

Language and Cultural Support Parents/Guardians Offered to Adolescent Girl Pupils during the COVID-19 Era to Ensure Psychosocial and Emotional Stability in Zimbabwe



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ABSTRACT

Prolonged school closures due to COVID-19 worsened the situation and created a new and additional set of challenges on top of already troubled learning circumstances. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) provided for an Alternative-Learning-School (ALS) Out-of-School (OoS) in a phenomenon code-named ‘stop-schooling-without-stopping-learning’ (SSwSL). There has, however, been a gap in parents/guardianship support despite that they are home environment custodians who are crucial in pupils’ schooling life, and particularly in COVID-19-induced OoS new normal learning contexts. Parents/guardians serve as pillars that pupils fall back on in times of schooling distress. The study is based on an inductive qualitative paradigm and case study design. Purposively sampled were education officers, teachers, parents/guardians, and girl pupils who served as key informants. They responded to open-ended interview questions individually and in focus group discussions. The Empowerment Theory informed the study. The Grounded Theory served as a coding scheme and analytical tool. The study revealed mixed perceptions, sometimes punctuated by either ‘non-interference’ or ‘caring’ phenomena by parents/guardians. The study recommends workshopping parents/guardians accordingly in line with the age and uniqueness of their children, especially in critical times of emergency when their support is much needed. The study provides new information on a neglected research area, which is the language and cultural support system that parents/guardians offered to girl-children during the COVID-19 era in Binga, Zimbabwe.

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Publication History

Received: 21st July, 2025

Accepted: 17th November,

2025

Published online:

30th December, 2025

To Cite this Article:

Taringa, Beatrice.

“Language and Cultural Support Parents/Guardians Offered to Adolescent Girl Pupils during the COVID-19 Era to Ensure Psychosocial and Emotional Stability in Zimbabwe.” *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6, no. 14 (2025): 4034 - 4048, <https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202561447>.

Keywords: Parent/Guardian Engagement, Non-Interference, Empowerment Theory, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the education systems globally and significantly flipped the learning of children, especially in rural areas such as Binga. Despite the critical role of parents/guardianship in supporting their children's education, there exists a significant gap in understanding how language and cultural support provided by families during this unprecedented time has influenced the psychosocial and emotional stability of these learners. This study explored the nature and extent of language and cultural support offered by parents and guardians to girl children during the COVID-19 era. Specifically, it seeks to identify the strategies employed by families to mitigate the psychological effects of the pandemic on their daughters, who are often at higher risk of educational disadvantage and emotional distress.

Parents/guardians' engagement in learning of their children is important in boosting pupils' confidence.¹ Henderson and Mapp argue that community, school and family involvement help in enhancing pupils' academic success.² Also, teacher-family communication has been found to be pivotal in successful schooling.³

The fluctuations of lockdowns from level one to level three paralysed critical service delivery systems like health care and education. The experiences caused stress to communities when participants could not project the end of woes, nor were there promises of breakthroughs from the biomedical arena. When humanity is confronted with gaps in knowledge, like the unavailability of vaccines for COVID-19, they find gap fillers like the resuscitation of traditional cultural means. The development saw the unusual phenomenon of 'rewinding the social clock'. Thus, the 'bush' again became their 'pharmacy' as noted by Taringa, with the traditional healers and backyard midwives being the attendants of the day.⁴ As people continue fighting for survival against the deadly, virulent infectious COVID-19, the phenomenon of gullibility sets in and especially taking its toll on communities and mainly skewing in favour of the adolescent girl pupils who are trapped in the matrix of gender, traditional cultural unwritten community constitution, COVID-19 pandemic and the environment without the school support system. It can be argued that such experiences are worse for those communities and families living in extreme poverty whose natural and spiritual environments become their 'pharmacy and consultancy centre'.

When COVID-19 was announced by the BBC in 2020, no one projected the magnitude it reached that which changed the world's education, culture and economic terrain. It has, however, become a force that reconfigured the education system worldwide in a number of ways never been imagined before. COVID-19 flipped the classroom, turning the educational spaces and operations upside down. The receding of the schooling frontier into backyard burdened parents and guardians. The situation compounded the already troubled Binga community, which is battling child marriage regardless of gender. Thus, closure leads to scourge in child marriage and where children sometimes get back to school as parents already. Thus, parents and guardians are forced to care for children and their children. In that regard, a lot of discussions to do with sexuality are going on globally according to which is a sign that the gender discourse remains topical and is continuing to haunt communities.⁵ King and Beattie noted that since 1966, gender has been officially monitored by the gender development index, which shows clearly how much still needs to be achieved before contemporary societies reach an equitable gender balance in all areas of social life.⁶

The home's social and cultural capital base assumes the position of hosting the education system. The parents/guardians, home custodians, found themselves in the educational frontline while sometimes ill-equipped in terms of resources and expertise. The pupil protection mechanisms that are structurally designed according to the school structures became obsolete as beneficiaries were locked down in homes through various lockdown levels. The school system, by its very nature, has afforded girl children pupils the much-needed security for psychosocial and emotional stability. It ring-fenced pupils' human rights and protected pupils, inclusive of boys and girls of various age groups in their diversity. The school environment, atmosphere, staff and administration deter potential abuse of girl pupils from outside and even among the school community. These schools are pupils' custodians and have the power to approach courts of law to defend the rights of their chief client, and the communities are well aware of that. Through

¹ Wendy S. Grolnick and Maria L. Slowiaczek, "Parents' Involvement in Children's Schooling: A Multidimensional Conceptualization and Motivational Model," *Child Development* 65, no. 1 (February 1994): 237, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1131378>.

