

Dealing with Children from Child-Headed Households in Schools: Strategies for Improving Their Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT The paper sought to assess measures that could be used to effectively assist child-headed household (CHH) learners to ensure their meaningful participation in the academic activities. It used a qualitative case design of a conveniently selected school and the snowball sampling technique to identify orphaned learners. In-depth interviews, observation and document analysis were utilised to collect data. Content analysis guided the data analysis through themes derived from the sub-research questions. Data reporting, took the form of thick description and verbatim quotations. It emerged from the findings that the school should formulate a policy targeting CHH learners as the first step towards assisting them. The researchers have recommended that schools should come up with well-articulated policies focused on CHHs. These policies would act like radar navigating the way for CHH learners. There should also be checks and follow-ups to ensure that policies crafted are being implemented on the ground.

INTRODUCTION

It is argued that education plays an important role in child development and is the most recognised tool that can be used to free someone from the bondage of poverty (Marongwe et al. 2016). Without education one is initiated into a life of poverty and his or her children will probably also be trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. The former president of South Africa, Mandela (2010: 34) in the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund Report states, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". Having this in mind, it means there should be measures put in place to effectively assist these children to perform in school and achieve excellent results.

Literature Review

When exploring measures to be put in place, one has to consider the responsibilities and challenges faced by these children as they come to school. van der Mark (2015) observes that the challenges the children in CHHs face were affecting their education. In support of van der Mark (2015), Chigwenya et al. (2008) establish that CHHs have untold implications for the well-being of children and the realisation of their rights, especially in education. This new phenomenon child-headed household (CHHs) has a serious impact on the learners' performance, according to different studies. Tomaszewski

(2006) points out that access to formal education promotes economic sustainability and supports efforts to ensure that all children have academic and/or vocational education opportunities (Gubwe et al. 2015).

Various studies available indicate that teachers handling these learners lack adequate training. Teachers therefore need to be trained comprehensively on how to treat or deal with HIV/AIDS-orphaned children from CHHs. It avoids misunderstanding between teachers and such learners. Pillay and Nesengai as cited in van der Mark (2015) posit that teachers often don't understand their situation which results in the students getting disciplined for things their living circumstances force them to. Therefore this could also increase their worrying at school and affect their schoolwork in that way (van der Mark 2015).

Maritz and Lessing (2004) state that there is need for educators to receive fundamental training in HIV/AIDS education as a component of the curriculum. It can be considered as a means of educational support provision for these orphaned children. Taggart (2007) also emphasizes the training of all teachers since teachers, according to her study, are poorly trained. UNESCO (2010) reports that teachers and learners see that training programmes are not preparing teachers to teach these children, hence, emphasizing the need for training educators to handle learners sensitively. A study conducted in Zambia by Baggaley et al. (1999) reported that

educators were constantly in need of support and training to enable them to deal with stress-causing concerns they faced at school. The greatest concern was related to them feeling inadequate in terms of providing counselling to their learners on matters related to the effect of poverty, death and illness of a parent (van der Mark 2015).

Once teachers have received this training they will come to understand these children better and the burden they carry to school. Taggart (2007) and India HIV/AIDS Alliance and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (2006) agree that it is practical to understand how the experiences and problems learners from CHHs face at home, school and in classroom systems. UNESCO (2010) reports that teachers have an important responsibility in ensuring that children and young people acquire essential knowledge, skills and attitudes required in the outside world. Teachers are seen as pivotal in ensuring that learners affected and infected as a result of the epidemic have access to care and support. As already alluded to in the study, it has been argued that these children lack care, love and support because of their background since they are “adult children”, so when they come to school they see it as a place to find safety, warmth, love, care and support. In line with that Phillips (2015) observes that the training equips the facilitators with the tools and knowledge on how to plan and facilitate a grief and loss support group for bereaved children, offering a range of activities and stories to approach particular topics and emotions.

