




Child-headed Households: Techniques to lessen the detrimental Impacts of Poverty on Secondary School Students from Chimanimani District in Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine strategies to reduce the negative effects of poverty among learners from Child-headed Households. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was employed as the theoretical framework. The study used a qualitative research design. Thirty-two participants were purposefully selected. Interviews, focus groups and document analysis were employed as data collection tools. The study established that the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), supplementary feeding schemes, and income-generating projects were the main strategies which were employed to cushion secondary school learners from child-headed households. It is recommended that school administrators prioritise funding income-generating projects to help schools satisfy the psychological requirements of learners from child-headed households. This study adds to the body of knowledge about how adolescents from child-headed households experience academic success. In several sub-sectors of the Zimbabwean education sector, it expands understanding of the lived experiences of a sample of teenage students from low-income homes in Manicaland Province that has never before been investigated. The report makes a clear call to action for the Zimbabwean government to reconsider the BEAM support model in light of the insufficient funds now provided to learners and children of child-headed households.

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INTRODUCTION

Societies in the twenty-first century cannot ignore the fact of poverty. A portion of society will always be negatively impacted by the vagrancy of poverty, especially children of child-headed families. It is widely acknowledged that poverty is a global social issue that affects people of all racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Growing evidence suggests that poverty influences academic achievement in schools today.¹ This situation has raised societal issues that call for educators to be aware of how poverty affects learners' academic performance, particularly those from child-headed families who have to cope

¹Kendra McKenzie, "The Effects of Poverty on Academic Achievement.," *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education* 11, no. 2 (2019): 21–26.v

with various demands and issues that individuals from families with higher salaries do not have to deal with or comprehend. People with low earnings find life particularly difficult.² Academics point to the relationship between socio-economic class and academic success.³ In light of this, educators, as well as society at large, are concerned about children of disadvantaged households who are prone to suffer from the adverse psychological effects of poverty. To lessen the detrimental psychosocial issues such children face, this calls for the creation of sound support programs. Only if the indicators of poverty are early recognized are such programs feasible.

Children under the age of eighteen (18) have taken on responsibilities due to the absence or permanent infirmity of the adult caregiver. As a result of primarily parental death, the child-only family has evolved as an environment for child development. Taking care of their siblings are young children who require adult supervision and help. Such children faced with onerous parenting roles are bound to experience academic challenges at school which are further worsened by their impoverished background.

The overarching research question is as follows: How can the negative effects of poverty be reduced among learners from child-headed households? Thus, this paper seeks to investigate the impact of poverty on the academic experiences of children from child-headed families in Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. It further examines the experiences of CHH secondary school learners and the mitigation strategies used to ameliorate the detrimental effects of poverty. The findings are presented in subsequent paragraphs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Poverty Cycle in the International Context

Scholastic achievement is correlated with the disadvantage of living in a deprived neighbourhood.⁴ Scholars are becoming more aware of the link between family socio-economic position and disparities in children's academic ability.⁵ Poverty can be found in both developed and developing countries, as evidenced by the corpus of literature. 37.2 million Americans were living in poverty.²⁴ Poverty-stricken children were more likely to reside in underdeveloped and economically depressed neighbourhoods than their advantaged peers, which worsened their struggle for survival.⁶

In Fiji, it was found that children from households of poor socio-economic status often perform worse academically than their more affluent counterparts.⁷ In contrast to learners from underprivileged circumstances, Sharma found evidence of a considerable difference in the academic success of learners from high socio-economic positions in the United States of America.⁸ Therefore, it can be inferred that children who grow up in poverty are more likely to have a range of psychosocial challenges that will probably have a detrimental impact on their academic performance. The current investigation adds to the body of knowledge on child poverty by illuminating the relationship between academic achievement of adolescents and poverty in a Zimbabwean setting.

There are 54 countries in Africa, and each has a unique economic structure. Most people in most African nations live in poverty and have limited access to the basic services provided by their governments to help reduce potential negative events and build capacity.⁹ For learners and adults of all ages, a

²Kristin Turney, Amy Gong Liu, and Estéfani Marín, "Stepping In and Stepping Away: Variation in How Children Navigate Responsibilities Stemming from Paternal Incarceration," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (January 17, 2024): 132–50, <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2024.10.1.06>.