² Anne T Henderson and Karen L Mapp, *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (National Center for family & community connections with schools, 2002); Konstantina Koutrouba et al., "An Investigation of Greek Teachers' Views on Parental Involvement in Education," *School Psychology International* 30, no. 3 (June 10, 2009): 311–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034309106497>; Matthew A Kraft and Shaun M Dougherty, "The Effect of Teacher–Family Communication on Student Engagement: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment," *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness* 6, no. 3 (2013): 199–222; Angeliki Lazaridou and Aspasia Gravani Kassida, "Involving Parents in Secondary Schools: Principals' Perspectives in Greece," *International Journal of Educational Management* 29, no. 1 (2015): 98–114.

³ Koutrouba et al., "An Investigation of Greek Teachers' Views on Parental Involvement in Education"; Kraft and Dougherty, "The Effect of Teacher–Family Communication on Student Engagement: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment"; Lazaridou and Gravani Kassida, "Involving Parents in Secondary Schools: Principals' Perspectives in Greece."

⁴ Nisbert T. Taringa, "Towards a Shona Environmental Ethic" (University of Zimbabwe, 2008).

⁵ Z. Bauman, *Globalisation: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press in Association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000).

⁶ U. King and T. Beattie, *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross Cultural Perspectives* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

uniforms, all pupils, boys and girls appear young and sacred, which in itself serves as a security measure. The pedagogical environment and atmosphere dictate the pace and tone in which pedagogical enterprise is prioritised. Unfortunately, the sudden change of venue to homes, and in particular, the traditional cultural and linguistic resources, reclaimed their position. Intangible cultural block has been blamed for posing challenges in intervention efforts in controlling and containing pandemics the world over.⁷

To that effect, several scholars have called for cultural reconsideration in tailoring intervention strategies against pandemics,⁸ hence this article. This is so since culture has been nabbed as a major contributor to life-threatening masculinity that endangers women and children. In the same vein, it has been argued that there is a time when change may be inevitable and unavoidable.⁹ In this case, African traditional religious myths may seem inadequate in combating global issues like gender and the pandemic. Challenges that confront societies in the 21st century are becoming more frequent and complex in nature. In a period of just three years, Zimbabwe experienced Cyclone Idai, which caused massive destruction in Manicaland and Masvingo provinces. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc globally, and Zimbabwe was not spared. Thus, communities are called to think out of the box. In this case of COVID-19, just like any other pandemic of its generation and magnitude, it caused anxiety and psycho-social and economic distress among Zimbabweans. The long stay at home led to some girl pupils getting pregnant, giving birth and coming back to school with a difference. With the conditional and sometimes inaccessibility of health care services, the sexual and reproductive health rights of the adolescent girl pupils, just like any other woman, were violated. Fontanesi et.al. argued that COVID-19 causes stress to parents.¹⁰ The psychosocial support and health and well-being of girl pupils are other dimensions that may be underestimated in scholarly discourses but are crucial in the run-up to Vision 2030 and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Based on the Empowerment Theory, this study seeks to uncover parental/guardianship language and cultural support systems offered to adolescent girl pupils in such critical times of emergencies like COVID-19.

Contextualising the Article

There is a mixed bag of opportunities and challenges that female pupils are experiencing in primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe. The noted concerns have to do with: completion rates, repetition rate, child marriage and education and child labour. These are discussed in detail in the subsequent sub-sections below.

The Completion Rate

The completion rate is also a cause for concern for primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe. There are some notable disparities between rural and urban divides and social class that exist between the affluent and underprivileged societies. There are provincial and gender-based differences in the completion rate, as noted by the Zimbabwe-MICS-EAGLE-Education-fact-sheets-2021 report. The noted disparities are as follows.

⁷ Chelsea Bond and Mark Brough, "The Meaning of Culture within Public Health Practice-Implications for the Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health," *Beyond Band-aids: Exploring the Underlying Social Determinants of Aboriginal Health.*, 2007, 229–38.

⁸ James Fairhead, "Understanding Social Resistance to the Ebola Response in the Forest Region of the Republic of Guinea: An Anthropological Perspective," *African Studies Review* 59, no. 3 (December 19, 2016): 7–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2016.87>; Shabir Ahmad Lone and Aijaz Ahmad, "COVID-19 Pandemic—an African Perspective," *Emerging Microbes & Infections* 9, no. 1 (2020): 1300–1308; Nomasonto Buso Doris Magobe, *Strategies to Facilitate Living a Health Promoting Lifestyle for Patients with Hypertension at Primary Health Care* (University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2016); Samuel Ngigi and Doreen Nekesa Busolo, "Behaviour Change Communication in Health Promotion: Appropriate Practices and Promising Approaches," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development* 7, no. 9 (2018): 84–93.

⁹ E. Wamala et al., *Cultural Heritage And Contemporary Change Series Ii*, vol. 4 (Michigan: The Council For Research In Values And Philosophy, Library Of Congress Cataloguing-In-Michigan Publication., 1999); Yatta Kanu, "Increasing School Success among Aboriginal Students: Culturally Responsive Curriculum or Macrostructural Variables Affecting Schooling?," *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 1, no. 1 (2007): 21–41.

¹⁰ Lilybeth Fontanesi et al., "The Effect of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Parents: A Call to Adopt Urgent Measures.," *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12, no. S1 (August 2020): S79–81, <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000672>.