Education should mobilise resources to meet the unmet needs and to champion for the rights of the children (Mkhize 2006). It is argued that free education is not the only thing these orphaned children need; they have so many unmet needs like uniforms, school shoes and other things (van der Mark 2015). Masondo (2006), Mabetoa (2008), Mkhonto (2010) and Chigwenya et al. (2008) hold the same view and that is that subsidised or free school uniforms, shoes and stationery are needed for these children since they need material items as well as care and support. In the same vein Gubwe et al. (2015) urge stakeholders to be actively involved in addressing the needs of orphans, especially with regard to social, health, nutrition, justice, water and sanitation services; the latter all have a bearing on learners’ performance at school (Fleming

2015; Mabetoa 2008). The Vulnerable Child Youth Study (2009) notes AIDS relief and assistance programmes for children should go beyond school attendance and make efforts to improve their school performance and aspirations.

Other studies also argue that schools should offer counselling to these learners in order to stabilise them from the trauma experienced before and after the death of their parent(s) (van der Mark 2015). Taggart (2007) and UNESCO (2010) concur in that counselling is vital and there should be employment of full-time professionally-trained guidance and counselling staff to provide pastoral care and counselling. This may boost these children’s morale and motivation for them to continue studying and performing better. Dalen et al. (2009) state that the orphaned children requested counselling for themselves, teachers and community because of the challenges they faced. The Vulnerable Child Youth Study (2009) states that the educational expectation was significantly lower among AIDS orphans; they were more likely to demonstrate aggressive impulsive and anxious behaviours (Gubwe et al. 2015; Zhangazha 2014). It is important to have counselling. If not, then learners may perform badly as established by several studies that CHHs’ children had more learning difficulties, so greater attention is needed to the school performance and behaviour of children affected by HIV/AIDS. Masondo (2006) also states that children need support to cope with emotional trauma resulting from sickness and deaths in their households and because teachers and peers exacerbate psychological trauma through stigmatisation, concur Fleming (2015) and Mkhonto (2010).

Schools need to devise other mechanisms to reduce the multiple roles played by the CHHs children. Even the Social Welfare Department should assist beyond the giving of a social grant. Educational stakeholders should also provide interventions (UNESCO 2010). Moreover, teachers should help in developing policy strategies and guidelines that will enhance the learners’ school lives. It is also argued that though South Africa has a comprehensive and dynamic legislative and policy environment that provides for the impact of HIV/AIDS, it has not seriously considered the challenges faced by CHHs in the school curriculum (Fleming 2015; DoE 2005). McCarthy (2006) points out that these children deserve all the necessary help and that their

educational needs should be recognised early so that they receive the support services they need.

India HIV/AIDS Alliance and Tata Institute of Social Science (2006) view that schools should be sensitised and have a flexible education programme for CHHs facilitated to make a school a supportive place for the CHHs and enable them to continue their studies. Sibanda (2006) carried out a study on "Who drops out of school in South Africa" and found out that one of the biggest concerns for educational systems in Africa is their ability to retain students until they graduate from primary or secondary school. The problem of dropouts is disquieting to policy-makers since it partly reflects the inadequacy of a schooling system in terms of either school quality or quantity. Other studies also seem to agree that the Education Policy on HIV/AIDS orphaned children is not clear or is quiet about it (Gubwe et al. 2015; Zhangazha 2014; Le Roux-Kemp 2013). A case study commissioned by UNESCO in Tanzania found that the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training does not have specific policies or guidelines (UNESCO and ESART 2009c). On the same note it is also argued that South African Education Policy is not clear on the issue of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS living in CHHs.

Statement of the Problem

The problem under investigation is, "What measures/strategies could be put in place in order to assist learners from child-headed households (CHHs) to perform well at school?"

Wilson (1996) acknowledges that teachers are likely to be puzzled, frustrated or irritated by these learners because of the teachers' lack of experience in teaching children raised without parents or guardians. There was, therefore a need to establish measures that could be put in place in order to help CHH learners perform well at schools, as that was a cause for concern because of the growing number of children coming from CHHs. George and Mansah (2011) observe that one of the greatest challenges schools face today is this increasing number of children from CHHs. Therefore, what should be done to alleviate some of the challenges they face as CHHs given such an increase in numbers of these learners?