³Randhir Parkash Raj and Satish Prakash Chand, "Access and Equity: The Relationship between Parent's Socioeconomic Status and Secondary School Student's Academic Achievement," *International Journal of Instruction* 16, no. 3 (2023): 1013–32.

⁴Nazar Khalid et al., "Floods and Children's Education in Rural India," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (January 17, 2024): 230–54, <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2024.10.1.10>.

⁵Feng Zhang et al., "Family Socio-economic Status and Children's Academic Achievement: The Different Roles of Parental Academic Involvement and Subjective Social Mobility," *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 90, no. 3 (2020): 561–79.

⁶Turney, Liu, and Marín, "Stepping In and Stepping Away: Variation in How Children Navigate Responsibilities Stemming from Paternal Incarceration."

⁷Turney, Liu, and Marín, "Stepping In and Stepping Away: Variation in How Children Navigate Responsibilities Stemming from Paternal Incarceration."

⁸Madhuri Sharma, "Poverty and Gender: Determinants of Female- and Male-Headed Households with Children in Poverty in the USA, 2019," *Sustainability* 15, no. 9 (May 5, 2023): 7602, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15097602>.

⁹FAO, "The Role of Agriculture and Rural Development in Achieving SDG 1.1," in *United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Eradicating Rural Poverty to Implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UNECACC-AA, 2019), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/03/FAO-ending-extreme-rural-poverty-1.pdf>.

physiological need for food is linked to inadequate nutrition involving the body, as opposed to the mind and psychological, emotional, and social welfare.¹⁰ Psychosocial consequences are the psychological, emotional, and social aspects of an individual's relationship with their health.³

According to the 2030 Agenda of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 1 is to eradicate poverty worldwide.¹¹ This goal seeks to mitigate these psychosocial consequences by ending all forms of severe poverty, including those endured by learners from child-headed families. Despite this noble objective, it cannot be denied that some learners may nevertheless experience psychosocial difficulties. Poor people in various societies have been affected by several debilitating issues, such as inflation, which most economies faced after COVID-19. Families, particularly those headed by children, have been heavily hit because their already limited purchasing power has been severely reduced. As a result, many weak people suffering from poverty are forced to eat little or nothing at all.¹²

Poverty and Access to Education

Worldwide there is an acceptance that poverty is a malaise afflicting nations that cuts across race, tribe, creed and religion. In light of this, both educators and academics are compelled to address this growing challenge, especially with regard to how it impacts the academic achievement of learners, especially those of impoverished backgrounds and CHH. Policy statements have been enacted at the international, regional, and country levels in an attempt to highlight and deal with poverty challenges, but it would appear that the situation of learners from child-headed households has not seen a significant improvement. The adult report of Sierra Leone 2021 under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) raised concerns about the welfare and safety of children. The staff of public institutions that offer services abuses children in a variety of ways, including sexual abuse, intimidation, discrimination, and the open display of negative attitudes.¹³ These institutions also lack safeguards for safety for children and young people. Most importantly, many children still experience violence, harassment, exploitation, or abuse in their daily lives, even though attitudes toward violence against children have strengthened, as the National Child Strategy Report indicates.¹⁴ The aforementioned supports a study by Campbell-Montalo et al⁵ that found that how teachers interacted with learners was, in the majority of instances, dependent on presumptions made about the learner's background.

Poverty and Academic Achievement in Zimbabwe

Examining the link between poverty and academic achievement in the context of Zimbabwe is extremely important. This is due to the numerous challenges that prevent learners from low-income and child-headed families from accessing education. The Zimbabwean government has attempted to address the plight of disadvantaged learners and struggling neighbourhoods and created the BEAM. The primary objective of BEAM is to increase access to education for economically underprivileged individuals. Social protection can go beyond only preventing or mitigating poverty; in this scenario, its goal is to reduce poverty by increasing the income and capacity of the impoverished.²⁸ However, it is important to remember that this programme is woefully inadequate for learners from disadvantaged homes, leaving it up to the very families that ask for help but lack the means to provide additional educational support.