Completion Rate Based on Social Class and Status

According to the Curriculum review narrative report (2022-2023) in Zimbabwe, children belonging to the poorest quantile and those living in rural areas have particularly low completion rates. At all levels, rural and poor children have completion rates below the national average, whereas urban and richer children have been noted to have completion rates above the national average. The gap between the completion rates of children from the richest and the poorest wealth quantiles widens starkly as they progress through the education system. It was empirically proven that, while 37% of children from the richest quantile complete upper secondary education, only 1% of children from the poorest quantile do so. Expressed as ratios, 1.3 times more children from the richest quantile complete primary education compared to children from the poorest quantile, 5 times more children from the richest quantile complete lower secondary education compared to children from the poorest quantile, and 37 times more children from the richest quantile complete upper secondary education compared to children from the poorest quantile. This is the reason the study concentrated on the rural areas in Binga in Matabeleland North. Also, Masvingo is among those with a low completion rate as a province.

Completion Rate Based on Provincial Location

The Education Fact Sheet notes serious provincial disparities in education that exist in Zimbabwe. Overall, Bulawayo, Midlands, and Harare have higher completion rates across all levels of education. In contrast, other provinces have much lower completion rates. Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Matabeleland North, and Masvingo all have upper secondary completion rates of less than 10%. At the primary school level, some provinces are close to achieving universal completion, such as Bulawayo and Harare. In particular, Harare has the highest completion rate in the primary and lower secondary levels, and Bulawayo is said to have the highest completion rate in the upper secondary level.

Completion Rate Based on Pupils' Gender

The education fact sheet included a survey on the completion rate by sex and religion. It was discovered that boys are less likely to complete primary school, but girls are less likely to complete an education level as they progress through the education system. Between urban and rural areas, more than two-thirds of the children who do not complete an education level reside in rural areas, and the gap narrows at higher levels of education. Children from the two poorest wealth quantiles make up over half of those who do not complete primary and lower secondary education. The Apostolic sect is said to be the largest religious group in the country, and so despite having high completion rates, their numbers mean that they are over-represented in this type of profile. Across all three levels, completion rates are lower, and the number of children not completing each level is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Completion rates in Zimbabwe are strongly associated with children's socio-economic status. The completion rates for the poorest quantile drop from 86% at the primary level to less than 1% at the upper secondary level. Thus, this article is critical in that it acknowledges already existing disparities which worsen in times of pandemics.

Child Marriage and Education

Documentary review findings from the education fact sheet in Zimbabwe reveal that the share of male pupils entering child marriage is extremely small. However, about 34% of young men and women, 20-24 years old, married or entered a union before their 18th birthday. Child marriage is strongly associated with other socio-economic status. Specifically, youth who reside in rural areas and who come from poor families have higher chances of getting married before 18. There is also a strong negative relationship between early marriage and education. Over 60% of girls with primary education reported getting married before 18, but only 6% of youth with upper secondary education did so. In Zimbabwe, female youth who do not marry early have a very high literacy rate of 95%. In contrast, those who were married between 15 and 18 have literacy rates 7% below their peers. For youth who got married before 15, their literacy rate is even lower, at 78%. The disparity in ICT skills is even more evident. Among females who got married early, only 4% have ICT skills, compared to 22% among youth who did not marry early. In the MICS module, children are considered to be in child labour if they engage in at least one of two categories:

economic activities and household chores. Contrary to this, boys are also a common feature in the child marriage phenomenon.

Child Labour and Education

A total of 28% of all children aged 5-17 years are engaged in some form of child labour, with a higher prevalence in boys than in girls. Compared to children who live in urban areas, children in rural areas have much higher chances of engaging in child labour (7% versus 35%). Child labour status is also strongly associated with wealth, as nearly 40% of the children in the bottom wealth quantile are in child labour, and only 7% of the children in the top wealth quantile are in child labour. Up to the age of 11, school attendance of children who are working is as high as for those who are not. However, starting from age 12, engaging in child labour is strongly and negatively associated with school attendance. Additionally, a lower share of working children have foundational reading and numeracy skills as compared to non-working children. The comparative analysis may have ignored domesticity that skewed in favour of girls.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article was informed by the Empowerment Theory, which is complemented by the Ecological Theory.¹¹ This theory seeks to help parents/guardians in developing the skills needed to assess their community and gives them decision-making power in developing and implementing community change projects. It engages parents/guardians in participating in empowering activities that can help adolescent girls avoid risky behaviors and develop into productive, healthy adults.

The Empowerment theory provides a unique conceptual framework for developing support systems to enhance the positive adolescent girls' development because it incorporates the notion that health promotion requires not only that girls develop specific skills and positive assets, but also that they become motivated to actively apply these skills and knowledge to become agents of positive change for themselves and in their communities.¹² Thus, support systems based on empowerment theory focus on building positive assets, connecting girl pupils with local resources, with parents/guardians serving as role models, and engaging girl pupils in community service activities.

The empowerment theory has ecological principles because it focuses attention on the social contexts in which girl pupils develop educationally, the interactions between these contexts, and the roles they can play within these school and community contexts. An intervention approach informed by these complementary principles enhances positive adolescent girl pupils' development by engaging them in relevant ecological settings where they can learn skills, practice those skills, establish the social resources to effectively navigate the social contexts in which they find themselves and develop into healthy adults. The theory seeks to empower individuals and communities to gain personal, interpersonal and political power to better their lives. This work also strives to challenge systems that hinder these groups from meeting their needs.