Goal of the Study

The goal of the study was:

- Assess measures/strategies that could be implemented to effectively assist these learners to ensure their meaningful participation in the academic activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The study was rooted in the qualitative approach as it sought to understand and describe the strategies that could be put in place to alleviate the challenges faced by CHHs in their academic pursuits from their own perception. The qualitative approach had been chosen because of its characteristics that suited the phenomenon of CHHs unlike the quantitative approach which explains everything using the causal and effect laws (Meyer et al. 2003). Moutong and Prozesky (2001) reiterate that qualitative research attempts to produce findings arrived at from real-world settings where the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally; in this case the phenomenon is CHHs. A qualitative approach was also considered suitable for this study since it presents facts in a narration of words, as compared to quantitative research which presents statistical results numerically (Henning 2005).

Research Design

A case study was used to study the phenomenon at one selected school (Babbie and Mouton 2010). A case study design allows a researcher to focus on a small scale study primarily for rigor and in-depth understanding of CHHs (Maree 2007). A case study is an in-depth study of a particular situation rather than a sweeping statistical survey, a method used to narrow down a very broad field of research into one that is easily researchable (Maphosa et al. 2007).

Sampling Procedures

The population for this study was drawn from orphaned learner children as a result of HIV/AIDS living in CHHs, who were of school going age in a rural senior secondary school. The school was selected through the convenient

sampling technique, where orphaned children from CHHs were identified. The targeted participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. 10 learners from child-headed households were used from Grade 8-12. 4 educators were interviewed, 1 SGB member and 1 principal. A total of 16 participants participated, small as it may appear, but the figure aligns to a qualitative approach. Cresswell (2008) substantiates this view when he argues that a sample size of this nature will suit the qualitative study.

Data Collection Techniques

The study used in-depth interviews which were the main source of data gathering. Cohen and Manion (1994) note interviews as the principal means of gathering information by providing access to what is inside the person's head and that it makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge and information) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs). Observation was applied in order to triangulate findings from the interview. Mathison (1998) states that triangulation is a strategy used in qualitative research for the purpose of improving the validity and reliability or research evaluation of findings. Observation was made at school and at home to establish the way children from child-headed households behave, work, and socialise and their attitude towards fellow learners, educators, school work and extracurricular activities. This was suitable to the topic under study because Leedy and Ormrod (2010) note that actions are more telling than their verbal accounts. The major advantage of an observation is that it is used to triangulate data collected from interviews. Document analysis was used to augment data from interviews and observations. Creswell (2008 cited in Babie and Mouton 2010) acknowledges that documents contain text (words) and images that were recorded without the researcher's influence and is reasonably free from the researcher's bias. The researcher analysed documents such as class attendance registers, the learners' exercise books and work schedules to measure how children from child-headed households were performing at school.

Data Analysis

Data were thematically analysed. Beginning with content analysis the researcher sought to

extract themes and metaphors that organise and make sense of the data obtained. Responses were put into categories on the basis of the meaning they conveyed.

Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

To ensure data trustworthiness, the researcher engaged measures such as:

Member Checks of Interview Transcripts

Participants were allowed to read interview transcripts after the interviews in order to comment and correct on any views that were not captured properly.

Multiple Sources of Data Collection

The researchers used triangulation of sources and instruments different sources of data were used such as individual interviews, document analysis and observations, in order to gather multiple perspectives on the same issue so as to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomena. Data were collected from principal, School Governing Board (SGB) member, educators and learners, in an attempt to hear different views on the same issues.

Pilot Testing of Instruments

Pilot testing was conducted to test the data collection instruments used in the study with the aim of identifying weaknesses and strengths.

Data Audit

The data auditing was used by the researcher and the study was reported in detail in order to enable a future researcher to repeat the work if necessary. The researcher allowed for an external check to be conducted checking the authenticity of the study. The researcher made it a point that data collected is well organised and retrievable so that it can be available when needed if findings are challenged.

