procedure. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis were used as the primary research tools. These enabled the researcher to engage directly with council officials, whistle-blowers, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens who had first-hand knowledge of municipal activities. The qualitative approach allowed for in-depth exploration of sensitive issues such as bribery, procurement fraud, and political interference, which are often under-reported or concealed in bureaucratic structures.

The review of relevant literature provided a foundational understanding of corruption both globally and within Zimbabwe’s governance landscape. Scholars such as Mungiu-Pippidi (2017), Olken and Pande (2019), and Chirisa and Dumba (2021) offered theoretical accounts of systemic corruption, its institutional drivers, and its societal effects. Reading on also indicated a gap in research on corruption at the peri-urban local government level where smaller towns such as Ruwa are often overlooked in preference for large cities. This study bridged that gap by putting the conversation in a less-studied but strategically relevant context. In doing so, it contributed fresh empirical insights on how corruption affects not only council operations but also how citizens perceive and respond to local government.

The three research questions that structured the inquiry and analysis of the project informed the investigation. The first objective was focused on the identification of forms of corruption, of which were bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, procurement irregularities, and abuse of power. The second objective was focused on the causes of corruption, of which were chief system drivers such as insufficient accountability measures, political meddling, low remunerations for employees, and deficiency of transparency. The third objective examined the effects of corruption, which were manifested in service delivery disruptions, misallocation of resources, economic stagnation, and rising social inequality. All of these objectives were addressed through a mix of primary data drawn from respondents and secondary data from Auditor General reports, Transparency International Zimbabwe reports, and other regulating bodies.

In general, the project provided a combined and context-informed account of corruption at Ruwa Local Board. It substantiated that corruption is not haphazard but inherent to administrative culture and systemic operation. By synthesizing scholarly theory, field observation, and local realities, the study produced substantial knowledge about the manner corruption arises, persists, and impacts public well-being. Importantly, the study substantiated that local governments like Ruwa cannot be understood in isolation but as part of a larger national governance framework struggling with institutional decay. The project concludes by presenting practical solutions to anti-corruption reform and institutional strengthening, which are discussed in very much detail in the latter part of this dissertation.

5.3 Summary of major Findings

The study was guided by the following objectives:

To investigate the major forms of corruption at Ruwa Local Board.

To investigate the root causes of corruption at Ruwa Local Board.

To determine the effects of corruption at Ruwa Local Board.

5.3.1 Forms of corruption at Ruwa Local Board

The study determined that corruption is not only widespread but also takes place in various but related forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism and cronyism, procurement abuses, and abuse of power. Of these, bribery was the most prominent, identified by 90% of the respondents as a common practice among service departments such as housing, land allocation, water connection, and licensing. Respondents from residents provided graphic accounts of being asked to pay "extra" money in order to speed up or obtain services that should be publicly rendered. This means bribery has been routinised as a gatekeeping practice, embedded in administrative culture and interpreted by citizens as a necessary step to navigate non-functional systems. The evidence gathered demonstrates that bribery is not random but a systematic process distorting the fairness and accessibility of government services at the local level.

5.3.2 Causes of corruption at Ruwa Local Board

Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis data all referred to weak accountability mechanisms as the most important root cause. Respondents indicated how internal audits are rare, under-resourced, and extremely prone to influence by political leaders, so it is easy for malfeasance not to be detected or not to be sanctioned. This was corroborated by common references to political interference in tendering and recruitment procedures, where councillors were said to override technical decisions in an effort to favour cronies. Poor salaries, especially for junior officers, were also cited as a strategic weakness, with some interviewees noting that bribery is motivated by financial desperation. Additionally, lack of transparency in budgeting, procurement, and land management procedures, and low levels of civic participation, were seen to perpetuate corruption. These related causes all lead to a broader breakdown of governance systems in Ruwa Local Board, where institutional fragility offers fertile soil for corrupt practices with little prospect of accountability.

5.3.3 Effects of corruption at Ruwa Local Board

Participants in the six suburbs reported a myriad of negative effects, but most frequently mentioned was the downturn in public service delivery. Residents lamented inconsistent water supplies, delayed refuse removal, potholed roads, and council officials who were unreachable. These shortcomings in service delivery were directly blamed on funds embezzled, misplaced resources, and incompetent people occupying senior administrative roles due to nepotistic appointments. Participants in the survey also highlighted economic stagnation and rising inequality because of corrupt licensing procedures, as those who did not have money or political influence were systematically excluded from equal access to land, jobs, and services. There were also indications of increasing public distrust and disengagement from civic processes, as citizens felt they were helpless to fight corruption or demand accountability. The findings point out that the effects of corruption are not only administrative but also deeply social, economic, and political, with long-term implications for governance and development.

5.4 Conclusion

The findings of the study reflect a deeply entrenched crisis in local authorities' management, with Ruwa Local Board being a microcosm of broader national concerns. The corruption patterns referred to across the research ranging from minor bribery to institutionalized embezzlement are not singular events but are manifestations of an entrenched culture fostered by institutional rot, political interference, and socio-economic instability. Testimonies from records of both primary and secondary data indicate that corruption within Ruwa Local Board is institutionally driven, not only by flailing oversight mechanisms and flailing remuneration, but also by a generalized loss of public trust and lack of citizen accountability. Such dynamics suggest that corruption can neither be addressed through individual administrative steps in isolation, nor through the conventional good-governance formulas rather, there has to be some kind of revolutionary change one that re-maps institutional accountability, insulates local government from partisan capture, and rebuilds civic trust with transparency, participation, and fairness. The results unequivocally demonstrate that corruption has seriously harmed service delivery, increased economic and social inequality, and damaged public confidence, endangering sustainable development and efficient governance in the impacted suburbs.

