BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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TITLE: CHALLENGES FACED BY INSTITUTIONALISED CHILDREN IN ACCESSING EDUCATION: A CASE OF PONESAI VANHU CHILDREN'S HOME

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Social Work.

DECLARATION AND RELEASE FORM

I Audrey Jayaguru studying for Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Social Work truly declare that:

- ❖ The dissertation report titled "*Challenges faced by institutionalised children in accessing education: A Case of Ponesai Vanhu children's home*" is a result of my own work and has not been plagiarized.
- ❖ I have adhered to research ethics in conducting social work research.
- ❖ I give the University permission to utilize this report for educational purposes.

Name of student: Audrey Jayaguru   Signature……

Name of supervisor: Dr. L. zinyemba   Signature

DEDICATION

To my family, the ultimate cheerleaders (and occasional stress relievers!). Thanks for reminding me that laughter and love are essential ingredients for academic success. This one's for you!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must express immense gratitude. Thank you, Almighty, for strength, my family for unwavering support, and my esteemed supervisor for expert guidance. Your belief fueled my journey, and I'm excited to leverage these newfound skills in the real world.

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ABSTRACT

The multifaceted challenges institutionalized children face in accessing education, the adequacy of available resources, and their coping strategies within Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home in Shamva District, Zimbabwe. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and a Rights-Based Approach, the study aimed to provide nuanced insights into these often-overlooked educational experiences. The study made use of qualitative research design making use of key informant interviews and in-depth interviews as data collection methods. Findings revealed that children's educational access is severely hampered by pervasive socio-economic challenges, including chronic financial constraints leading to inadequate uniforms, poor nutrition, and inability to cover exam fees. These material deprivations directly result in physical discomfort, absenteeism, and significant psychosocial impacts such as stigmatization, affecting self-esteem and school engagement. Within the institutional setting, educational resources and support systems were found to be largely inadequate, characterized by a scarcity of learning materials, lack of conducive study environments, and limited access to qualified academic assistance. Furthermore, inconsistent communication between the home and schools, alongside precarious access to essential medical care due to reliance on intermittent NGO support, exacerbated educational vulnerabilities. Despite these systemic barriers, the study identified remarkable coping strategies employed by the children, including strong individual perseverance, active peer support, and resourcefulness in overcoming material scarcity. While demonstrating profound resilience, these strategies often compensate for systemic deficiencies rather than complementing robust support structures. The study concludes that the educational vulnerabilities of institutionalized children are deeply rooted in interconnected socio-economic challenges and inadequate institutional support, infringing upon their fundamental right to quality education. Recommendations include advocating for stable government funding, establishing structured educational support programs within homes, fostering stronger home-school linkages, implementing child-sensitive psychosocial support, and promoting community sensitization to stigma, all aimed at creating a more equitable and supportive learning environment for these children.

ACRONMYS

AMTO	Assisted Medical Treatment Order
DAPP	Development Aid from People to People
DSD	Department of Social Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for socioeconomic upliftment, enabling individuals to realize their full potential and break cycles of poverty and disadvantage. However, for children residing in institutional care, whether due to abandonment, parental loss, or various family crises, the path to quality education is frequently fraught with unique and formidable challenges. This introductory part of the project has the study background, problem statement, objective of the study, research questions as well as limitations and delimitations of the study being covered in this project.

1.2 Background of the Study

The institutionalization of children is a pervasive social phenomenon observed across diverse societies globally, stemming from a complex interplay of socio-economic and familial factors. Primary among these precipitating factors are orphanhood, familial neglect, and pervasive poverty. Giddens (2021), from a sociological perspective, defines orphanhood as the predicament of a child who has lost both biological parents, often resulting in their placement under the guardianship of extended family members. Sweetman (2020) largely concurs with this definition but introduces a more nuanced categorization, distinguishing between "vulnerable" and "non-vulnerable" orphans. Both interpretations converge on the understanding that orphanhood, as a social construct, frequently necessitates external support for the child, potentially culminating in their placement within an institutional setting.

From a psychological standpoint, Schaefer (2023) posits that an orphan is fundamentally a child experiencing parental deficiencies, a condition often correlated with a heightened vulnerability context. This perspective underscores that children lacking fundamental social provisions and enduring precarious living conditions may be identified as orphans, thereby warranting intervention from social services, including institutionalization. This argument finds resonance within social functionalist theories, which posit that societal efficacy is measured by its capacity to integrate all its constituent systems towards a common objective (Haralambos, 2019). In this context, institutionalization can be viewed as a societal mechanism to address the breakdown of primary social units.

However, the efficacy of traditional family structures in providing protection for orphans is increasingly compromised by factors such as family disintegration, escalating poverty, persistent gender disparity, and widespread moral decadence. Contemporary family dynamics have attenuated the capacity of extended family networks to shoulder the responsibility of educating orphaned children once their biological parents are deceased. Consequently, governmental agencies, such as the Department of Social Development in Zimbabwe, often resort to the institutionalization of these children as a measure of last resort. The persistent economic decline in Zimbabwe, in particular, has resulted in countless parental deaths, leaving children with insufficient means for sustenance, let alone educational pursuits. Sweetman (2020) and UNICEF (2019) lament that, in many instances, the educational aspirations of orphans are tragically thwarted. Faced with limited alternatives, many children not placed in institutions are driven into early marriages or exploitative child labor to survive. Such circumstances are demonstrably detrimental to the long-term interests and developmental trajectories of these children. Marion (2018) cogently argues that without access to education, children are deprived of critical skills essential for self-initiative, self-advocacy, and an understanding of human rights, rendering their future prospects bleak. Consequently, children excluded from formal educational pathways are significantly marginalized from contributing meaningfully to societal building and development. It is against this critical backdrop that this study is premised, seeking to meticulously investigate the specific educational challenges encountered by children residing in institutional care.

Education stands as the principal catalyst for a child's holistic development. Fullan (2017) emphasizes that from infancy through adulthood, a substantial portion of a child's life is dedicated to educational development. In conventional settings, parents or guardians play a pivotal role in facilitating a child's needs within an enabling environment, thereby sustaining their learning endeavours. There is a strong, albeit often unstated, assumption that institutions, by assuming the role of a surrogate home, are similarly obligated to serve as equally vital environments for a child's moral, social, cognitive, spiritual, and physical growth. Koler and Freeman (2019) highlight the imperative for institutional environments to be structured in a manner that genuinely prepares children to navigate their external environment successfully upon reunification with society. This implies a dual responsibility for institutions: not only to provide care but also to actively facilitate and integrate the child's educational journey with their overall development. The intrinsic interrelationship between the institution's role and

formal schooling establishes the foundational framework upon which a child's future life trajectory is constructed.

Despite extensive literature on the importance of education for child development and the broad vulnerabilities faced by institutionalized children globally (Giddens, 2021; UNICEF, 2017), a discernible gap in scholarly understanding persists regarding the specific, intricate, and localized challenges that institutionalized children encounter in accessing quality education within particular national contexts. While studies frequently highlight the socio-economic factors leading to institutionalization (Browne & Herbert, 2015) and the general educational disadvantages of marginalized groups (Sweetman, 2020), there remains a paucity of in-depth research meticulously detailing the unique systemic, pedagogical, and resource-related impediments *within* residential care facilities that directly impact children's educational attainment. Specifically, in the Zimbabwean context, characterized by persistent economic decline and evolving social welfare policies (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2018), comprehensive empirical evidence on the precise nature and extent of educational barriers for institutionalized children is limited. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge void by providing a granular examination of these challenges, contributing nuanced insights that can inform more targeted and effective interventions to uphold the educational rights of this vulnerable population.

1.3 Statement of the Problem.

The universal recognition of education as a fundamental human right, enshrined in international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), posits an ideal wherein all children, irrespective of their socio-economic background or living arrangements, possess equitable access to quality educational opportunities. This ideal further stipulates that vulnerable populations, particularly children residing in institutional care, should receive enhanced support and tailored provisions to mitigate inherent disadvantages, ensuring their holistic development and future societal integration. Under this normative framework, institutions acting *in loco parentis* are morally and legally obligated to provide a nurturing and resource-rich environment that actively facilitates academic engagement, cognitive growth, and psychosocial well-being, thus serving as robust platforms for educational attainment.