Description of Research Context

As an element of data trustworthiness, a detailed description was given for the research sites and research participants. These were some

of the measures taken to ensure data trustworthiness of the study.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher conformed to the standards (expected norms) of conducting research as this was a social science research project which collected data from human participants. Rubin and Babbie (1997) note that social research often presents an intrusion into people's lives requiring people to reveal personal information about their lives, therefore, ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation and withdrawal were critical (Neuman 2006). The researcher explained to the participants the importance of ethics in research. She made it a point to explain the purpose of the study to them first before signing of the consent forms.

RESULTS

From the findings themes related to the problem statement emerged. These themes are discussed below and illustrated by means of quotations from the interview text. The quotations are presented verbatim.

- Designing of activities and appeal to Department of Education
- CHH policy
- Projects
- Revival of extended family

Coding: OL-Orphaned Learner, T-Teacher, P-Principal and SGB-School Governing Board

Designing of Activities and Appeal to Department of Education

All the participants used in the study were asked to respond to the following question: 'What measures/strategies should be put in place to effectively assist (child-headed households) CHH learners to perform well at school?' In response to the above question **OL1** suggested that:

There should be activities that are organised to motivate and teach CHH learners on how to deal with social and personal issues. The government through the Department of Education should give us all the basics. The school should not chase us away for school fees. Teachers should not just punish us without finding the causes first.

In addition to the views above, **OL8** suggested that:

The Department of Education should send counsellors to CHH learners in every rural area. Some rural areas are neglected because there is no follow-up. The school should appoint a teacher who should make a follow-up of us, checking us even at home. Lastly, the school should identify us and know us.

Similarly, **OL6** (like **OL1** and **OL8**) suggested that:

The community should help us with the basics and protection and even adopting us. For us to know that we are not alone but are loved. CHH learners should not use drugs and alcohol because no one will be willing to help us and we will end up in jail. As CHH learners we should not compare ourselves with other learners.

The CHH learners came up with so many suggestions that were also supported by other interviewed OLs. Their sentiments and perceptions were more or less similar. Among other suggestions, it was noted that they were appealing to the school to design activities that were suitable for them and for the Department of Education to supply them with uniforms, food parcels, etc. The data also revealed that teachers should not just punish them without finding out from CHH learners why the work was not done. Furthermore, they said that CHH learners should behave well. Another appeal was to the Department of Education to send counsellors to their school. They also wanted the community to treat them with respect like their own children. Finally, they once again appealed to the school to provide them with calculators and then identify and know them as learners from CHHs so that they could be exempted from other activities that demanded money.

CHH Policy

The teachers also came up with suggestions reinforcing some of the suggestions proposed by the learner participants. In response to the same question **T1** proposed that:

The school should come up with policies specifically to do with CHH learners and draft also an HIV/AIDS policy. Every learner should also contribute towards the welfare of CHH learners by donating food, clothes, money, etc. Instead of throwing away the left-over from the school nutrition scheme, the food should be kept and be given to them.

From her response **T1** touched on the issue of policy formulation and said that other learners should also contribute towards these learners. Also, **T2** suggested that:

The school should identify the CHH learners first then secondly keep the lists and exclude them from activities that need money. It should also not send them back home for fees/levies. The school in conjunction with the Department of Education should do something on school uniforms, food, clothes, books etc. The teachers should use methods that suit their behaviour. Teachers shouldn't be too harsh, rude and insensitive to them. The class teacher should talk to the class; that these learners are orphans in CHHs and they should accept them as such and explain the value of education to them and they should be treated equally. He/she should also urge the other learners to report if they see orphans in CHHs being abused.

The above response indicated that CHH learners must be identified and not sent home for non-payment of school levies. She also advised teachers to be sensitive and for other learners to mix with them.