Van Ijzendoorn, et.al. conducted a study in the Insiza District of Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe, which revealed that impoverished families faced a challenging circumstance where their efforts to provide their learners with a nurturing home environment were hindered by insufficient financial support.¹⁵ This

¹⁰Seung Jae Lee, Kyung Won Lee, and Mi Sook Cho, "Association of Food Insecurity with Nutrient Intake and Depression among Korean and US Adults: Data from the 2014 Korea and the 2013–2014 US National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18, no. 2 (January 9, 2021): 506, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18020506>.

¹¹FAO, "The Role of Agriculture and Rural Development in Achieving SDG 1.1."

¹²ActionAid, "Zimbabwe Food Crisis 2020 Policy Brief," 2020, <https://zimbabwe.actionaid.org/publications/2020/zimbabwe-food-crisis-2020-policy-brief>.

¹³United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, "CSO Report-List of Issues For Sierra Leone," Child Rights Coalition- Sierra Leone (CRC-SL), 2021.

¹⁴National Child Strategy Report, "The Parliamentary National Child Strategy Committee," Finnish Government, 2022.

¹⁵Marinus H van IJzendoorn et al., "Institutionalisation and Deinstitutionalisation of Children 1: A Systematic and Integrative Review of Evidence Regarding Effects on Development," *The Lancet Psychiatry* 7, no. 8 (August 2020): 703–20, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(19\)30399-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30399-2).

could potentially have an impact on the children's social and emotional wellbeing. BEAM support does not extend to paying for other essentials like books, uniforms, and school projects, as it is limited to covering the price of tuition, taxes, and examinations. Ringson's study in Gutu District, Masvingo Province, also revealed that BEAM was extremely insufficient for learners to complete their schooling.¹⁶ The literature confirms a worrisome scenario for learners from child-headed households, which demands attention from the government, communities, and supporting agencies in the non-governmental sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The relationship between child development changes and conflict in any system will cause disturbances throughout other systems.¹⁷ When studying child development, it is necessary to look closely at the way they interact with the whole environment rather than concentrating on their immediate environment. Initially, the ecological perspective views a child-headed household learners' environment as reciprocal and shows the reliance on both.¹⁸

Bronfenbrenner originally developed the Ecological Systems Theory to understand ways of interactions of learners from child-headed households within their environments.¹⁹ The ecological systems theory portrays the development of learners through environmental interconnectedness and their significance on the acceleration of direct effects of psychological growth.²⁰ According to Small, et.al. the ecological theory is grounded in the condition of existing mutuality among other people.²¹ Ecological approaches to situations provide a model of several factors determined by the education of learners from households without parents.

The Ecological Systems Theory delineates the intersection of biological, psychological and social sciences.²² In this theory there is a holistic relationship between learners from child-headed households and their environment. An unaccompanied domain is very limited which perpetuates the exercise of unjust challenges and relegation.²³ In this regard behaviour being portrayed by child-headed household learners is predictably connected to the society, forces and associations that create their environment. Consequently, what transpires once can also influence other parts of the system.

When conducting a study on the directed changes of learners from child-headed households, one should not put more emphasis on his/her close environment apart from the positive occurrences. Consequently, it is acceptable to analyse that the influence of the state of poverty among learners from child-headed households is complicated and can be continued circumstances such as the family, home, neighbourhood, school and the relatively greater community. Understanding the impact of one surrounding the other enables me to establish strategies to thwart the unfavourable outcome of being poor. The study revealed that research carefully inspects the connection between the development of learners from child-headed households and other representatives which is extremely important because this comprehension is needed to achieve a desired result.²⁴

The Ecological Systems Theory accepts that the growing of learners from child-headed households within their systems has manifold challenges that erupt from their surrounding community. In addition,

¹⁶John Ringson, "Basic Education Assistance Module as a Material and Psychosocial Support Intervention for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Gutu District, Zimbabwe. An Evaluation," *New Ideas in Psychology* 59 (2020): 100803.