However, the reality on the ground frequently diverges significantly from this established ideal, presenting profound and multifaceted challenges for institutionalized children in accessing education. Despite the inherent right to education, these children are disproportionately affected by a unique constellation of socio-economic challenges, including chronic institutional underfunding, lack of personalized familial advocacy, and societal stigmatization, which collectively impede their seamless integration into mainstream schooling and their overall academic progression. Furthermore, a critical concern lies in the often-observed inadequacy of educational resources and support systems within institutional settings themselves. These facilities frequently contend with limited availability of qualified educators, insufficient learning materials, inadequate infrastructure, and a dearth of specialized pedagogical and psychosocial support services tailored to the distinct needs of children with potentially traumatic backgrounds, thus compromising the quality and continuity of their learning experiences. Consequently, instead of thriving within a supportive system, many institutionalized children are compelled to develop informal and often arduous coping strategies to navigate these systemic barriers in their pursuit of education, a necessity that underscores the fundamental failings of the existing framework to provide a truly enabling educational environment. This stark discrepancy between the aspiration of universal, equitable, and supportive education and the lived reality of institutionalized children in contexts like Zimbabwe signifies a critical gap in service provision and policy implementation, ultimately jeopardizing their developmental trajectories and future life chances.

1.4 Aim of the Study

The study will be focused on exploring the challenges faced by institutionalized children in education access.

1.5 Objectives.

1. To probe into the socio-economic challenges being faced by institutionalized children in accessing education.
2. To investigate the availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within institutional settings.
3. To identify which copying strategies can be adopted by institutionalized children in accessing education.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What socio-economic challenges do institutionalized children face in their pursuit of an education?
2. To what extent are educational resources and support systems available within institutional settings?
3. What are some coping mechanisms that institutionalized children can use to access education?

1.7 Assumptions of the study

It is assumed that participants (institutionalized children and institutional staff) will provide honest and candid responses to the research questions. This assumption is critical for the validity of the qualitative data collected, positing that despite the sensitive nature of some inquiries, respondents will communicate their experiences and perceptions truthfully, within the bounds of their understanding and comfort.

The study assumes the basic stability of the operational environment within the selected institutional settings during the period of data collection. While recognizing the dynamic nature of such environments, it is assumed that no radical or unforeseen systemic changes, policy shifts, or major disruptions will occur that could fundamentally alter the educational access and support systems within these institutions, thereby invalidating the contemporaneous observations.

It is assumed that the theoretical frameworks and existing literature drawn upon in the background provide a relevant and applicable lens through which to understand the challenges faced by institutionalized children in Zimbabwe. This includes the applicability of universal principles concerning child rights and the functionalist perspectives on societal structures, even when adapted to the local context.

Finally, the study assumes that necessary ethical approvals and institutional access will be consistently maintained throughout the research period, enabling the researcher to engage with the target population and collect data without undue hindrance. This implicitly assumes a cooperative stance from relevant authorities and institutional management regarding the research process.

1.8 Significance of the study

From an academic and theoretical perspective, this research is poised to address a notable gap in existing literature, particularly concerning the nuanced educational experiences of institutionalized children in sub-Saharan African contexts, and specifically in rural Zimbabwe. By meticulously exploring the socio-economic barriers, resource deficiencies within institutions, and the coping mechanisms employed by these children, the study will enrich the scholarly discourse on child welfare, education equity, and the sociology of childhood. Its findings will offer empirical data that can either corroborate, challenge, or refine existing theories pertaining to vulnerability, educational disadvantage, and the role of institutional care in human development.

The findings hold substantial policy relevance for governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations involved in child protection, education, and social development in Zimbabwe. By clearly delineating the specific impediments to educational access, this study can provide evidence-based insights crucial for the formulation, review, and effective implementation of national policies. This includes informing strategies for resource allocation to children's homes, developing targeted educational support programs, and strengthening regulatory frameworks to ensure quality education for all children in alternative care. It can guide interventions aimed at harmonizing educational mandates with the operational realities of care institutions.

For institutional management and practitioners within children's homes, the research will offer practical and actionable recommendations. Understanding the specific challenges from the perspectives of both children and staff can enable institutions to better allocate their limited resources, design more effective educational support systems, foster an environment conducive to learning, and implement tailored psychosocial interventions that address the unique needs of their residents. It can foster a more empathetic and effective approach to their role *in loco parentis*.

This study is significant for the institutionalized children themselves. By amplifying their voices and shedding light on their struggles, the research serves as a critical advocacy tool. It aims to raise public awareness and foster greater societal accountability towards ensuring that these vulnerable children are not deprived of their fundamental right to education. Ultimately, the study's contributions hope to facilitate tangible improvements in educational outcomes, empowering institutionalized children with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities necessary for successful social integration, self-reliance, and active participation in the development of their communities in Zimbabwe.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

Firstly, a significant geographical limitation arises from the specific locale of the primary research site, Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home, which is situated in the rural areas of Shamva District, Zimbabwe. This setting means that the findings are bound to reflect the unique socio-economic, infrastructural, and resource realities prevalent in rural institutional contexts. Consequently, the results may not be directly transferable or comparable to those obtained from institutions located in more urbanized areas of Zimbabwe, which often benefit from better access to mainstream schools, diversified educational resources, and potentially stronger support networks. The rural-urban disparity in educational provision and access is a known factor in development studies, and this specific focus delimits the applicability of findings to similar rural settings rather than a national generalization.

Secondly, the inherent constraint of the sample itself constitutes a limitation. While diligent efforts will be made to engage a representative selection of children and staff from the chosen institution, it is duly noted that the investigator cannot comprehensively study every single individual or exhaustively capture every nuanced aspect of the experiences within the institutional environment. The practicalities of research design, including time, resources, and access, necessitate a carefully defined sample. This means that the findings, while providing rich qualitative depth and specific insights into the studied population, may not be statistically generalizable to the entire population of institutionalized children in Zimbabwe or beyond.

Finally, while rigorous methods will be employed, the reliance on self-reported data from institutionalized children and institutional staff introduces the potential for biases such as social desirability, selective memory, or a reluctance to disclose challenging realities.

1.10 Delimitations of the Study

The scope of the population is strictly delimited to children residing in formally recognized institutional care settings within Zimbabwe. This intentionally excludes children living in other forms of alternative care, such as foster families, kinship care, or those living on the streets, whose educational experiences may differ significantly. Secondly, the thematic focus of the study is specifically delimited to challenges pertaining to access to education, the availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within institutional settings, and the coping strategies employed by children to overcome these barriers. Consequently, the study will not delve extensively into other aspects of institutional care, such as the general health and nutrition services (unless directly impacting educational attendance or performance), the psychological well-being unrelated to educational barriers, or post-institutionalization outcomes, which fall outside the immediate purview of this research.

Thirdly, the geographical scope of the study is confined exclusively to selected institutional settings within specific provinces of Zimbabwe. While the findings may offer insights relevant to other regions or countries facing similar challenges, the study does not purport to provide a comprehensive national or international generalization.

Finally, the study is delimited to methodological issues as, focusing on the current experiences and perceptions of the participants at the time of data collection. It does not encompass a longitudinal analysis of educational progression or the long-term impact of institutionalization on academic trajectories. These deliberate choices ensure that the research remains concentrated on providing in-depth understanding within its defined parameters.

1.11 Definition of Key Terms.

1. **Orphan:** A child is considered an orphan when it has lost both parents beside being under the custody of some family member (Giddens, 2011).
2. **Education**: According to UNESCO (2012), education is defined as the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits.
3. **Child**: A child, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children means a human being below that of attaining the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, that attainment comes earlier.

4. **Loco parentis**: This is a situation where an individual or organization assumes the rights, duties, and responsibilities of a parent in the absence of the child's biological parents or legal guardians. While acting *in loco parentis*, the individual or organization is expected to make decisions and provide care for the child's welfare, education, discipline, and overall well-being, much like a parent would Sweetman (2020). This concept is commonly applied to schools, universities, and, pertinent to this study, residential care institutions such as children's homes, where staff members are expected to act with the same level of care and responsibility as a reasonable parent.

1.12 Dissertation Structure

In the first chapter, there was a lucid introduction, stating the problem, research objectives, and research questions. In the second chapter, theoretical frameworks and literature reviews will be elaborated, together with a review of relevant literature on what has been researched so far on the problem under investigation. Research methodology is the term for chapter three. Within this context, the research designs and qualitative approach will be discussed. Sampling technique and the study population will form part of this chapter. Chapter four is purely based on overall results' presentation, which includes data presentation, data analysis, and data interpretation of results in the form of tables and graphs. Chapter five carries the analysis of results and conclusions, with recommendations citing information from the literature review.