Projects

On the other hand, **T3** suggested that:

The community should assist CHH learners to have projects like gardening and poultry for them to generate income. The community should not view these learners as criminals instead they should protect them from criminals who are using them as their scapegoats. The community should protect these learners from robbery activities and sexual abuses. The teachers should provide more help, support them physically and be their parents for them not to be afraid to approach teachers whenever they have problems.

T3 echoed what was suggested by his colleagues but also suggested the idea of empowering learners through introduction of different projects for them to generate incomes. Lastly, **T4** came up with his own views when he suggested that:

Teachers should act in loco-parentis and take responsibility to act in the interest of the CHH learners, show them love, care and protecting their rights and conduct extra lessons. The government should liaise with teachers' colleges and universities for inclusion of this

topic in the foundations of education. The NGOs should visit rural schools and extend their help to such learners.

T4 showed that teachers should be mindful and proactive regarding these orphans and show them love and care. He also encouraged the school to hold extra lessons for them. Furthermore, he stated that the Department of Education should organise workshops for teachers and that NGOs should chip in and assist these learners.

Revival of Extended Family

P1 and **SGB1** were also afforded the opportunity to come up with suggestions since they were part of the school management. In response **P1** suggested that:

The extended family should take care of them. The Department of Education should educate teachers and learners from normal households on how to help these learners.

P1 concurred with the suggestions that were given by all the other participants. It was generally suggested across all the interviewed participants that the Department of Education should play a bigger role in launching awareness campaigns with regard to the issue under discussion. Finally, **SGB1** also proposed that, "*The SGB committee should come up with a plan on how to assist them with the payment of fees*".

From the above responses, the data revealed that much has to be done for these learners. Many different constructive suggestions were brought forward by the participants. The proposed suggestions seemed to agree that the Department of Education, school, community and CHH learners themselves should contribute towards the success of these learners. Another participant pointed out that NGOs should reach out to these learners. India HIV/AIDS Alliance and Tata Institute of Social Sciences (2006) advise that schools should be sensitised and have a flexible education programme for CHHs, facilitated to make a school a supportive place for the CHHs and enable them to continue with their studies.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to find out learners' and educators' contributions toward what exactly could be done to assist the child-headed house-

hold (CHH) learners to perform well at school. The intention was to find insights into measures that could be employed for the benefit of CHH learners in order to overcome the challenges they were facing.

It emerged from the study that the school should formulate a policy targeting CHH learners as the first step towards assisting CHH learners. The participants argued in the study that without a policy, CHH learners would never benefit. Closely related to this was the suggestion that learners should be properly identified and a record kept. The latter was viewed as a way that was going to help teachers offer appropriate help. Fleming (2015) reports that increasing focus on policies relating to children affected by HIV/AIDS and vulnerable children and developing a greater understanding of the needs of this group, particularly those in child-headed households, require greater focus. The finding is consistent with UNESCO and ESART's (2009b) and UNAIDS' (2010) report that South Africa, like Tanzania does not have specific policies or guidelines for CHH learners and this makes it difficult for teachers to handle such learners because of lack of training. Likewise Mkhize's (2006) study established that the schools did not have an action plan with regard to CHH children. Mkhize argued that an action plan as suggested above provides a forum where learners would be assessed and appropriately referred before the circumstances of the children develop into complex problems. In support of Mkhize (2006), Fleming (2015) and van der Mark (2015) agree that it was useful to understand the challenges associated with orphanhood and other vulnerable children in order to appreciate the context and need for broad programme and policy design.

The study also found that the participants advocated for in-service training of teachers since teachers were not confident in dealing with CHH learners and this resulted in misunderstandings with learners. Some of the teachers received their training long before this new family unit had emerged. This finding is in line with what was reported by Phillips (2015) that training would be beneficial in dealing with CHH learners effectively since it offers basic counselling skills specific to working with such children, concurs van der Mark (2015). The participants proposed forums like seminars, workshops and staff development meetings to empower the educators. In support of the view above,

UNESCO and IATT (2010) argue that the inadequate support provided through teacher programmes, or other efforts to empower teachers to support HIV/AIDS-infected and affected CHH learners was having a negative bearing on how teachers were handling them.