¹⁷Ngaruiya Lukas Gathui, Norbert Ogeta, and Peter Nyaga Muchanje, "Career Guidance and Counseling Services for Virtual and Open Learning and Its Impact on the Preservation of Post-Graduate Students in Kenyatta University, Kenya," *Journal of Education* 4, no. 1 (2024): 23–36.

¹⁸Patricia C. Jackman et al., "'There's Only so Much an Individual Can Do': An Ecological Systems Perspective on Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Early Stages of Doctoral Research," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 46, no. 7 (August 9, 2022): 931–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.2023732>.

¹⁹Rebecca Buchanan, "An Ecological Framework for Supervision in Teacher Education," *Journal of Educational Supervision* 3, no. 1 (March 2020): 76–94, <https://doi.org/10.31045/jes.3.1.6>.

²⁰Marcus Crawford, "Ecological Systems Theory: Exploring the Development of the Theoretical Framework as Conceived by Bronfenbrenner," *Journal of Public Health Issues and Practices* 4, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.33790/jphip1100170>.

²¹Angela Small, Alice Owen, and Jouni Paaavola, "Organizational Use of Ecosystem Service Approaches: A Critique from a Systems Theory Perspective," *Business Strategy and the Environment* 31, no. 1 (January 2022): 284–96, <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2887>.

²²Crawford, "Ecological Systems Theory: Exploring the Development of the Theoretical Framework as Conceived by Bronfenbrenner."

²³Gabriel Velez and Margaret Beale Spencer, "Phenomenology and Intersectionality: Using PVEST as a Frame for Adolescent Identity Formation amid Intersecting Ecological Systems of Inequality," *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development* 2018, no. 161 (2018): 75–90.

²⁴Hannah Zagel and Wim Van Lancker, "Family Policies' Long-Term Effects on Poverty: A Comparative Analysis of Single and Partnered Mothers," *Journal of European Social Policy* 32, no. 2 (2022): 166–81.

the Ecological Systems Theory interprets surroundings in which the development of learners from child-headed households is guaranteed. Bronfenbrenner had an understanding that, for someone to understand the development of children from child-headed households one should take note of the ecological settings around them. He summarised five ecological systems which are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem which operate in several systems to manipulate children from the growth of child-headed households.²⁵

The Ecological Systems Theory has been proven to be very important in providing a clear or deep perception of the psychosocial development of learners from child-headed households. This theory depicts all the intertwined systems that eventually impact the development cycle. This hypothetical description of a complex entity has given something useful or necessary qualities that allows or facilitate the achievement or accomplishment of learners' lives in their settings. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory played a critical role in the formulation of government policies and programmes that would require the development of education for learners from child-headed households. Educators can use this process to estimate the nature or significance of the problem which is being faced by the child in his/her setting and try to resolve it amicably. Even though it is of paramount importance to have a deeper understanding of the issues that increase the challenges of learners from child-headed households, it is also important to observe from all angles the reasons why many children are being exposed to such risks. Regardless of the issues from all the levels of the systems that were highlighted above, it is believed that the resilience developed by the family regardless of all odds allows children to be successful in life.²⁶

METHODOLOGY

Design and Participants

The study was based on a qualitative phenomenological research design that drew on the ontological and epistemological tenets of interpretivism. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate to gather the participants' perceptions, interpret them, and retell them using their own lived experiences through thick, rich descriptions. This allowed the researchers to effectively assess and evaluate how the participants interpreted and constructed their world and the significance they attached to their experiences.²⁷ Thirty-two (32) participants comprising eight (8) teachers, four (4) parents, four (4) school heads, and sixteen (16) CHH adolescent learners were purposively sampled. The sample was made up of information-rich participants from whom the researchers were able to learn the most.

Data Collection, Presentation and Analysis

The study relied on semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis as the primary data collection tools. The semi-structured interview was conducted with teachers, school administrators, and school development committee members. The focus group interview was used with the learners. The semi-structured interview and focus group interview were recorded and then transcribed. For privacy, all interviews were conducted in the offices requested by participating school heads.