1.13 Chapter Summary

This foundational chapter has meticulously laid the groundwork for the ensuing investigation into the educational challenges faced by institutionalized children in Zimbabwe. It commenced by providing a comprehensive background of the study, contextualizing the global phenomenon of child institutionalization, defining key terminologies such as *orphanhood* and *loco parentis*, and elaborating on the complex socio-economic factors that lead children into institutional care, particularly within the Zimbabwean context. This contextualization then naturally led to the **problem statement**, objectives of the study, limitations of the study and delimitations. In sum, this chapter has critically established the rationale, scope, and parameters for the subsequent phases of the research.

<center><u>**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**</u></center>

2.1 Introduction

This chapter establishes the conceptual and empirical foundations of the study by providing a comprehensive and critical review of relevant literature. It will meticulously examine the theoretical frameworks that underpin the research, offering the analytical lenses through which the challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education will be understood. Simultaneously, it will present an in-depth review of existing scholarly literature on the educational experiences and specific impediments encountered by children residing in institutional care globally and, where available, in similar contexts. The overarching aim of this chapter is to situate the current study within the broader academic discourse, identify prevailing themes, discern key trends, and ultimately highlight the specific knowledge gaps that this research endeavours to address.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1992). This theory offers a powerful and comprehensive lens through which to understand human development as a dynamic process influenced by a complex interplay of environmental systems. It allows for a nuanced exploration of how various levels of a child's environment—from their immediate daily interactions to broad societal structures—collectively shape their access to and engagement with education. Complementing this, a Rights-Based Approach to Education will provide the ethical and legal imperative for evaluating the conditions under investigation, highlighting whether children's fundamental rights are being realized within the institutional context.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's theory posits that a child's development is embedded within, and influenced by, a series of interconnected environmental systems. Applying this framework to the educational experiences of institutionalized children in Zimbabwe reveals the intricate layers of influence:

The Microsystem which is the immediate institutional environment and school. This refers to the child's immediate surroundings and direct interactions. For institutionalized children, the microsystem is profoundly shaped by the children's home itself. This includes the daily

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routines, staff-child ratios and relationships, the quality of care provided, the emotional climate, and the internal availability of learning materials or dedicated study spaces.

Challenges in this layer might involve overworked staff unable to provide individualized academic support, a lack of stimulating educational activities within the institution, or a peer environment that does not prioritize schooling. Furthermore, the external mainstream school that the child attends also forms part of their microsystem. Factors such as teacher quality, classroom size, school resources, and peer interactions within the school directly impact their learning experience.

The Mesosystem which are the linkages between microsystems. This section encompasses the interconnections and interactions between two or more microsystems. For institutionalized children, the mesosystem is critical and often fragile. It involves the relationship between the children's home and the external school. Challenges in the mesosystem, such as a lack of coordinated effort between the institution and the school, can severely hinder a child's educational progress, leading to disengagement or academic underperformance.

The Ecosystem which is the external systems indirectly affecting the child. This level refers to external settings or institutions that do not directly involve the child but indirectly influence their microsystems and, consequently, their development

Macrosystem which is the broader cultural and societal context. This outermost layer comprises the overarching cultural values, beliefs, laws, customs, and dominant socio-economic and political systems. In the Zimbabwean context, the macrosystem profoundly shapes the economic conditions, educational policies and societal attitudes.

Rights-Based Approach to Education as a Complementary Framework

Complementing Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, a Rights-Based Approach to Education, primarily guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), provides a crucial normative framework for this study. This approach asserts that education is a fundamental human right for every child (Articles 28 and 29) and not merely a privilege or a service. It obligates states to ensure that education is accessible, available, acceptable, and adaptable ("the 4 As") to all children, without discrimination.

This framework is vital for this study as it Provides a moral and legal benchmark that allows the research to evaluate whether the conditions and provisions within institutions and the

broader educational system in Zimbabwe are meeting their obligations to institutionalized children.

The theory Frames the problem; It highlights that the challenges faced by these children are not merely practical difficulties but potential violations of their human rights, demanding accountability and action.

The Recommendations derived from the study can be framed as steps necessary to fulfil the state's and institutions' duties to uphold these children's educational rights.

By integrating the Ecological Systems Theory with a Rights-Based Approach, this study gains a powerful dual lens: Bronfenbrenner helps to explain the complex interplay of factors contributing toto the challenges, while the Rights-Based Approach provides the evaluative standard for assessing the gravity of these challenges and identifying avenues for advocating for improved outcomes.

2.3 Socio- economic challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education.

In developed nations, while the prevalence of large-scale orphanages has significantly diminished in favour of foster care and family-based alternatives, institutional care for children with complex needs, disabilities, or behavioural issues still exists. Even in these resource-rich environments, like Netherlands socio-economic challenges subtly manifest, impacting educational access. Research in Italy indicates that children in residential care often come from backgrounds of extreme poverty, neglect, or familial instability, which predisposes them to educational disadvantage (Marion, 2018). Studies from the OECD (2025) highlight that income inequalities shape opportunity gaps from an early age, even within advanced economies, suggesting that children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including those in care, face hurdles in accessing quality education, specialized learning support, and opportunities for higher education. The stigma associated with institutionalization, though less pronounced than in developing contexts, can still affect a child's confidence, social integration in mainstream schools, and consequently, their academic performance (Giddens, 2021). Furthermore, in countries like Germany while public education is often free, hidden costs such as school trips, extracurricular activities, specific learning materials, and technology access can

still create barriers for institutions with limited budgets or children lacking personal financial support.

In developing countries, the socio-economic barriers to education for institutionalized children are often far more pronounced and systemic. In Tanzania for instance, institutionalization is frequently a direct consequence of extreme poverty, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, conflict, natural disasters, or family disintegration due to economic hardship (UNICEF, 2017; Browne & Herbert, 2015). Literature from across sub-Saharan Africa and Asia consistently points to several critical socio-economic impediments stated below.

Orphanages and children's homes in developing nations frequently operate with severe financial constraints, relying heavily on donor funding which can be unstable (World Bank, 2016). This leads to inadequate infrastructure, lack of basic learning materials (textbooks, stationery), insufficient qualified staff, and inability to pay school fees or levies for children, even where primary education is nominally free (Hossain, 2013).

In many impoverished settings like Zambia, the opportunity cost of sending a child to school, even from an institution, can be high. Children, particularly older ones, may be expected or feel compelled to contribute to the institution's upkeep through chores or, in some cases, engage in informal income-generating activities, thus sacrificing school time (UNICEF, 2019).

The broader public education system in many developing countries is often underfunded, lacking adequate resources, and characterized by high student-teacher ratios and demotivated educators (IMF, 2024). Institutionalized children, even if they access mainstream schools, are thus integrated into a system already struggling with quality and equity issues.

In Malawi studies by Phiri (2019) Children from institutional backgrounds often face significant social stigma and discrimination from peers and even teachers, leading to psychosocial challenges that negatively impact their learning and attendance.

Socio-economic factors also affect post-institutionalization transitions. Without adequate financial or social capital, care-leavers struggle to pursue higher education or vocational training, perpetuating cycles of poverty (Katiro, 2020).

Studies from countries like Nigeria and Kenya corroborate that financial situations and emotional stress, stemming from their vulnerable socio-economic status, significantly impede educational continuity and performance for orphans and vulnerable children (Sachiti, 2021).

The Zimbabwean context presents a unique and often exacerbated set of socio-economic challenges for institutionalized children, deeply rooted in the nation's protracted economic instability and high rates of poverty (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2018). While some studies broadly discuss educational access for vulnerable children in Zimbabwe, specific, in-depth research on institutionalized children remains limited.

A significant proportion of the Zimbabwean population, particularly in rural areas, lives in poverty, directly impacting household capacity to afford education (Chikoko, 2022). The national education budget has often been insufficient, with a large proportion consumed by employment costs, leaving minimal funds for educational materials, infrastructure development, or specialized support. This directly translates into poorly resourced schools, especially in rural districts.

As highlighted by the problem statement, institutions in rural areas, often face compounded challenges. Rural schools typically lack basic infrastructure (electricity, internet), have fewer qualified teachers, and are geographically isolated from essential resources (Katiro 2017). This exacerbates the socio-economic disadvantage of institutionalized children in such settings compared to their urban counterparts.