The same line of thought is advanced by UNAIDS (2010): that the quality of education provided for CHH learners hindered progress due to lack of training of teachers and an unwillingness on the part of teachers and schools to provide this education. In addition to the above, as has been established in the literature review, McCarthy (2006) shows how inadequate training of teachers affects CHH learners' education negatively. McCarthy holds that school systems do not understand the cognitive and emotional dynamics of the CHH learners and children are at a high risk of encountering difficulties in school and may never reach their full potential. That is why the participants in this study proposed the re-training of teachers.

It also emerged from the study that there should be counselling services of CHH learners at school. It was also proposed by the participants that the school should introduce children's clubs whereby such learners could meet and discuss issues affecting them and try to come up with solutions. This was viewed as a way of equipping the CHHs learners with techniques to deal with challenges affecting them in order for them to do well in school. This finding is also in line with what van der Mark (2015) proposes that schools should offer counselling services to such children (Phillips 2015).

It also stemmed from the study that the community hated and disregarded CHH learners because they believed that they increased criminal activities. There was a shocking revelation in the study: It was found that the criminals were robbing people and then taking the stolen goods to the homes of certain CHH learners for storage. They threatened the CHH children since they were vulnerable and the community was not protecting those children. Payne (2012) as cited in van der Mark (2015) concurs that peers and the neighbours reject CHH children and do not protect them. The view confirms that of Waghid (2004) in that the breakdown of the concept of 'Ubuntu' or 'botho' (humanness) is also to blame for the increased vulnerability of orphans, since in the past, members of the extended family would take care of orphans. The study

established that the CHH learners were exposed and vulnerable with no one taking any notice of them.

The study further established that teachers should go for workshops or staff development meetings for them to manage the CHH learners well. This was prompted by the fact that teachers (used in the study) were too busy to notice these learners because they were punishing CHH learners like other learners coming from normal homes without establishing the reasons why the homework was not done. Learners were shouted at in class and labelled as lazy or dull and some teachers developed a negative attitude towards them. Teachers in the study indicated that they had never attended a workshop or a staff development meeting on CHH or even talking about it as a school. They admitted that they had a lot of work to do hence failing to attend to the needs of CHH learners. This finding contradicts what was established by van der Mark (2015) that teachers were quite supportive. This paper argues that probably teachers in van der Mark's study had received training on how to deal with CHH learners unlike teachers used in this study. Phillips's (2015) report supports the current study that facilitators/teachers needed to be trained in order for them to have skills on how to deal with CHH learners.

The CHH learners' plight was to be identified and known for them to get proper help and attention. The learners pointed out that they did not want only to be asked about their family background status when there were visitors looking for information or the Department of Education just asking for the statistics to update their records. The CHH learners because of that felt neglected, demoralised and rejected and it resulted in poor performance in class. The learners in the study felt that their teachers were not ready assist them.

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that CHH learners had not been identified by the school; there was no record-keeping of such learners, despite the school having quite a large number of learners from CHHs. Furthermore, the paper concludes that the school did not have policies on CHH learners in order to direct the teachers and the learners to this regard. It was also established that teachers were not empowered to deal with

learners from CHHs, hence always clashing with them and calling them names; this created misunderstandings between teachers and CHH learners. The paper also showed that there was a need for the revival of the African concept of humanity, resuscitation of the African system of extended families, reflecting the idea that your child is my child in the villages and communities. These were all perceived as positive steps toward helping the CHH learners to grow normally and perform better at school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that:

Schools should seriously consider the impediments that are faced by CHH learners in their quest for education and should therefore come up with well-articulated policies focused on CHHs since there is now a significant increase in the number of learners coming from such families. These policies would act like radar navigating the way for CHH learners and creating a conducive and comfortable environment for them to overcome the cited challenges so that they can then perform well at school. The policy-makers should also formulate and come up with policies that cater for CHH learners and protect them from being sent home by schools for non-payment of school levies and fees. There should also be checks and follow-ups to ensure that policies crafted are being implemented on the ground.