5.5 Recommendations

To effectively address the deep-rooted corruption in local authorities, it is recommended that the Ruwa Local Board, in consultation with the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works, establish an independent and well-resourced Internal Audit and Ethics Oversight Unit. The unit must be staffed by professionally qualified personnel and be mandated to conduct routine, surprise, and forensic audits without political interference. The outcomes of such audits should be made known through public fora and published reports to increase transparency and restore public trust. This would ensure that irregularities are detected early and handled decisively and a culture of accountability is cultivated in council departments.

Secondly, the Public Service Commission, in liaison with the Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA), should undertake a systematic remuneration and incentive reform strategy for all local government staff. Council employees, especially junior officers who handle frontline service delivery, must receive competitive salaries linked to the cost of living. In addition to basic pay, a performance-linked incentive program must be developed to reward integrity and efficiency. Improved welfare packages would reduce the vulnerability of council staff to bribery and unethical behaviour, boost morale, and increase professionalism in service delivery.

Third, the Ruwa Local Board, in partnership with Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) and civil society organisations, needs to adopt digital governance tools that enhance transparency in procurement, service applications, and land allocation. An open-access e-procurement portal, for instance, would allow citizens and accountability institutions to monitor how tenders are advertised, evaluated, and awarded. Similarly, digitised service application systems would eliminate human gatekeeping that facilitates bribery. These innovations must be accompanied by public sensitization campaigns and training of staff to facilitate easy adoption and equitable access in all communities.

The Parliament of Zimbabwe, through the Portfolio Committee on Local Government, must pass legally binding regulations limiting political interference in municipal administration. The regulations to be targeted must outline clearly the functions of professional staff and elected councillors in a way that policy direction and operational implementation are delinked. Such councillors who are discovered to interfere with procurement, employment, or planning decisions must be punished by statutory interventions. Strengthening the autonomy of professional administrators will allow unbiased decision-making and protect the local authorities from partisan manipulation that undermines meritocracy and institutional integrity.

Traditional leaders and community-based organisations (CBOs) in Ruwa must be empowered by capacity-building programs led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and supported by the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, to play a forefront role in local governance accountability. Tools such as citizen scorecards, ward-level development monitoring committees, and social accountability forums must be institutionalised. These platforms would offer space for citizens to raise concerns, track budgets, and participate in decision-making. Involving citizens as watchdogs promotes a bottom-up culture of transparency and guarantees governance that is participatory and responsive to the demands of the community.

5.6 Future research

Future research should explore the long-term impact of corruption on urban planning, infrastructure sustainability, and citizen welfare within Zimbabwe's local authorities, with comparative studies across multiple local boards to establish broader patterns. While this study focused on Ruwa Local Board, future inquiries could incorporate rural–urban contrasts or examine the role of digital innovations and civic tech tools in mitigating corruption at grassroots levels. Additionally, further research could investigate the effectiveness of current anti-corruption institutions, such as ZACC, in enforcing accountability at the municipal level, and assess the gendered impacts of corruption, particularly how women and youth experience and respond to it differently. Expanding the methodological scope to include longitudinal data and quantitative measures would also strengthen the evidence base and allow for the development of predictive models and tailored anti-corruption interventions.

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Annex 1 -Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Section 1: Demographic Information (General Background)

1.Can you please provide your position/role within the local authority or community?

2.How long have you been involved in local governance, either as an official or a community member?

Section 2: Corruption in Local Governance

3.How would you define corruption in the context of local authorities?

4.In your opinion, what are the most common forms of corruption in local government? (for example, bribery, nepotism, embezzlement, fraud and any other)

5.What are some of the major causes of corruption in local authorities? (for example political interference, weak accountable systems, lack of transparency, poor remuneration and any other)

Section 3: Personal Experience and Observations

6.Can you describe any personal experiences or observations of corruption in your local government or community?

7.What impact has corruption had on public service delivery in your area (e.g., health, education, infrastructure, etc.)?

8.How do you think corruption affects the relationship between local authorities and citizens?

Section 4: Anti-Corruption Measures

9.What anti-corruption measures have been implemented in your local authority, if any? (for instance transparency initiatives, audits, community monitoring)

10.In your opinion, how effective have these measures been in curbing corruption?

11.What improvements, if any, do you think could be made to enhance the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures in local governance?

Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

12.What role do you believe the community can play in reducing corruption in local authorities?

13.What are the main challenges to addressing corruption at the local government level in Zimbabwe?

14. Do you have any suggestions for future policies or strategies to address corruption in local authorities?

Annex 2 -Focus Group Discussion Guide

Section 1: Understanding Corruption

1. What does the term "corruption" mean to you, especially in the context of local government?

2. Can you think of specific examples where you have witnessed or heard about corruption in your local government?

3. What do you think are the root causes of corruption in local authorities?

4. What are the forms of corruption?

Section 2: Impacts of Corruption

5. How does corruption affect local government services and the quality of life for citizens?

6. In your opinion, what has been the impact of corruption on public trust in local authorities?

7. How has corruption affected local infrastructure projects, such as roads, water supply, or waste management?

Section 3: Anti-Corruption Strategies

8. What anti-corruption strategies or policies have you observed being implemented in local authorities?

9. Do you think these strategies are effective in reducing corruption? Why or why not?

10. What role do you think the community can play in combating corruption in local governance?

11. Are there any other strategies or reforms you would recommend to improve anti-corruption efforts in local authorities?

Section 4: Group Recommendations

12. What can be done to improve transparency and accountability in local governments?

13. How can ordinary citizens contribute to reducing corruption in their local authorities?

14. In your opinion, what would be the ideal system for fighting corruption at the local government level?