If not empowered, these adolescent girls may feel helpless in their lives for any number of reasons, but empowerment theory focuses on how oppression contributes to this experience. It centers on helping marginalised people at individual, group and community levels gain the personal, interpersonal and political power to improve their lives. The theory argues that empowered individuals have the characteristics of high self-esteem, self-efficacy, control over their lives and increased sociopolitical and civic access.¹³ The view is informed by self-determination, autonomy, and collaboration. By focusing on competence rather than deficits in individual or social functioning, the empowerment model supports resourcefulness and the development of skills to remove social barriers for individuals and communities. By focusing on competence rather than deficits in individual or social functioning, the empowerment model supports resourcefulness and the development of skills to remove social barriers for individuals and communities. There are key principles of the empowerment theory, which are: being respectful and

¹¹ Marc A Zimmerman, "Empowerment Theory: Psychological, Organizational and Community Levels of Analysis," in *Handbook of Community Psychology* (Springer, 2000), 43–63.

¹² Marc A. Zimmerman, "Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 23, no. 5 (October 1995): 581–99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02506983>; Zimmerman, "Empowerment Theory: Psychological, Organizational and Community Levels of Analysis."

¹³ Zimmerman, "Empowerment Theory: Psychological, Organizational and Community Levels of Analysis."

non-judgmental, building a relationship where the person feels comfortable to discuss their feelings and what they want, focusing on strengths and abilities, supporting and encouraging involvement in decision making and respecting the decisions a person makes about their own life. The two-pronged theory of empowerment theory with inbuilt ecological principles is especially handy in accounting for girl pupils' education in the matrix of African Traditional Religion and the COVID-19 pandemic and the social, spiritual and natural environments. The analogy goes like peeling off each of the environments in trying to free and empower the girl pupils to reach optimal schooling performance.

METHODOLOGY

From the above discussion, it is clear that there is an association among gender, social background, completion, and child marriage in general in primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe. The article sets out to account for parental and guardianship language and culture support offered to adolescent school girls during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on an inductive qualitative paradigm, a case study design of Binga, which implies that the article moved from data to theoretical principles. The support systems parents and guardians offered are based on the data generated by the selected key informants. It is the content and discourse analysed on selected excerpts from the purposively selected key informants that lead to theoretical propositions. According to Bryman, the inductive theory “implies that a set of theoretical ideas drives the collection and analysis of data.”¹⁴ In this article, it is the actual views of interviewees led to an understanding girl pupil educational opportunities among the four facets. It also adopted an interpretivist epistemology; hence, reality is a social construction phenomenon, and there are multiple realities. In this case, the interviewees' experiences were the basis for coming up with theoretical constructs of girl pupils' education in the matrix among gender, culture, environment and pandemic. The exploration set out to uncover whether the characters' cultural acquisitions are assets or liabilities in hopes of achieving a gender-equal society, a positive environmental ethic and responsible and life-saving/threatening masculinity and femininity in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ontologically, the article was informed by constructivism, which further adds that “there are varied and multiple truths leading the researchers to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing the few categories or ideas”. In this case, there is no one-size-fits-all set of gender conception, positive environmental ethics, and responsible and life-saving masculinity and femininity that is universally agreed upon and adopted worldwide. Hence, the article is not taking an exclusive position but rather is arguing for the possibility of an alternative Zimbabwean breed that uniquely suits and hooks nicely to the Binga people's cultural context. In tandem with the constructivist ontology, the article used a revelatory case study to reveal girls' educational opportunities in the matrix of the four variables as they are presented by interviewee narrations. This entailed a selection of the interview excerpts that support the theoretical proposition that the Binga community has its own position on the female pupil's education in response to the ATR, social, spiritual, and natural environments in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which, if ignored, may render intervention strategies and efforts futile. The purposively sampled interview excerpts were screened in cycles until saturation was reached. Binga community has been chosen as a representative sample to offer insights into the cultural assets that Zimbabwe relies on in interpreting and interacting within and between gender species, with the environments, and in an effort to contain and manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sampling technique for gathering research participants is made in line with Punch's assertion that “we cannot research on everyone, everywhere, doing everything”, as the scope may be too wide.¹⁵ In the same light, this article made use of a purposively sampled case study of the Binga community and selected interview excerpts that support the theoretical construct until saturation. As noted by Punch, “data collection and analysis are done in cycles and stop after two repetitions and even continue until theoretical saturation is achieved.”¹⁶ In analysing the data collected for this article, the authors made use of the critical content and discourse analyses of the excerpts on how participants have come up with the cultural frame that guides their contact in social, spiritual and natural environments in the context of the COVID-19

¹⁴ A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press., 2012), 6.

¹⁵ K. F. Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2013).162.

¹⁶ Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*.

pandemic. The data was triangulated with discourse analysis to help in describing, explaining, and interpreting the position of the girl pupil and her educational opportunities. Also, insights from textual analysis are included to enrich the perspective.

In organising data, the article employed the thematic web-like data analysis and interpretation. Thematic networks allow the derivation of themes of parental/guardian support systems from the selected interview data excerpts, allowing the unearthing of resilient themes salient at different levels. This also assisted the author in extracting data, grouping it into sub-themes, themes, and global themes that are eventually woven into a reportable story.¹⁷ The dynamic translation theory¹⁸ was used, where the excerpts were in Shona, as it allows the relativity of equivalence of interview excerpts from the purposively sampled literary texts. The theorising about parental/guardianship support systems emerges from the data collected and analysed, depending on advice from Charmaz's grounded theory.¹⁹

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards relevant to this kind of research. Permission from the appropriate community authorities was requested and granted. The author, being a consultant, came up with the Zimbabwean Heritage-Based Curriculum.²⁰ Participants were made aware of the study's goal. Additionally, pseudonyms, rather than the participants' real names, were used to guarantee confidentiality. Participants gave their consent and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any moment if they no longer wanted to.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Support Systems Parents/Guardians Offered to Girl Pupils During the COVID-19 Era