Different stakeholders should take a multi-dimensional approach in order to assist these learners effectively: for example, the Department of Education, Department of Social Welfare, NGOs, communities, relatives and the school should jointly work together and fight for the protection and security of these learners so that they are not to be trapped in the vicious circle of poverty by not getting proper education and or not being educated at all. The communities should ensure that such vulnerable children are protected and safeguard from the social ills that have erupted in different communities because of selfishness and economic challenges. Enlightened policies will alleviate poverty, stress, truancy and low self-esteem.

In addition to the above, the educators should go for in-service training, workshops, seminars, and professional development meetings to empower and prepare them to deal with

such families that have emerged in the classroom situation. The study noted that the incompetence of teachers created a gap and led to misunderstanding between teachers and learners. The colleges and universities training teachers should also prepare teachers in the making with the relevant skills to deal with such situations.

The study pointed out that the CHH learners under study faced a myriad of challenges that affected their education thus there should be counselling services at school level to assist learners deal with such problems in a way that does not impede their education negatively. Complicated issues should be referred to professional psychologists. Furthermore, for this recommendation to be implemented effectively, the researcher recommends that the school should have a way of identifying CHH learners and have a record that reflects biographical data of each CHH learner. This record should be kept locked away and be treated with confidentiality. There should be a register of orphans. The researcher further suggests urgent counselling for teachers in the system since they are frustrated and stressed by CHH learners. The Department of Education should act swiftly and treat this issue with the urgency it deserves to address this anomaly.

The study further recommends the formation of social groups in schools whereby learners affected by the same issue can meet and discuss their challenges and try to come up with solutions. It is a way of empowering learners to deal with life's challenges and it will encourage open communication and sharing of ideas that help learners to share their problems. This would help to heal the wounds and the broken hearts of CHH learners considering the challenges they meet every day. When they meet there should be a counsellor to take note of the problems and challenges and guide and direct them to ensure emotional stabilisation so that they perform well at school.

The study recommends the introduction of viable projects for CHH learners at school and home in small groups to reduce poverty since it was found that most were living in poverty. This would cushion and keep them busy rather than being idle and then engaging in unwanted behaviour as discussed earlier in this study. It would empower them to be independent and be hard workers. Schools should give them an area

where they can grow some vegetables and also do poultry projects as a way of income-generating at home. This could work as a strategy to try and alleviate the plight of CHH learners; NGOs should chip in and assist with the initial capital or inputs needed for a 'kick start'. Monitoring would be necessary for them to be viable and monitoring productive. Based on the findings of the study the researcher wishes to introduce a new model to deal comprehensively with this problem. It is called Marongwe's proposed school/community partnership. This model is now discussed below.

Marongwe's Proposed School/Community Partnership Model

The partnership approach thrives on close co-operation between the school and the community in addressing the plight of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) as well as children from child-headed families. The spirit behind this model is that schools and communities cannot ignore the existence of children from child-headed households in schools and in communities. There is, therefore, need to work co-operatively with mutually supportive function performed by both the school and community.

School and Community Functions

The school and community should have in place committees to deal with children from child-headed households. The school committee should be made up of the principal, senior teachers and a student representative. Such a committee should design a programme of action for assisting children from child-headed families in the school. The starting point would be identification of such children and then identifying their needs and how best they can be assisted.

The community committee should include community leaders, church leaders, social workers and representatives of local non-governmental organisations. The committee should also have a programme of action for assisting children from child-headed households in the community and should work with and liaise with the school community to identify areas of synergy.