A deductive approach was used for thematic analysis, which involves approaching data analysis with predetermined themes and categories according to which the data are evaluated. Thematic analysis that is entirely deductive does not require the generation of new codes and themes as it begins with a set of themes before data collection and analysis, taken directly from a previous study in the topic area and then seeks to apply those to a new sample.²⁸ Documents were subjected to content analysis. Content analysis involves the systematic classification and counting of text units to condense a large amount of information into a more concise representation of certain of its features.²⁹

²⁵Buchanan, "An Ecological Framework for Supervision in Teacher Education."

²⁶Catherine E. McKinley and Jenn Lilly, "It's in the Family Circle": Communication Promoting Indigenous Family Resilience," *Family Relations* 71, no. 1 (February 7, 2022): 108–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12600>.

²⁷Eman Abukmail, Mina Bakhit, and Tammy C. Hoffmann, "Exploring Individuals' Perceptions and Acceptability of a 'Wait and See' Approach for Managing Self-Limiting Illnesses: A Qualitative Study," *Patient Education and Counseling* 118 (January 2024): 108032, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2023.108032>.

²⁸Oliver C. Robinson, "Conducting Thematic Analysis on Brief Texts: The Structured Tabular Approach," *Qualitative Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2022): 194.

²⁹Amir Marvasti, "Qualitative Content Analysis: A Novice's Perspective," in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 20 (DEU, 2019), 14.

Written permission was obtained to conduct the study from a university ethics committee and the relevant Ministry in Zimbabwe. Adult participants also gave their informed written consent for the interviews to be audio recorded.

RESULTS /FINDINGS

Strategies to curb the challenges faced by learners from child-headed families emerged in four categories which are herein given as themes.

Theme1: Basic Education Assistance Module

The respondents revealed that there was a programme named BEAM that spearheaded the assistance of disadvantaged learners to meet their educational needs such as school fees. Learners who were deemed eligible for assistance would have their school fees paid. The study established that every school had a BEAM committee comprising members of the community and school administrators. Most research participants indicated that BEAM was capable of making a positive difference in the lives of disadvantaged learners such as those who come from child-headed families. The four school administrators agreed that the BEAM committee was mandated to choose and suggest deserving learners from families with children as candidates for inclusion in the programme. Nevertheless, some respondents revealed that some deserving learners from child-headed households were denied BEAM money through a biased selection of beneficiaries. For instance, one secondary school learner from a child-headed family made the following remarks:

The BEAM committee must do its work with integrity by choosing the most deserving children from homes with no parents and recommending them for fee payment by the government. I was frustrated and surprised by the way the BEAM committee works because those who are from rich families are selected and recommended to be BEAM beneficiaries leaving those who are visibly in need.

To address the issue of lack of integrity on the part of those who executed the BEAM programme, some respondents suggested that village heads should play a role in determining the beneficiaries of the programme, as village heads were in direct contact with literally all the families in their respective villages.

All additional challenge revealed by the respondents during focus group discussions was that the disbursements of BEAM funds by the government usually took time to the extent that the school development committee may end up sending the concerned learners back home to seek alternative sources of school fees. All the 16 learners from child-headed families who participated in the study requested that schools do not send those who are BEAM beneficiaries home since their fees would ultimately be deposited into school accounts by the government.

Theme 2: Supplementary Feeding Programmes

From the information provided to the researchers by school administrators, members of the school development committee, and teachers in the guidance and counselling department, it emerged that a feeding committee made up of senior teachers and community representatives was operating in each of the four participating secondary schools. Although the learners from child-headed families acknowledged the existence of feeding scheme committees, they hastened to indicate that these committees were no longer as effective as they were when they were supported by non-governmental organizations such as Care International and Save the Children. Although the participants indicated that the Zimbabwean government continued to support school food programmes, they lamented that the level of support was extremely inadequate. School administrators and teachers suggested that further assistance should be sought from well-wishers such as non-governmental organisations and the corporate world to spruce up the quality of the feeding programmes. Some parents who participated in the study suggested that schools should consider increasing their sponsorship of feeding schemes. One male school head further remarked:

Sinking of boreholes in secondary schools should be initiated by the government and donor community so that schools can embark on nutritional gardens which will eventually assist all learners from homes with no parents.