Participants responded to a number of questions that are thematically represented below:

Medicinal and Health Support

The participants' narrations are evidence that parents/guardians provided traditional medicinal and health support services. These are indicated in the following responses: "I would make sure that I fetch *choonzwe* and *busika/ tamarind fruit* daily for everyone, as they serve as a broad spectrum for preventing multiple ailments. The whole family would take medicinal *ngwevuma*, which is used by athletes for easing breathing and increasing endurance, whether sick or not." In another instance, a respondent stated, "For my family, I would make sure they frequently take *ngwevuma* to prevent colds. Also, traditional medicinal relish, pods and medicinal vegetables became a common sight in my kitchen." Another participant said, "For the colds, I steam and drink warm water for my family, and it worked well. There was a time when we all got sick in the house." Another highlighted, "I was using *kantookaniini* medicinal tree bark and leaves for steaming. I was also using *muchekusani* even if I was aware that it is meant for oral infections." A participant in resonance added, "Yes! We had to use every other option so that we could prevent all dangers that may require us to go to the hospital. We were aware that it was almost impossible to get access to health care services."

It was difficult to get to the hospital as there was a movement restriction. The health centres would require a person to have recent COVID-19 test results to be attended to in a hospital or clinic. So, for men, it was possible to avoid visiting a hospital or clinic unless a person had a chronic condition, but for women, it was difficult to go without family planning services."

The above discussion shows that people devise gap fillers whenever they encounter knowledge gaps in life. The community resorted to traditional herbs, where, as indicated by Taringa and Taringa, the environment turned into a pharmacy and their communities turned into a consultancy centre.²¹ Thus, they

¹⁷ Jennifer Attride-Stirling, "Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Research* 1, no. 3 (December 1, 2001): 385–405, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307>.

¹⁸ S Boushaba, "An Analytic Study of Some Problems of the Literary Translation: A Study of 2 Arabic Translations of K Gibran's the Prophet," *Unpublished PhD Thesis*. University of Salford. Retrieved from Usir. Salford. Ac. Uk/14668/1/Doi/136, 1988.

¹⁹ Charmaz K., *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London: SAGE, 2014).

²⁰ Alexis Zickafoose et al., "Barriers and Challenges Affecting Quality Education (Sustainable Development Goal #4) in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030," *Sustainability* 16, no. 7 (March 24, 2024): 2657, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16072657>.

²¹ Nisbert T. Taringa, "The Potential of Ubuntu Values for a Sustainable Ethic of the Environment and Development," *Religion and Development in Africa* 25 (2020): 387–400.

were using barks of a certain thorn tree and steaming to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Knowledge about alternative medicine was an empowering strategy for adolescents. In this case, the female pupil is in an ATR religious environment that is forcing her to believe in the natural environment as a 'pharmacy'. This was triggered by the vacuum created by the unavailability of a vaccine for COVID-19 for some time, which the Binga community and other communities were trying to plug.

Counselling Services and Mystifying Womanhood

School-going adolescent girl pupils during the COVID-19 era were more exposed than before to physical, sexual, and psychosocial violations in the home or OoS settings. Some of the participants narrated their ordeal. The teacher told me, "A woman expires, if I keep on postponing marriage, I will expire before getting married." My husband told me, "The warmth of a woman's body is short-lived and should be used while the window is still open." A mother has this to say, "My daughter experiences menstruation at the age of 8. I tried the traditional healers, prophets and hospital, but nothing changed. She still bleeds monthly." Another girl pupil said, "My mother told me that it is in times of crisis that gullible people get into trouble and that she is the only one to advise me on womanhood." An education officer said, "We have three pairs of Ordinary Level pupils who are married to each other. This means that if they are coming back to school, they are coming in as couples, parents and heads of families. They may have been influenced by falsified myths that if they die single, they are buried with a rat." Another education officer said, "I remember when we were young boys, we often heard big boys saying 'she is now ripe' referring to girls who would have developed breasts."

In the above scenarios, through the falsified myths, the elderly as a social group impose much greater restrictions on adolescents in the guise of tradition.²² The narrations are bringing out girl and boy pupils nested in a social ATR environment, the COVID-19 danger that threatens their lives in an information-restrictive environment. The situation disempowers both boy and girl pupils in terms of their Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR).²³ The narrations confirm mother-daughter closeness noted by Gaidzanwa, and women are portrayed as perishable, as they expire within a window period.²⁴ The mother-daughter closeness ensures the female pupil's moral and emotional support in times of COVID-19 and in social and spiritual environments. Also, such support was necessary in preventing girl pupils from gullibility, considering myths and falsehoods that women expire and that the warmth of a woman's body is just a window period. The phenomenon of child marriage, which had been mostly a feminine trait, is now cutting across both genders.

All the same, the negative effects skew towards the female pupil who may be pregnant, giving birth and breastfeeding, as well as taking domesticity roles, which may subsequently reduce schooling time even if she is allowed to rejoin the school system. While in previous studies patriarchal and cultural systems were used to disempower female pupils, the current finding is disempowering both genders who enter into early and child marriages. According to Giddens, those myths about wo/manhood are a tradition that is meant to transmit [Tonga] culture for safekeeping and continuity.²⁵ The kings, Emperors, and Priests are said to have been using traditions to suit themselves and legitimate their rule. In this case, patriarchal culture proffers the myths in order to psyche women into subservience. Tradition provides a framework for guiding actions that is largely unquestioned, and the custodians are not experts but users who are capable of interpreting tradition's ritual truths.