Studies on Zimbabwean orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) acknowledge the psychosocial problems, including anxiety, loneliness, and stigma, often linked to their socio-economic circumstances and parental loss (Chikoko, 2019). These emotional burdens significantly interfere with a child's ability to concentrate and perform academically, regardless of educational provision.

While there is research on "orphans and vulnerable children" (OVC) in general (Kanjanda, 2018), notes that much of it does not specifically disaggregate the experiences of those within formal institutional care from those in kinship or child-headed households. This lack of specific focus makes it difficult to draw precise conclusions about the unique socio-economic barriers faced within institutional settings.

Despite the valuable insights garnered from existing literature across developed and developing countries, and the limited studies within Zimbabwe, several critical knowledge gaps persist concerning the socio-economic challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education, which this study aims to address.

While general socio-economic barriers to education for vulnerable children are well-documented, there is a notable paucity of in-depth research specifically focusing on the unique interplay of these challenges within formal institutional settings in rural Zimbabwe. Most Zimbabwean studies on OVC tend to generalize or focus on broader categories without distinguishing the distinct socio-economic realities of children living in residential care, particularly those in rural areas.

There is limited empirical research that meticulously links the specific funding models, budgetary constraints, and resource allocation strategies within Zimbabwean children's homes directly to the educational access, participation, and performance outcomes of their residents. Understanding how the institution's socio-economic viability (or lack thereof) translates into educational provision is a significant gap.

This study will therefore contribute by providing a focused, empirical examination of these under-researched areas, offering nuanced insights that are crucial for developing targeted and contextually relevant interventions to uphold the educational rights of institutionalized children in Zimbabwe.

2.4 Availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within institutional settings.

In developed nations, the focus on child welfare has largely shifted towards deinstitutionalization, favouring family-based care. However, where residential care persists for children with complex needs, there is a strong emphasis on providing highly individualized educational resources and comprehensive support systems (Marion 2018). Adequacy is defined not merely by presence but by quality and tailoring to individual needs.

Despite these robust provisions, challenges in developed contexts can include difficulties in coordinating services between residential care, schools, and health providers; high staff turnover in institutions; and ensuring that individualized plans genuinely meet complex needs (Koler and Freeman, 2019).

In contrast, institutional settings in developing countries often grapple with severe resource limitations, directly impacting the availability and adequacy of educational provisions. The sheer volume of children in care due to poverty, disease, and conflict overwhelms often rudimentary systems (UNICEF, 2017; World Bank, 2017).

Many institutions lack fundamental learning resources such as sufficient textbooks, notebooks, pens, and even adequate classroom space or furniture (Hossain, 2013). This scarcity forces children to share, limiting individual learning time and engagement.

Institutions frequently rely on staff with minimal formal training in child development or education, and who are often poorly compensated, leading to low morale and high turnover. The direct educational support for children within the institution is thus compromised (Fullan, 2017).

School buildings, especially in rural areas, may be dilapidated, lack electricity, clean water, or proper sanitation, creating an unsuitable learning environment. Similarly, many institutional dormitories do not offer conducive spaces for studying or homework (Newman, 2014).

Digital divides are profound, with most institutions lacking computers, internet access, or other technological tools that are increasingly vital for modern education, further disadvantaging children (UNESCO, 2021).

Psychosocial support, remedial teaching, or counselling services are often non-existent or severely limited due even to funding constraints, leaving children with unaddressed trauma or learning difficulties that impede their academic progress (Oxfam 2014).

High numbers of children per institution, coupled with limited staff and resources, mean that individualized attention is almost impossible to provide, making it difficult to address specific educational needs (UNICEF, 2018).

Studies across Africa and Asia frequently report that institutionalized children attend under-resourced public schools and receive minimal supplementary educational support within the homes themselves, often due to financial constraints and a lack of clear mandates (UNICEF 2019).

In Zimbabwe, the provision of educational resources and support systems within institutional settings is critically influenced by the country's persistent economic challenges and the broader state of its social services sector. While general literature on Zimbabwean education acknowledges issues like teacher shortages, dilapidated infrastructure, and textbook scarcity, particularly in rural areas (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2019), specific research focusing on the internal resource environment of children's homes is scarce.

Zimbabwean children's homes, operate under severe financial strain. Government subsidies are often insufficient and inconsistent, forcing reliance on unpredictable donor funding (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2018; UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2020). This directly translates to a critical deficit in the budget for educational materials, school fees, uniforms, and external educational activities.

Anecdotal evidence and reports from NGOs suggest that many institutions lack basic educational resources such as up-to-date textbooks, exercise books, stationery, and age-appropriate reading materials (Kanjanda, 2018). This often means children rely solely on what is provided by under-resourced public schools.

Institutional structures, especially older ones, may not provide conducive spaces for study, such as quiet areas, proper lighting, or suitable desks, impacting children's ability to complete homework or engage in independent learning.

While caregivers provide essential daily care, many may lack specialized training in educational support, remedial teaching, or understanding specific learning difficulties. High turnover rates due to low pay and challenging conditions further exacerbate this issue (Chikoko, 2019).

Given the resource constraints, dedicated psychosocial support personnel (counsellors, therapists) are often absent in Zimbabwean institutions, leaving children to cope with trauma, grief, or emotional distress that significantly impedes their learning capacity (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2020).

Access to computers, internet, and digital learning platforms is severely limited, particularly in rural institutions, widening the digital divide for these children and hindering their preparation for a technologically evolving world (Robeyns 2016).

Despite the insights provided by general studies on institutional care and education in developing countries, and the broad understanding of socio-economic challenges in Zimbabwe, significant knowledge gaps persist regarding the availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within Zimbabwean institutional settings.

Limited research explores the precise mechanisms through which Zimbabwean institutions acquire, manage, and prioritize the allocation of their often-scarce resources specifically for educational purposes. Understanding the decision-making processes and the impact of funding models on resource provision is an underexplored area.

2.4 Coping strategies that can be employed by institutionalized children in accessing education.

In developed nations, where institutions often operate within more structured and resourced educational systems, the coping strategies of children in care tend to be more aligned with academic resilience and the effective utilization of available support. Research indicates that children in residential care, despite having complex needs, often develop strategies to manage their academic lives and leverage opportunities (The Global Partnership for education, 2018).

While these strategies are often adaptive, their success is highly dependent on the responsiveness of the institutional and educational systems. When support is inconsistent, children may struggle to sustain these coping efforts (Munro, 2011).

In developing countries, where institutional environments are often characterized by significant resource scarcity and socio-economic hardship, the coping strategies employed by institutionalized children in accessing education take on a more fundamental and often arduous character. Here, coping is frequently synonymous with resilience in the face of adversity and the ability to navigate profound structural barriers (UNICEF, 2017; World Bank, 2016).

Seeking Informal Support: Relying on older peers, compassionate but often untrained caregivers, or sympathetic community members for help with homework or navigating school-related issues (African Child Policy Forum, 2018). Developing personal strategies to cope with social stigma from peers or community members, such as minimizing disclosure of their institutional background or building strong social skills to counter negative perceptions.

The efficacy of these coping strategies is often limited by the sheer scale of the systemic barriers. While demonstrating remarkable individual resilience, these strategies cannot fundamentally compensate for chronic underfunding, lack of qualified educators, or inadequate infrastructure (IMF, 2024).

Literature specifically detailing the coping strategies of institutionalized children in accessing education in Zimbabwe is remarkably sparse, representing a significant gap in context-specific knowledge. However, inferences can be drawn from broader studies on orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in the country, combined with the known socio-economic realities of Zimbabwean institutions.

Zimbabwean OVC, particularly those facing poverty and familial disruption, are known to develop strong resilience strategies to survive and pursue education (Kanjanda, 2018). Drawing strength and practical support from their immediate peer group within the institution, and potentially from the local community or faith-based organizations if available (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2020).

However, the specific nuances of how these children overcome the unique institutional and rural educational barriers, such as inconsistent institutional funding for fees or limited access to well-resourced schools, remain largely undocumented. Chikoko, (2022) highlights that despite insights from general resilience studies and literature on OVC, significant gaps exist regarding the coping strategies of institutionalized children in accessing education. There is a critical lack of empirical research that specifically identifies, categorizes, and evaluates the diverse types and actual effectiveness of coping strategies employed by institutionalized children within rural Zimbabwean settings to navigate direct educational barriers.