Theme 3: Welfare of learners from child-headed households

Most of the research participants indicated that everyone involved in ensuring the welfare of learners from child-headed families needed proper training and assistance. They also acknowledged the significance of discipline in dealing with children from those households. Optimal execution of tasks is a challenge for school administrators and facilitators due to a lack of resources and inadequate training. Facilitators in guidance and counseling should have graduate degrees in their fields.³⁰ It was suggested that learners from child-headed families needed psychosocial support in the form of guidance and counselling and participation in social activities such as sports, clubs, and drama. The respondents reiterated that such forms of support would go a long way towards fostering resilience on the part of learners from child-headed families.

Theme 4: Income-Generating Projects

It was brought to the attention of the researchers that some schools had income-generating projects meant to finance the welfare of learners from child-headed households. More precisely, three out of the four secondary schools reported that they engaged in income-generating programmes designed to support learners from homes with no parents.

In support of this, one adult participant gave the following contribution:

In order to raise money for the payment of school fees for learners from child-headed homes, the school is operating a banana plantation.

Another teacher made the following allied remarks:

Teachers and learners are in a club which sells freezits, ice lollies and zepnaks to buy stationery for learners from parentless homes, but the project is not fruitful.

However, one school committee member regretted that although they had the passion to participate in some projects to assist learners from homes with no parents by raising funds to buy them stationery; they unfortunately did not have the necessary capital.

DISCUSSION

The study examined the strategies which were employed to help learners from CHH under four themes, namely; BEAM supplementary feeding programmes, the welfare of learners from CHH and income-generating projects. Strategies to support needy learners were also indicated. This findings of the study are consistent with Pillay's claims that while education is considered "free" for some, it restricts access to high-quality education for learners from low-income households as they cannot afford uniforms, textbooks, exercise books, and other essentials.³¹ Participants claimed that the bias in BEAM selection made it difficult for the intervention to help learners from non-parental households accomplish their needs. The current study found that BEAM does not cover expenses such as test fees, uniforms, or stationery, placing a significant financial burden on learners from families with small children. The study established that the income-generating projects in the schools were largely unproductive, if not ineffective. In light of this, the support for adolescents from CHH was largely thin or non-existent. For the most part, the well-being of orphans and vulnerable children requires government help, and this intervention must take into account the capacity of these families. The study's findings regarding BEAM are consistent with those of Garutsa's 2012 research study, which discovered that there is no suitable policy directing the implementation of BEAM. Similar results were found by O'Brien¹⁸ who found that low-income parents of learners spend more money on non-fee items, like uniforms and stationery. This demonstrates how the majority of learners from single-parent families are expected to drop out of school as a result of Zimbabwe's economic problems.

³⁰Gathui, Ogeta, and Muchanje, "Career Guidance and Counseling Services for Virtual and Open Learning and Its Impact on the Preservation of Post-Graduate Students in Kenyatta University, Kenya."

³¹Indira Pillay, "The Impact of Inequality and COVID-19 on Education and Career Planning for South African Children of Rural and Low-Socioeconomic Backgrounds," *African Journal of Career Development* 3, no. 1 (May 18, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajcd.v3i1.36>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggests that school administrators should prioritise funding income-generating projects to help schools satisfy the psychological requirements of learners from CHH. Furthermore, to offer effective and efficient support to vulnerable children, non-governmental organizations should maintain political neutrality in their operations to build effective working relationships with the government and other local authorities. To encourage learner-learner guidance and counseling, schools should use peer guidance and counseling school teachers to offer counseling to learners in need.

CONCLUSION

It was discovered that efforts were being made to assist learners from child-headed families to navigate the challenges associated with surviving without parents. BEAM, supplementary feeding schemes and income-generating projects were the key strategies that were used to alleviate the challenges encountered by secondary school learners from child-headed households. Nevertheless, some challenges pertaining to the execution of the stated strategies were reported. Although the strategies had some loopholes, it was pleasing to note that stakeholders such as school administrators, educators and community leaders to some extent showed compassion towards secondary school learners from child-headed households.

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