

Cognitive Learning: A Life-line Challenge for Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Child-headed Households

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ABSTRACT Orphaned children suffer mental stresses and anxieties and these manifest in the manner they learn and socialise at school and in the community. The phenomenological descriptive case study investigated the learning limitations of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and how various stakeholders could mitigate and support the learning of these OVC living within child-headed households (CHHs) in the Chimanimani District of Zimbabwe. Observation and focus group discussion were used for data collection. Six heads of CHHs, two local community members, two teachers, a school headmaster and one childrens' rights advocate participated in the study. Data collected indicates that OVC lived under difficult physical and psychosocial circumstances, going through life without proper parental guidance. They encountered situations that militated against effective formal and informal cognitive learning. Orphanhood is a psychological deterrent to learning; the study therefore recommends that the local community, education administrators, policy makers and child advocates should map out life-lines ideal for enhancing the cognitive learning of OVC residing as "siblings" in CHHs.