Upon asking the question about what counselling services the girl children received from their parents and guardians, the following sentiments came out:

A parent said, "I told my daughter that, if she gets into a relationship with a man, she will get pregnant. I had no choice since I knew no one would tell her when she is out of school." Another parent said, "I had a torrid time. My daughter and I were pregnant. We used the traditional herbs for widening

²² W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

²³ Ezra Chitando and Nisbert T Taringa, "The Churches, Gukuruhundi, and Forgiveness in Zimbabwe," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 2 (2021): 187–96.

²⁴ R. Gaidzanwa, *Images of Women in Shona, English and Ndebele Literature*. (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1985); Beatrice Taringa, *Implications of the Portrayal of Women in Shona Proverbs for Gender Sensitive Teaching and Learning of Chishona* (Harare: The Institute of Development Studies and Partner Organisations, 2014).

²⁵ A. Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives* (London: Profile Books, 2002).

the ‘way’ to avoid scissors and stitches when giving birth. We used elephant dung. I was fearing for her, but she made it.” Another parent said, “I knew that in a crisis children get mischievous. I warned my daughter not to play around with boys. I realised that there are no more teachers to teach my daughter about Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) while she was at home.” A guardian said, “It was unfortunate that most public communications concentrated on COVID-19, ignoring SRHR, which left SRHR orientation of boy and girl pupils strictly in the hands of the family, who may not be trained on that.” Another girl pupil said, “My mother told me that my pants should not be seen by anyone. Also, that I should report to her on anyone who touches my body.”

The narrations above are evidence that an out-of-school schooling ambushed parents/guardians. Most of the parents were caught napping, and they felt over-stretched. It is unfortunate, especially in Zimbabwean cultures where Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) issues are treated with utmost secrecy and especially between children and parents, which is treated as a taboo. To this effect, uncultured citizens feast on innocent adolescent girl pupils by intimidating them through cultural myths. Thus, parenthood and guardianship have to be reconstructed to be extended into covering the aunt/ uncle and school vacuum created by distance. To help maintain the necessary decency, parents/guardians took advantage of the rich Zimbabwean intangible ethnolinguistic resources in opening and enhancing sustainable dialogue on sexuality health orientation that spans beyond COVID-19. There is a notable gap in the dialogue that, as narrations, parents/guardians are talking in riddles, which may not be clear to the female pupil. Also, they are concentrating on pregnancy as if it were the only risk encountered in sexual relationships. The finding in this category confirms Taringa’s view that women are often the victims of love relationships.²⁶

Financial and Material Resources

When asked what the financial and material resources support that parents and guardians offer to the female pupils the participants gave the following narrations: One participant said, “After realising network and connectivity challenges that hampered online out-of-school learning for our rural children, we pulled resources and hired community teachers for our children. Our community was roughly safe from COVID-19, and we agreed to avoid hiring teachers from outside, so we hired some school leavers and teachers from neighborhood.” Another parent said, “I provided the necessary stationery. I provided for the payment for out-of-school community school tuition. I provided the food. It was a tough time that I battled to provide food for the family.” Another female pupil said, “The most traumatic issue was to do with nice dressing while out of school uniform daily. I did not have good clothes to put on. My mother told me that after paying for the lessons, she could not buy me new clothes. I could not feel comfortable with the usual old clothes.” Another girl said, “My boyfriend bought me a fashionable dress. My aunt confiscated the dress and told me that I should tell him that my aunt wanted to see him. I ended up wearing it on my way to school and kept it in my school bag.” Another guardian said, “It is just that these children could not understand what we were going through during the COVID-19 era. Business was low, and the little resources we were left with needed prioritizing. And certainly not for buying luxury clothes.” Another participant said, “Some parents and guardians had suggested that we have our children come to the community schooling points (CSPs). That was shot down by some who argued that we may run into problems with the schools that may not want to identify with the CSPs. Thus, our children continued wearing home clothes in these CSPs, and parents complained that the situation widened the already existing inequalities.” Another participant added, “Do not hesitate to tell the truth that dropouts were experienced and the rate skewed in favour of girl pupils.” Another participant said, “Our girl pupil remained largely vulnerable with the hidden hand of the ‘blesser phenomenon’ being the major stumbling block to the achievement of inclusive and quality education.” A participant added, “Even after the organisers of the CSPs announced that children should come in and pay later, some parents and guardians said they feared that they may not be able to offset the bill cumulatively. In this case, a number of pupils, both boys and girls, remained barred from benefiting from the CSPs’ innovation.” Another parent said, “I personally had no hope of getting the money. I had been a cross-border. The COVID-19 era movement

²⁶ Taringa, *Implications of the Portrayal of Women in Shona Proverbs for Gender Sensitive Teaching and Learning of Chishona*.

restriction paralysed my sole source of money. There was no point for me to have my son and daughter in the CSPs with no hope of getting the money.”