Current literature seldom details the extent to which Zimbabwean institutions actively teach, support, or inadvertently hinder the development of positive coping strategies for educational access among their residents. Understanding how the institutional environment influences adaptive coping is a significant void (Kajanda, 2018). While individual resilience is admirable, there is a lack of research examining the long-term psychosocial and academic consequences of consistently compelling children to rely on personal coping strategies in the face of persistent systemic failures to provide their right to education.

This study aims to address these critical gaps by providing a nuanced and context-specific examination of the coping strategies employed by institutionalized children at Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home, thereby contributing unique insights that can inform more effective and rights-based interventions

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked the foundational elements critical to understanding the complex challenges institutionalized children face in accessing education. This conceptual scaffolding is crucial for interpreting the intricate interplay of factors influencing educational access. In sum, this chapter has solidified the conceptual and empirical groundwork for the research. By synthesizing existing knowledge and pinpointing areas requiring further investigation.

CHAPTER THREE: METHDOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive exposition of the research methodology employed in this study, detailing the systematic approach undertaken to investigate the educational challenges faced by institutionalized children in Zimbabwe. The meticulous articulation of the research design, population and sampling strategies, data collection instruments, and data analysis techniques was paramount to understanding how the research questions were answered empirically. Ultimately, this detailed methodological framework serves to demonstrate the scientific credibility and systematic approach underpinning this investigation.

3.2 Research Design

A research design refers to the comprehensive plan or blueprint that guides the entire research process. The primary purpose of a well-articulated research design was to ensure that the study effectively addresses the stated research objectives and questions, while simultaneously maximizing the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the findings. Qualitative research designs were employed in this study. Qualitative research has the advantage that in-depth information can be collected about what the community expresses or does as it operate in various natural settings (Borgdan and Biklen, 1990).

3.3 Data collection instruments

In-depth interviews and key informants' interviews were the instruments used for this study in data collection. Allen (2012) supports that key informant interviews are schemes of data gathering whereby the field researcher engages a native informant who has proprietary information that would otherwise be inaccessible or difficult to acquire. According to Showkat (2017), an in-depth interview was used as a method of digging in much detail to extract more information or deep understanding of a subject or concept. Allen (2012) also added that the merits of in-depth interviews are more than just conversations with a purpose, allowing participants to express themselves in their own words.

3.4 Target Population

In this study, the target population was composed of institutionalized children at Ponesai Vanhu children's home. There are 40 children at Ponesai Vanhu. Key informants from the Department of Social Development, Higherlife Foundation, Chindunduma Primary and Secondary School, and DAPP (Development Aid from People to People) were also studied. According to Alvi

(2016), a target population consists of all the members who meet the criteria prescribed for an investigation.

3.5 Sampling and sampling techniques

This research adopted the quota sampling technique that identifies 12 institutionalized children from Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home. Children were put into strata's as per their level of education. The advantage that Creswell (2014) mentioned on quota sampling techniques was that it helps in reducing bias in data as it ensures representation in the sample from the population. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify 5 key informants. Among the advantages of purposive sampling technique was that one can choose participants who have either knowledge or experience in the area being studied Creswell (2014).

3.6 Data collection procedure

Data collection took place at Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home in Shamva District, Zimbabwe. The researcher first obtained informed consent from all participants through the consent forms outlining the study's purpose, procedure, duration, and rights of participants, as per Biros (2018). In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 institutionalized children selected through quota sampling, ensuring representation and lowered bias (Creswell, 2014). Five key informants from Department of Social Development, Higherlife Foundation, Chindunduma Primary and Secondary School, and DAPP were interviewed purposively to benefit from their expertise (Creswell, 2014). Interview guides, as recommended by Marshall and Roseman (2007) structured questions to be focused. Interviews took place in private settings as a precaution for confidentiality, with pseudo names designated to protect participant identities (Israel and Hay, 2006). Consent was obtained from all participants, and data was kept in a safe manner for analysis while maintaining adherence to ethical guidelines such as confidentiality and non-maleficence.

This section meticulously details the sequential steps and methods employed for the systematic collection of qualitative data, ensuring the comprehensive capture of rich, nuanced information pertinent to the research objectives. Given the exploratory and interpretive nature of this study, a multi-method qualitative approach was adopted to triangulate findings and enhance the credibility of the research.

All audio recordings were be digitized and securely stored on a password-protected computer, accessible only to the researcher. Transcripts were anonymized to protect participant identities.

3.7 Data presentation and Analysis

Upon completion of data collection, all qualitative data, primarily derived from in-depth interviews and key informant interviews, underwent thorough preparation for analysis.

All audio-recorded interviews were be transcribed verbatim. This ensures accuracy and allows for detailed engagement with participants' exact words and expressions. Field notes were taken during interviews were digitized and organized. The researcher repeatedly read through all transcripts and field notes. This initial step was crucial for gaining a holistic understanding of the data, identifying initial impressions, and beginning to note recurring ideas or patterns.

Transcribed data and any other textual data were imported into a suitable qualitative data analysis software NVivo to facilitate efficient coding, categorization, and retrieval of information.

The study employed Thematic Analysis as the primary method for analysing the qualitative data. This approach, as outlined by Creswell, (2014) as highly flexible and well-suited for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within textual data. It was appropriate for this study as it allows for the nuanced exploration of experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms related to educational access from the perspectives of institutionalized children and key stakeholders.

The analysed data was presented systematically in Chapter 4 (Findings). The presentation primarily was narrative driven, organized around the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

Each theme was introduced with a descriptive narrative that explains its essence and relevance to the research objectives. Direct, anonymized quotes from interviews were integrated throughout the narrative to provide empirical evidence, add depth, and allow participants' voices to be heard directly. This enhances the authenticity and credibility of the findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the qualitative findings, the following criteria, adapted from Lincoln and Allen (2012), were considered:

- **Credibility:** This enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data, ensuring that the themes genuinely reflect the participants' experiences. Member checking, where

selected participants review preliminary findings, may be employed to validate the interpretation of their perspectives.

- **Transferability:** Qualitative findings were provided, offering rich contextual details about the institutional setting and participants.

- **Dependability:** An "audit trail" was be maintained, documenting the research process, including decisions made during data collection and analysis. This transparency allowed for an external reviewer to assess the consistency of the methods. **Peer debriefing** with experienced qualitative researchers were also be utilized to review the coding and thematic development process.

3.8 Ethical considerations

The ethical framework guiding this research was rooted in the fundamental principles of beneficence (doing good), non-maleficence (doing no harm), respect for persons (autonomy and protection of vulnerable individuals), and justice (fairness in selection and distribution of risks/benefits), as widely recognized in international ethical guidelines and local Zimbabwean research regulations.

Formal ethical approval was sought from Bindura University of science Education and Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home as shown in Appendix 5 and 6. Informed consent and assent were paramount, as the study involved children. The following ethics were adhered to minimising harm and maximising benefit, confidentiality, Anonymity, Data security, Voluntary participations and the right to withdraw.

3.12Chapter Summary

In a nutshell, this chapter delves into the research methodology, design, tools, and methods employed by the researcher. It further discusses the target population, sampling methods, and ethical considerations examined throughout the process

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study in terms of the economic and social challenges that institutionalized children face in their educational endeavors. The data is organized in accordance with the research objectives and gives a comprehensive discussion of the findings. The cross-cutting issues revealed by a narrative of the respondents' experiences will show, in this chapter, how these children are affected by the multifaceted barriers they are faced with and the coping mechanisms and supports available to them. These findings would better comprehend how complex issues surround educational access for institutionalized children.

4.2 Socio-Economic Challenges Faced by Institutionalized Children in Accessing Education

The study revealed that institutionalized children at Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home face a complex web of interconnected socio-economic challenges that significantly impede their access to and progress in education. These challenges primarily stem from the chronic underfunding of the institution and the broader economic distress prevalent in Zimbabwe. A prominent theme emerging from the data was the severe financial limitations experienced by the institution, which directly translated into tangible barriers to education for the children. Participants frequently highlighted the lack of funds for basic school necessities.