Identification and Placement of OVCs

In unison the school and the community, through committees should identify such CHH

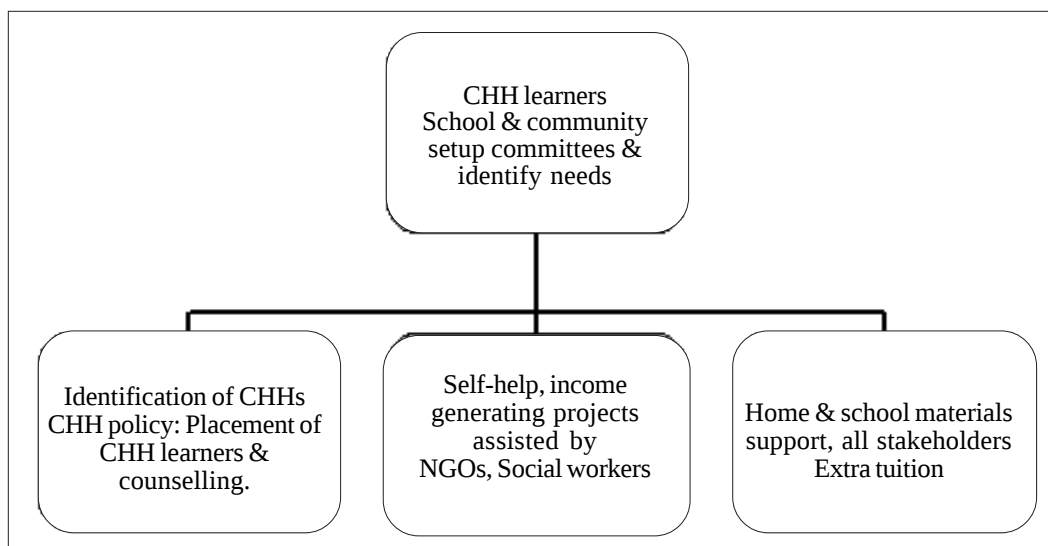


Fig. 1. Marongwe's proposed school/community partnership model
Source: Author

children, place them in safe areas where they can feel warmth, love, and protection, be provided for, and have role models for supervision, guidance and direction. These placement areas could be with relatives (who need to be sensitised through campaign awareness to absorb such children into their families) or houses where a matured and responsible person could stay with them. It could also be done through moving them to designated children's homes or orphanage centres where they would receive the basics, for example, SOS children's homes.

School/Community Counselling Programmes

The school/community counsellors should target both CHH learners and teachers to create a conducive and manageable situation both at home and at school. The school should introduce social clubs targeting such learners where they discuss their challenges and possible solutions freely. Professional counsellors, psychologists or social workers should be employed to counsel the affected teachers and learners. The teachers should receive basic counselling skills through workshops, seminars, staff development meetings etc. for them to be equipped on how to handle such learners and for them to keep abreast with developments. Teachers who majored in Psychology should be identified and asked to

assist with counselling. These teachers should be asked to identify signs of, for example, clinical depression which may need medical intervention.

Self-help Income Generating Projects

This idea should be taken seriously and valued in order to reduce dependence on the government, relatives and donations. Small projects need to be introduced in small groups or by individuals to ensure that such learners free themselves from the oppressive forces of poverty that lead them to prostitution, alcohol and drug abuse, etc. Every stakeholder should assist; NGOs could be asked to supply them with the initial capital to set up the projects, the Social Development could monitor and supervise and the community could protect against theft, and help learners to sell and buy produce. The school could motivate, encourage and apply for resources on learners' behalf. Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will not go hungry.

Home and School Materials Support

All the stakeholders should co-operate and assist the CHH learners with the material support they need both at home and at school. Without the basic material resources, they will not

achieve much. This should even come from the support of other learners who can be encouraged to collect whatever they have and give to CHH learners.

Extra Tuition

The school should be prepared to go the extra mile in order to assist these learners to receive quality education. Extra time to teach them and to monitor their schoolwork should be created by the school which should come up with strategies and methodologies that best suit CHH learners. The school could even look for volunteers from the community who could come and monitor CHH learners during time allocated to ensure that homework is done and completed with understanding. A classroom for homework could be set aside for CHH learners.

The spirit behind the model is to ensure that stakeholders play their part in reducing the challenges that impede CHH learners from acquiring quality education and free them from the oppression enslaving them. The model is depicted diagrammatically in Figure 1.

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