The narratives above are evidence of COVID-19-induced innovations which led to the creation of CSPs as gap fillers for filling the gap created by OoS learning spaces. The COVID-19 era, besides paralyzing economic activities, has caused anxiety, fear and stress to the participants regarding the sustainability of the CSPs, given the drop in the cash flow. The finding confirms Letzel, Pozas, and Schneider that energetic students stressed parents, and nervous teachers, in that parents had lost sources of income while girl pupils demanded new clothes.²⁷

Moral Support and Assistance in School Work

Upon asking the question of how parents and guardians would ensure that they give girls pupils moral support and assistance in school work. This is what they had to say: A parent says, “I used to tell my daughter that the COVID-19 woes would soon be over. Hard work will be rewarded. Just prepare for your examinations.” Another parent said, “I tried my level best to assist my daughter, but CALA items were just too much and overwhelming. Teachers continue to send them through WhatsApp with inadequate instructions. I just continued to cheer my daughter up as she worked.” Another girl pupil said, “It is tough. Taking schooling home without teachers, colleagues, and a library was hopeless. The only hope is internet connectivity. I had to rely on calling someone else, which caused me anxiety. I almost dropped out of school.” Another female pupil said, “Schooling and home domestic chores in the same space and jostling for my time. The school environment used to spare me from domesticity. At school, I used to concentrate on schooling without being bothered by caring for my young siblings.” Another pupil said, “Home space resuscitates the unnecessary multi-tasking where I will be cooking on one hand and doing my school work. I made the work cards for reading while working in the garden. I do not like doing my work with my young siblings constantly disturbing me.” Another pupil said, “My grandmother calls me countless times when I am at home. It was even worse during COVID-19 when I was at home 24/7 daily. It is disturbing when I am at home trying to concentrate, then someone calls me.” Another pupil said, “Our families boosted our confidence and made us feel loved in a distressing situation. They helped keep us strong. They are role models from which we learn values like caring, respect and faith.” Another participant said, “The backyard learning environment gave the parents and guardians an opportunity to experience schooling together with their children, especially those with special learning needs. They could understand some of the demands that schools make in trying to accommodate such pupils by making instructional materials accessible formats, engaging them fully despite differences, and making them freely navigate the school environments with the barest minimum of aid or assistance. The resources are key enablers in reducing stress, anger, frustration, guilt and unnecessary shame. The enablers foster independence, which is an important ingredient in boosting a sense of self and enhances self-esteem.”

From the scenarios above, it is clear that parents/guardians did not give much help to their children. This therefore refutes findings by Barge and Loges, who argued that parents give children confidence and moral support.²⁸ Cullingford and Morrison have suggested the need for a sound relationship between schools and parents.²⁹

Home Learning Spaces as Opposed to School

Home-based learning spaces have their own challenges that further worsen the already existing inequalities. The narratives below are evidence of the politics of learning space complexities during COVID-19 in Zimbabwe and particularly in the Binga community. One of the participants said, “While it gave a breather to parents and guardians in terms of transport to and fro school, the sometimes usual 3 in 1 room (bedroom for night, sitting room and kitchen during the day) turned into 4 in 1 (on top of the

²⁷ Verena Letzel, Marcela Pozas, and Christoph Schneider, “Energetic Students, Stressed Parents, and Nervous Teachers: A Comprehensive Exploration of Inclusive Homeschooling During the COVID-19 Crisis,” *Open Education Studies* 2, no. 1 (September 19, 2020): 159–70, <https://doi.org/10.1515/edu-2020-0122>.

²⁸ J Kevin Barge and William E Loges, “Parent, Student, and Teacher Perceptions of Parental Involvement,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 31, no. 2 (2003): 140–63.

²⁹ Cedric Cullingford and Mary Morrison, “Relationships between Parents and Schools: A Case Study,” *Educational Review* 51, no. 3 (1999): 253–62.

bedroom, sitting room and kitchen, it becomes a classroom and playroom) not only for one child. In the same setting, the furniture is versatile: a study desk, a kitchen table, and a playing table.” Another parent said, “I used to clean when the children had left for school. During that time, however, I had to battle to clean with the three of them lying on the floor doing school work.” Another guardian said, “Even water buckets with lids were serving as study desks in our house.” Another girl pupil said, “I prefer working with my books on my lap. I do this to make sure that I do not use a lot of space.” Another guardian said, “I would simply dump them into one room and close the door. I only get into the room upon hearing that they are quarreling or when I hear one of them crying.” Another female pupil said, “My parents used to tell us to use the veranda as the study area, and we only pack our books and get into the house at the end of the day.” Another participant said, “I used to wake up early in the morning and clean the yard, then put a reed mat for them to do their schooling from there. I live in one room, so I do not have space for the three of them to do work. It was only late when I came to realise that there were CSPs dotted across the community and also that there were NGOs that assist children with learning materials.”

From the presentation above, there is evidence of the relativity of out-of-school learning spaces provided for in the home-schooling learning environment in Zimbabwean communities. They range from conducive and spacious learning environments to unconducive and restrictive indoor learning spaces where anything could be furniture. Even when NGOs came in to give assistance to the community, communication barriers remained a challenge since there are areas where connectivity is poor and sometimes not everyone is privy to the gadgets. The views proved that parents/guardians are cultural capital home environment custodians. From the suggestions on how they can assist the learning of their children, it is interesting to note that parents/guardians now know that they have a role to play in the learning of their children.