This finding aligns with broader literature on developing countries, which consistently points to pervasive poverty and underfunding as a primary impediment to education for vulnerable children (UNICEF, 2017; World Bank, 2006). The Zimbabwean context specifically confirms the impact of economic decline and insufficient state support on social service provision, including children's homes (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2018; ZIMCODD, 2024). This directly reflects the influence of the Macrosystem and Exosystem on the children's Microsystem (the institution) within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. One key informant articulated this stark reality:

> "*Our biggest struggle is money. The government grants are very little and often delayed. We rely mostly on donations, which are not consistent.*"

Child participants corroborated this, expressing feelings of inadequacy and being different from their peers due to lack of proper attire or resources. Tafadzwa Pseudo name (P 9), an older child, shared:

> "*Sometimes you don't want to go to school because your uniform is torn, or you don't have enough books like others.*"

Most of the respondents also indicated that they lacked adequate school uniforms. Some of the respondents indicated that they share uniforms amongst themselves with those who have more. The key informants pointed out that this is mainly because these children are placed at the institution at different times so the newly placed will have to wait a while till they get uniforms after the institution receives funding also this affects the ones that have already been placed because there won't be funds to buy them new uniforms to replace the torn-out ones. This affects their education because due to weather dynamics in winter they struggled to concentrate because of the cold weather. Hossain, (2013) pointed out that Children cannot effectively participate in classroom activities if they are shivering or preoccupied with discomfort, representing a direct barrier within their Microsystem (the classroom and their physical well-being). This physiological impact underscores the critical link between basic needs and educational access, a fundamental tenet of a Rights-Based Approach to education, where the right to education implicitly includes the right to an environment conducive to learning. This finding reinforces the urgent need for more stable and adequate funding mechanisms for children's homes in Zimbabwe, enabling them to meet the fundamental needs that underpin effective educational engagement. One of the respondents Nyasha, Pseudo name (P4) had this to say;

> "*...I was given the school uniform by a senior girl from the institution who had outgrown hers.*"

Beyond direct financial costs, the study revealed that limited resources impacted children's health and nutrition, subsequently affecting their school attendance and concentration. Participants, particularly the children, described experiencing a subtle yet pervasive sense of stigma associated with their institutional background and the perceived poverty of the Home. This had a psychosocial impact that affected their engagement with education. This aligns with literature from both developed and developing countries noting the psychosocial impact of stigma on vulnerable children, affecting their learning (Giddens, 2011; Richtmann Publishing,

2021). The Mesosystem here is crucial, as the interaction between the institutional identity and the school environment creates this challenging social dynamic. It highlights how broader societal perceptions (Macrosystem) filter down to affect individual experiences. Caregivers often spoke of the struggle to provide sufficient and nutritious meals consistently, a caregiver, lamented:

"We try our best, but sometimes there isn't enough variety of food."

Rudo Psudo name (P2) shared a poignant experience:

"Sometimes, other children at school would whisper, she's from the Home."

When asked about who assists them with their homework most respondents indicated that they are assisted by students on attachment and they also said sometimes they are assisted by older children. Some of the respondents pointed that they do their homework at school with their friends before they get back at home. key informants indicated that the children are given study time in the evening so that they help each other with homework and the caregivers assist when necessary. While institutions in developed countries often boast dedicated educational specialists or highly trained care staff to provide academic assistance (Cameron & Maxwell, 2018), this study's findings reflect the stark reality in under-resourced settings like those found in most developing countries. One respondent Emily, Pseudo name (P12) had this to say;

"…I do my homework at school with my friends in the school library."

The majority respondents also pointed out that they do not carry lunchboxes every day to school because they do not like cooked food when they were asked by the interviewer if they carry food to school. Some of the respondents indicated that they do not like carrying lunchboxes because the food will be cold by the time they reach break and lunch time. However, the key informants gave an interesting view that is because the children do not want to wake up early to cook and prepare lunchboxes pointing out also that the institution cannot afford to buy snacks for all of them so that's how they end up not carrying lunchboxes to school.

This challenge significantly impacts their daily nutrition and energy levels at school, which are fundamental to effective learning and concentration. The absence of adequate mid-day sustenance means children are likely to experience hunger during school hours, directly affecting their cognitive function and academic engagement, a phenomenon widely recognized in studies on vulnerable children's health and education (Browne & Herbert, 2015). This is a clear manifestation of a deficiency within the Microsystem (the children's immediate

environment and daily routine) and is exacerbated by Exosystem factors, such as the institution's limited budget, consistent with the broader financial constraints observed in Zimbabwean institutions (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2018; ZIMCODD, 2024). It points to a systemic failure in fulfilling the children's right to adequate nutrition, which, as articulated by the Rights-Based Approach (Fry & Denby, 2013), is inextricably linked to their right to education. Ultimately, this situation forces children to endure hunger, impacting their learning and well-being, despite their expressed preferences. One of the respondent Joyie, Pseudo name (P1) had this to say;

> "...I do not like cooked food as my lunch meal because they spoil my books if they leak."

4.2 The Availability and Adequacy of Educational Resources and Support Systems within Institutional Settings.

The interviews consistently pointed to a severe lack of fundamental educational resources. The children's home had a very limited supply of textbooks, and these were often outdated or in poor condition. Furthermore, the key informants noted that the physical environment within the Home offered minimal dedicated space for studying. Children often did homework in communal areas that were noisy or poorly lit or crammed into dormitories. This finding is highly consistent with literature on underfunded institutions in developing countries, where basic material scarcity and inadequate infrastructure are pervasive issues (Hossain, 2013; IMF, 2024). The lack of modern technology further exacerbates the digital divide, a concern also raised by UNESCO (2021) for vulnerable populations. This highlights a clear deficit within the Microsystem of the children's home, impacting the Rights-Based Approach to education.

Munya Pseudo name (CP5) explained the implications:

> "We share textbooks in class, but at the Home, there are hardly any. "

A significant finding was the apparent inadequacy of dedicated educational support within the institution. While caregivers tried their best, they largely lacked formal training in pedagogical support or addressing learning difficulties. Individualized academic assistance was rare, and children with specific learning challenges often went unnoticed or unsupported. This contrasts sharply with best practices in developed countries which emphasize specialized educational personnel (Child Trends, 2020). The absence of such support within the Microsystem of the

institution significantly disadvantages the children, failing to compensate for potential learning gaps from their earlier experiences or difficulties in mainstream schools. One key informant had this to say;

> *"I help when I can, but I'm not a trained teacher. I have many other duties. Some children need special attention, but we don't have the skills or the time to provide that."*

When asked if the children had access to medical care, the key informants pointed out that the children had AMTOS from DSD however there are some medications that cannot be bought using AMTOS that's where DAPP jumps in and provide funding for medications and other stakeholders such as Learned Cheshire organizations who once provided wheel chairs and rumps for the children living with disabilities but then it's not an everyday thing. From a Rights-Based Approach (Fry & Denby, 2013), this inconsistent access to essential healthcare, especially for children with disabilities, represents a significant infringement on their fundamental human rights, potentially impacting their ability to consistently attend and benefit from educational opportunities due to health-related setbacks (Browne & Herbert, 2015). This reliance on fragmented and unsustainable external support, rather than robust and consistent governmental provisions, is a common challenge in many developing contexts (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2020; World Bank, 2006) and underscores the need for strengthened, reliable public health systems for vulnerable populations. One of the key informants reported;

> *"...the DSD gives AMTOS to the children."*

The study revealed a notable disconnect in the Mesosystem between Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home and the local schools attended by the children. Communication regarding individual child progress, academic challenges, or behavioural issues was often limited and reactive rather than proactive. This lack of a robust mesosystem connection means that potential support opportunities or early interventions are missed, leaving children to navigate the academic interface largely on their own. This finding is consistent with challenges in coordinating services for vulnerable children globally (Munro, 2011) and highlights a failure in upholding the child's right to accessible and integrated education. One key informant reported that;

> *"We usually only hear from the Home if there's a serious problem, like extended absence or disciplinary issues."*

4.3 Coping Strategies Employed by Institutionalized Children in Accessing Education

Despite the formidable socio-economic challenges and resource limitations, the institutionalized children at Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home demonstrated remarkable resilience and developed various coping strategies to continue their pursuit of education. These strategies often reflected individual determination and informal support networks, highlighting their agency in challenging circumstances.

A powerful and pervasive coping strategy was the strong internal drive and perseverance exhibited by the children themselves. Many expressed a deep understanding that education was their pathway to a better future, motivating them to overcome significant hurdles. This high level of self-motivation aligns with findings from other developing countries where education is viewed as a crucial escape from poverty (Hossain, 2013). It highlights a core strength within the individual's Microsystem, where their personal agency becomes a primary coping mechanism, demonstrating academic resilience despite adversity. One respondent Blessing Pseudo name (P3) reported that;

> *"It is hard, very hard. Sometimes you want to give up. But then you think, if I don't study, what will I become? This is my only chance to make something of myself. So, you just push."*

The researcher asked the respondents if they received any help from the NGOs and most of the respondents pointed that they often get assistance from the Higher life foundation which helps with scholarships. However, sometimes the payments are not made on time which will result in children being ousted from school. Some of the respondents pointed out that the fees are paid by DAPP which is the mother board of the institution which provides other school necessities from uniforms to stationery. One respondent Julie, Pseudo name (P8) had this to say:

> *"…we have scholarships from Higher life foundation."*

Children frequently relied on their peers within the institution for academic assistance and emotional support. In the absence of formal tutoring, peer-to-peer learning emerged as a vital coping strategy. Observations confirmed groups of children studying together, often with older children assisting younger ones. This informal peer network within the institution's Microsystem serves as a critical adaptive strategy, demonstrating how children create their own support systems in the face of resource inadequacy. This also reflects the resilience noted in

broader OVC studies in Zimbabwe (Kanjanda, 2018). One respondent Nokutenda Pseudo name (CP7) reported that;

> *"If I don't understand something, I ask Tafadzwa. He's good at maths. We help each other with homework. If one of us has a book, we share it."*

Children demonstrated ingenuity in making do with limited resources. This included carefully preserving scarce stationery, sharing textbooks, and finding alternative study spaces. One observation noted children drawing diagrams in the dust outside when paper was unavailable. This was in agreement with Chikoko, (2022) who notes that children had to share the limited resources that were available in order to survive. One respondent Tafadzwa, Pseudo name (P9) indicated that;

> *"...if there's no paper, you just have to find a way."*

Children also employed emotional coping strategies, displaying a remarkable ability to normalize their challenging circumstances and maintain a positive outlook despite stigma and deprivation. This emotional resilience helps children to mitigate the psychosocial impact of their situation, enabling them to remain engaged in their education. This aligns with generalized findings on resilience in vulnerable populations, where emotional coping is key to persisting in adverse conditions (Herbert, 2015). One respondent Rudo pseudo name (P2) shared her perspective:

> *"It's just how life is here. You learn to live with it. You just focus on school and try not to think about what you don't have. We are all in the same boat."*

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the empirical findings of the study, offering a detailed understanding of the socio-economic challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education, the availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home, and the coping strategies employed by the children. The findings consistently highlight the profound impact of chronic underfunding and broader Zimbabwean economic conditions (Macrosystem/Exosystem) on the immediate educational environment (Microsystem) of the children. These findings provide a rich empirical basis for the conclusions and recommendations to be discussed in the subsequent chapter, directly addressing the research questions framed within the ecological and rights-based theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMANDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the conclusions of the study and offers recommendations based on the research findings that were discussed in the preceding chapter. The insights that emerged from the study indicate the challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education which provide a basis for future research and policy formulation. The recommendations focus on addressing these challenges in such a way as to improve the educational experiences of these children. In synthesizing the findings, the chapter is reflective on the research objectives, and it provides practical steps for the interested parties working towards the education and welfare of institutionalized children.

5.2 Summary of the Research

Chapter one forms the introductory part of a dissertation, presenting the overview, study context, background and problem statement of the study, objectives and research questions. The assumptions of the study, the limitations and delimitation, and the definition of key terms that are used in the study have been included in the chapter. Methodology, research design, target population, sampling techniques, research methods and research methods as well as ethical considerations followed by the researcher were presented in chapter three. The fourth chapter was presenting the findings of the study and a discussion of the findings. Finally, the fifth chapter is about the conclusion containing the Source where the findings of the study gave birth to recommendations.

5.3 Conclusion

The empirical evidence from this study unequivocally demonstrates that the educational access and experiences of institutionalized children at Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home are severely constrained by a confluence of interconnected challenges. These findings strongly reinforce the initial premise that pervasive economic realities within Zimbabwe directly and profoundly impact the institution's capacity to provide a supportive educational environment. The reliance on inconsistent external funding, coupled with insufficient governmental support, creates a precarious system that struggles to meet even the most basic educational and welfare needs. Consequently, these children are compelled to navigate their educational journeys amidst acute material deprivation, health vulnerabilities stemming from nutritional gaps, and significant psychosocial burdens like stigmatization, which collectively diminish their self-esteem,

confidence, and opportunities for meaningful social integration. This comprehensive set of challenges directly contravenes their fundamental right to quality education, as articulated by the Rights-Based Approach. While the children exhibit admirable resilience and employ various coping strategies, such as individual perseverance, peer support, and resourcefulness, their necessity points to systemic failures rather than robust support. It is clear that the burden of accessing education largely falls on the shoulders of these vulnerable children, necessitating urgent and multi-faceted interventions from various stakeholders to establish a truly child-sensitive and supportive learning ecosystem.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the compelling findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the educational experiences and overall well-being of institutionalized children in Zimbabwe:

1. **Strengthen Institutional Funding and Resource Allocation:** The government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development partners, should establish more stable, adequate, and consistent funding mechanisms for children's homes. This funding must specifically cater for essential educational necessities, including tuition fees, exam fees, sufficient and well-maintained uniforms, appropriate learning materials (textbooks, stationery), and basic nutritional provisions that can be easily transported to school.

2. **Develop Structured Educational Support Programs within Institutions:** Institutions should aim to employ or secure regular volunteer support from qualified educators or teaching assistants dedicated to providing academic mentorship, homework assistance, and specialized support for children with learning difficulties. Dedicated, well-lit, and quiet study spaces should also be created and maintained within the Home.

3. **Foster Robust Home-School Linkages and Communication:** Mechanisms for regular and proactive communication between the children's home and the schools they attend must be formalized. This includes scheduled meetings between institutional staff and teachers to discuss individual child progress, academic challenges, psychosocial well-being, and any support needed, thereby strengthening the Mesosystem around the child.

4. **Implement Child-Sensitive Life Skills and Psychosocial Support Programs:** School authorities and the institution should collaborate to integrate life skills development programs that focus on self-concept, confidence-building, and coping mechanisms for dealing with social pressures and stigmatization. This will empower children with emotional resilience and improved self-esteem necessary to withstand external pressures and engage fully in their education.

5. **Promote Community Sensitization and Anti-Stigmatization Education:** Local leadership and community organizations ought to spearhead awareness campaigns to sensitize community members and school populations on the effects of stigmatization and discrimination against institutionalized children. Fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding can significantly improve the social integration and educational experience of these children.

6. **Establish Emergency Funds for New Arrivals:** The institution should maintain a reserve fund specifically allocated for newly placed children. This ensures that essential items like uniforms and initial school supplies can be provided immediately, preventing any delay in their educational access and easing their transition.

7. **Strengthen Collaboration with NGOs and Donors for Holistic Support:** While long-term government funding is crucial, the institution should proactively strengthen partnerships with NGOs, well-wishers, and civil society organizations to secure additional resources for both educational programs and holistic child welfare, including consistent access to health supplies not covered by basic government provisions.

8. **Regular Monitoring and Evaluation of Children's Progress:** Establish a system for regular monitoring of the children's educational progress, attendance, and overall emotional well-being. This ensures that they receive timely interventions and tailored support when needed, adapting to their evolving needs.

These recommendations collectively aim to shift the burden of educational access from individual children's coping mechanisms to a robust, supportive, and rights-affirming system, thereby enhancing the educational experiences of institutionalized children and promoting their successful integration into society.

5.5 Areas for Future Research

This study, while offering significant insights, also highlights several avenues for future research that could further enrich the understanding of educational access for institutionalized children in Zimbabwe and similar contexts:

1. **Longitudinal Studies on Academic Trajectories:** Future research could employ longitudinal designs to track the academic progress and long-term educational outcomes of institutionalized children, offering deeper insights into the sustained impact of challenges and interventions.

2. **Comparative Studies Across Different Institutional Models:** A comparative study examining educational outcomes and support systems across various types of children's homes (e.g., small group homes vs. larger institutions, government-run vs. privately funded) could reveal best practices and contextual differences.