Provision of Gadgets, Airtime and Bundles for Communication

Upon being asked about the kinds of gadgets and the amount of airtime and bundles they provided for the female pupils, especially. The following narratives were uncovered:

A participant said, “I provided a smartphone for my girl, but I later realised that she extended to use it beyond school work, talking to her boyfriend. I then decided to give it to her in my presence.” Another participant said, “There was no connectivity to even access the community radio station. Thus, my child relied mainly on pre-recorded lessons that we got from NGOs.” Another participant said, “It was fortunate that NGOs made an effort to assist with stationary and pre-recorded lessons. Some female pupils only received the study packs and were never to be seen again. When we tried to access them on the mobile contacts they supplied, it was in vain. No one could tell their challenges. It could be that they were between home and school or at home.” Another participant said, “I could not afford to give my girl child a gadget of her own. Instead, I allowed her to use mine, but the connectivity challenge hampered every effort I made to assist my girl child. We only relied on the pre-recorded lessons that we received.” Another female pupil said, “I only attended the CSP for one week, and my parents stopped me after my friend got pregnant. It was worse when she eloped; they told me that it was not safe for me to go to the CSP. I could not communicate with the school as I feared that my father would blame me for reporting him to the school.” Another participant said, “To tell the truth, we have been battling to have food on the table. Bundles and airtime were luxuries even for me. I would have loved to, but I had no means. I am a cross-border trader. Cross-border trading was the hardest hit and first one to collapse during the COVID-19 era.” Another guardian said, “There were some incidents in which each day we could hear from our neighbours that a female pupil left home for CSP and never came back. I could then no longer allow my niece to go to the CSP for fear that if she elopes, I will have a problem with my brother.” Another guardian said, “A lot happened between homes and the CSPs. Girl children were raped, some were forcibly taken into child marriages, while some were kidnapped. The abuse of female pupils became a social pandemic during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The scenarios above showed resonance with Letzel, Pozas and Schneider, who noted energetic pupils, stressed parents and nervous teachers.³⁰ This is in the sense that children aspire to technology while

³⁰ Letzel, Pozas, and Schneider, “Energetic Students, Stressed Parents, and Nervous Teachers: A Comprehensive Exploration of Inclusive Homeschooling During the COVID-19 Crisis.”

parents are in financial challenges, and teachers continue to send schoolwork electronically. There is also a gender dimension that differentiates the treatment of boy and girl pupils in the ATR and COVID-19 environments. Womanhood and victimhood are intricately intertwined and are worsened by the ATR belief system and COVID-19 when communities are stressed, and girl pupils are saving as stress packs. The finding contradicts Giddens' (2002) observation that instantaneous electronic communication is not just a way in which news and information are conveyed more quickly. In that, the scholar proffers that traditional family systems are becoming transformed, or under strain in many parts of the world, as women stake claim to greater equality. Again, the scenario contradicts that of Bauman,³¹ because the scenario is that there is truly a global revolution in everyday life, whose consequences are being felt around the world in all spheres. The situation of the female pupils confirms what Giddens said, that "we live in a world where hazards created by ourselves are as or more threatening than those that came from outside."³² Similarly, it refutes the views of Bauman, who reaffirmed the announcements of the end of history by Paul Virilio and the end of geography by Bill Clinton, in that there is no longer a difference between here and there, outside or inside and close by and faraway.³³ The situation is still very old to some who do not have gadgets and have no internet connectivity to join virtual schooling. The situation is way different from that which has progressed from teaching technology to enhancing learning through technology, as noted by Beyerbach, Walsh, and Vannatta and Greenhow, Lewin and Staudt Willet.³⁴

Discussion Summary

Overall, the terms gender, culture, COVID-19 pandemic, and the environment simple as they seem to be, have appeared as complex concentric rings that come one after the other in trapping the female pupil and making future educational success blurred. As discussed above, the social and spiritual environment has re-established and persists in making female pupils feel incomplete when single and deteriorating each day they go before marriage. The intricacy and embeddedness would need the communities to consciously make a gender-critical turn and desist from understanding and practicing gender as applying primarily to women only. While the impact of globalization is slowly opening up from the hold of tradition, other societies across the world have remained more traditional and are becoming de-traditional. Sexuality is not just the core principle of democracy. It is also important for happiness and fulfillment. It is clear that religion, culture, and tradition are gatekeeping communities from exiting gender relations that restrict female pupils from reaching their optimal academic development. To that effect, there is a need for tremendous intellectual effort and a good deal of practice to decentre maleness as a human norm and ideal which informs our imagination that mostly humanity is gendered in one way or the other.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the article recommends further empirical studies in other communities on the same subject. Also, there is a need for the education system to empower parents/guardians so that they assist their girl children accordingly and especially in times of emergency. While in other communities the gender intervention programmes skewed in favour of the girl child, the Binga community has a unique scenario that deserves to cater for both genders. The Zimbabwean policy of making dropouts rejoin schooling by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education would need special consideration of individual needs and feasibility for individual communities to avoid over-burdening parents who may need to send children and their children to school.

CONCLUSION

The article aimed to evaluate the parental and guardianship linguistic and cultural support systems offered to adolescent girl pupils during COVID-19 in the Binga community in Zimbabwe. The study was based

³¹ Bauman, *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*.

³² Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives*.

³³ Bauman, *Globalisation: The Human Consequences*.

³⁴ Rachel Vannatta, Barbara Beyerbach, and Christine Walsh, "From Teaching Technology to Using Technology to Enhance Student Learning: Preservice Teachers' Changing Perceptions of Technology Infusion," *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education* 9, no. 1 (2001): 105–27; Christine Greenhow, Cathy Lewin, and K. Bret Staudt Willet, "The Educational Response to Covid-19 across Two Countries: A Critical Examination of Initial Digital Pedagogy Adoption," *Technology, Pedagogy and Education* 30, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 7–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2020.1866654>.

on an inductive theory, qualitative paradigm and case study design that purposively samples key informants in education. The empowerment theory lens informed the empowerment theory. Findings reveal the resuscitation of African traditional religio-cultural systems that served a gap in filling the contemporary schooling, biomedical provision and counselling services, which were disrupted by gullibility from time to time. The COVID-19 pandemic brought an uncontested spell of indigenous languages and cultural revival.

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