3. **Impact of Specific Intervention Programs:** Research could evaluate the effectiveness of specific educational intervention programs (e.g., tailored tutoring, digital literacy initiatives) implemented within children's homes on children's academic performance and psychosocial well-being.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a conclusive overview of the entire research study. It effectively summarized the key empirical findings from Chapter 4. The chapter then synthesized these findings into a comprehensive conclusion, reinforcing the interconnectedness of the barriers and emphasizing the critical need for systemic support aligned with a rights-based approach. Finally, a set of actionable recommendations was put forth, aimed at directly addressing the identified problems and fostering more equitable educational opportunities for these vulnerable children. The chapter concluded by identifying promising avenues for future research, ensuring that this study contributes not only to current understanding but also to the ongoing discourse and progressive action in the field of child welfare and education.

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ppendix 1: In-depth interview guide

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDREN AT PONESAI VANHU CHILDRENS HOME

Demographic information

1. Age………………………………

2. Sex:

    ☐ Male

    ☐ Female

3. Level of Education

    ☐ Primary Student

    ☐ Secondary student

4. Are you an orphan

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

5. Type of Orphan:

    ☐ single –maternal

    ☐ Single –paternal

    ☐ Double orphan

Socio-Economic challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education

1. Have you ever failed to attend school due to poverty?

2. Do you have adequate school exercise books?

3. Do you have access to school textbooks?

4. Do you have proper school uniforms?

5. Do you carry lunchbox?

6. Do you have enough food before you go to school after school?

7. Who will assist you with your homework?

8. Where do you get educational support?

9. What are the effects of these challenges on your education?

10. Do you face stigmatization at school?

11. How does this affect your self-esteem?

12. How did you integrate into mixed school?

13. Do you consider yourself a confident person?

14. Have you ever been bullied at school?

15. Did you isolate yourself from other children?

16. Have you faced any form of abuse?

17. If yes specify type of abuse?

18. Do you have good medical care?

19. What are the effects of these challenges on your education?

The availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within institutional settings.

1. Describing your general experience with the educational resources and support systems available.

2. What is the availability of physical resources like the library.

3. What is the availability of physical resources like the reading textbooks.

4. Are there enough copies of reading textbooks.

5. "Do you rely more on physical or digital copies, and why?

6. What is the availability of physical resources like computers.

7. Are they easy to access when you need to use them.

8. Are there any specific resources you feel are consistently lacking or difficult to get

9. How do the hours of operation for these facilities impact your ability to use them

10. Do you have WiFi at the institution.

11. What has your experience been like with the internet connectivity.

12. Is it consistently reliable for your study needs.

13. What are some of the challenges you've faced trying to use online resources.

14. How easy is it to get technical support if you have an IT issue.

15. How would you describe the *quality* and *relevance* of the educational resources you use.

16. Are they up-to-date and truly helpful for your learning.

17. Do you feel the resources provided cater to different learning styles or needs.

18. Are there any resources you wish were available to better support diverse learners.

19. Have you ever had need of additional tutoring services.

20. Do you feel you have enough student welfare services.

21. Do you feel there's adequate support for mental health and personal challenges here.

22. How do the availability and adequacy of these resources and support systems ultimately impact your learning experience.

Coping strategies employed by institutionalized in accessing education.

20. What kind of things would make it easy for you to go to school?

21. Do you get help from the   government?

22. Do you get any assistance from NGOs?

23. Do you get any help from well-wishers?

24. What kind of help did you get from the government?

25. What kind of help did you get from NGOs?

26. What kind of help did you get from well-wishers?

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDREN AT PONESAI VANHU CHILDRENS HOME

I am a fourth-year student at Bindura University of Science Education. I am currently studying for a Bachelor of Science (Honors) Degree in Social work. It is a requirement for every student at Bindura University of Science Education to undertake a research project as part of the training program. Therefore, I am carrying out a study entitled, *'Challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education. A case of Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home.'* This study is for academic purposes, the information provided will be treated with strict confidentiality. You are free to decline to answer some questions and even to terminate the interview at any stage. If you are willing to participate in this study the interview will take much of your time

Socio-Economic challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education

1. Have the children ever failed to attend school due to poverty?
2. Do they have adequate school uniforms?
3. Do they have school textbooks?
4. Do they have enough stationery?
5. Do they carry lunchboxes?
6. Do the children have enough food before you go to school after school?
7. Who assists the children with their homework?
8. Where do they get educational support?
9. What are the effects of these challenges on children's education?
10. Do the children face stigmatization at school?
11. How does this affect their self-esteem?
12. Do the children experience bullying at school?
13. Do they isolate themselves from other children?
14. Do the children have access to good medical care?
15. What are the effects of these challenges on your education?

The availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within institutional settings.

1. What educational resources and support systems available.

2. Do institutions have physical resources like the library.

3. Do they have reading textbooks.

4. Are there enough copies of reading textbooks.

5.   Do institutions have physical resources like the like computers.

6. Do you have WiFi at the institution.

7. Do institutions have technical support if you have an IT issue.

8. How would you describe the *quality* and *relevance* of the educational resources at institutions.

9. Do you feel the resources provided cater to different learning styles or needs.

10. Are there any resources you wish were available to better support diverse learners.

11. Do institutions have enough student welfare services.

12. Do institutions have adequate support for mental health and personal challenges.

Coping strategies employed by institutionalized in accessing education.

16. Does the institution get help from the government?
17. Does the institution get help from NGOs?
18. Does the institution get help from well-wishers?
19. What kind of help do the children get from the government?
20. What kind of help do the children get from NGOs?
21. What kind of help do the children get from well-wishers?

Appendix 3: Child ascent

Child Assent

Hello! My name is Audrey Jayaguru. I am a student from Bindura University of Science Education.I'm doing a study to learn about what it's like for children living in homes like Ponesai Vanhu to go to school. I want to understand what makes it easy or hard for you to learn, what helps you with your schoolwork, and how you manage when things are tough. Because you go to school and live here, you know best about these things. Your ideas are super important to help us understand and maybe make things better for children like you in the future. I will record our talk so I can remember everything you say. But your name will not be used, and no one will know it was you.

Everything you say will be kept private.

Please ask me if you have any questions about this!

I have read/had explained to me the information about this study. I understand that I can stop at any time. I agree to participate.

Your Name (Please print clearly): _____

Your Signature/Mark: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian name _____ date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Researcher's Name (Printed): Audrey Jayaguru

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 4: Consent form

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education: A Case Study of Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home

Name: **Audrey Jayaguru** Department: Social Work University: Bindura University of Science Education Contact Email: audiejayaguru@gmail.com Contact Phone: 0776444760/0713651044

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted by Audrey Jayaguru, an Undergraduate student in the Department of Social Work at Bindura University of Science Education. This study aims to understand the challenges institutionalized children face in accessing education, the resources available to them, and the strategies they use to cope. Your participation is voluntary. The objective of this study is to thoroughly investigate:

- The socio-economic challenges that affect institutionalized children's access to education.

- The availability and adequacy of educational resources and support systems within children's homes.

- The coping strategies employed by these children to overcome educational barriers.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate, or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time, for any reason, without explanation or penalty. Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and anonymity: Your name and any other identifying information will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. A pseudo name (a fake name) will be used to refer to you in all transcripts and research outputs.

I have read and understood the information provided above. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name (Printed): Audrey Jayaguru

Researcher's   Signature: _____   Date:

_____

Appendix 5: Permission from University

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

P. Bag 1020
BINDURA, Zimbabwe

Tel: 263 - 71 - 7531-6, 7621-4

Fax: 263 - 71 - 7534

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
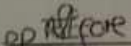
Date: 29 MAY 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH PROJECT IN YOUR ORGANISATION

This serves to introduce the bearer, AUDREY JAYAGURU, Student Registration Number B1851642, who is a BSc SOCIAL WORK student at Bindura University of Science Education and is carrying out a research project in your area/institution.

May you please assist the student to access data relevant to the study, and where possible, conduct interviews as part of a data collection process.

Yours faithfully

MR L.C. NYAMAKA
ACTING CHAIRPERSON

Appendix 6: permission from Ponesai Vanhu

DAPP Development Aid from People to People Zimbabwe

Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home
Cell: 0772466781.Email: abiemarira@gmail.com: P. Bag 2076 Shamva

07/07/2025

Audrey Jayaguru was given permission to collect data at Ponesai Vanhu children's Home. Her topic was **Challenges faced by institutionalized children in accessing education: A case of Ponesai Vanhu Children's Home.** She collected the data from the period April 24 –June 2024.

Regards,

The Superintended,

A. Marira.

PONESAI VANHU CHILDREN'S HOME
NO. LEXINGTON ROAD
HIGHLANDS: HARARE
Cell: 0772 466 781
Email: abiemarira@gmail.com