



## Orphaned by the Diaspora? School Experiences of Learners with Parents in the Diaspora in the Zimbabwean District of Mwenezi.

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### ABSTRACT:

The study sought to explore the school experiences of primary school learners from the Mwenezi district of Zimbabwe whose parents were in the diaspora at the time the research was conducted. An interpretive paradigm that incorporated a qualitative research approach and case study design was adopted to gather data through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and through focus group discussions. The study had a total of 27 participants, comprising 2 heads, 13 teachers, 6 learners, and 6 guardians who were drawn from the two schools studied. Data were analysed using the thematic content technique and the generated narrative data were presented using verbatim transcriptions. It emerged that learners left behind got orphaned both materially and socially although their parents were alive because they got inadequate financial and moral guidance respectively due to the disruption of family systematic structures emigration caused. They were thus labelled by teachers as undisciplined and violent. Biological parents' emigration was reported to negatively influence motivation for school hence the learners left behind had negative attitudes towards education and their performance was largely poor. The left behind learners had difficulties coping with both home chores and school requirements and hence felt like dropping out of school to follow their parents. To minimize the negative educational effects on children orphaned by the diaspora, it is recommended that there should be a reorientation of communities and schools on a new type of orphaned child due to parental emigration into the diaspora.

**Keywords:** diaspora, orphan, emigration, learners left behind

### INTRODUCTION

The concept '*Orphaned by the diaspora*' is getting increased space in migration literature (Mensah & Omigbodun, 2020; Munyoka 2020). It entails a situation whereby children are left by emigrant biological parents under self-care or under the care of other people for a relatively long period such as extending a year with little or no parental remission, return or guidance thus exposing children to experiences similar to what most children whose parents had died go through such as caring for other family members, early sexuality, school girl pregnancy, engaging in excessive household chores, prone to

contracting HIV/AIDS, school dropout and poverty (Cho, 2021; Tawodzera & Themane, 2019). Of late globalisation, which is global integration of communities has precipitated movement of people from one place to the other due to ease of communication networks and vast transport systems (IOM, 2018; Mazzucato & Schans, 2011). On many accounts, the factors that propel emigration include the search for greener pastures, political asylum, better education prospects, natural disasters, among others hence high statistics of South- North migration due to the two's varying development levels (IOM, 2018; Munyoka, 2020; Wallace; Freeman; Morell & Levin, 2021). However, studies show

that a good number of school-going age children rarely out-migrate with their parents for some cultural, or other reasons or prohibitive migration laws in the destination countries (Jaure & Gregory, 2022; Sanduleasa & Matei, 2015; Tawodzera & Themane, 2019).

For Zimbabwe, the out-flux of the able-bodied people into the diaspora was induced by economic austerity measures such as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs) introduced in the early 1990s and the fast track land reform programme that started in early 2000 (Machinya, 2019) which resulted in the loss of formal employment as some companies closed as well as political instability (Machinya, 2019; Tawodzera & Themane, 2017). Consequently, the number of children left under self-care or under the care of relatives has become phenomenal because the majority of the emigrants stayed and worked illegally, especially in South Africa hence deemed it safer to leave the children behind (Machinya, 2019; Munyoka, 2020).

The major challenge in Zimbabwe is that, despite the increasing numbers of learners left behind (LLB) by emigrants (Chakombera & Mubikwa, 2020; Machinya, 2019; Munyoka, 2020), the phenomenon of vulnerability among such learners is largely not understood and appreciated by most of those who implement government educational welfare programmes because despite the constitutional provisions especially sections 19, 25, 27 and 30 on child safety, protection of the family, education and welfare respectively (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Number 20, 2013) as well as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) manual that accord all children including LLB to access safety nets, most such learners are excluded in educational welfare programmes such as BEAM on the basis that they are believed to be self-sustaining since their parents worked in the diaspora (Dzimiri & Gumbo,

2016; Filippa, Cronje & Ferns, 2013). The belief by some Zimbabweans that emigrants were affluent is not an isolated case since Mensah and Omigbodun (2020) report of similar view from findings of studies carried out in Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria where the focus was on the mental health of such learners. We felt that considerations for inclusion of children into welfare programmes needed to be a result of evidence of vulnerability rather than on assumptions because even though some emigrants could have been well off economically, the questions that remained were, Were they all responsible? If otherwise, should children suffer on the account of their irresponsible parents? We therefore reasoned that such a line of argument was opposed to the African perspective of Ubuntu in which a child is regarded as belonging to the community and hence should have access to any form of assistance when the need arises, thus developed an interest in establishing how the LLB experienced school in the Mwenezi district of Zimbabwe where their population was high (Zirima, 2016), so as to contribute valid literature for policy improvement.

We also note that while some scholars acknowledge the growing number of LLB by emigrants in Zimbabwe, (Chakombera & Mubikwa, 2020; Kufakurinani, Pasura & McGregor, 2014), they have tended to focus more on the experiences of adolescents or learners at secondary school level and those who lived in towns and cities where they established that drug abuse and early sexuality were rampant among such learners. A study close to the current one conducted by Zirima (2016) emphasized on psycho-social effects of parental emigration on children left behind hence still leaving a gap because it did not cover the ground on the educational experiences of such learners from the perspective of guardians and the learners themselves hence this study sought to add more literature by seeking views of the

guardians of those children since they had adequate knowledge of the 'orphaned' children's daily lives.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE STUDY**

The current study was underpinned by the family systems theory by Bowen (1978) which expounds on the idea that a family is a system with integrated parts that include rules and members whose alterations may significantly influence the functionality of the whole family (Johnson, 2010). The family systems theory builds on four precepts namely anxiety, two basic life forces, the emotional system, and the family as an emotional unit. By anxiety, Bowen meant our responses to probable or real threats following an event (International Social Services Family Institute (ISSFI, 2015) which in our case was the probable threat or anxieties on the (LLB) brought about by the changed family structures due to emigration of biological parents. In the two basic life forces, it assumes that organisms are controlled by two opposing forces one for togetherness and the other one for individuality which helped us to assess the level of support, affection, and love as well as the respect of the children's right to opinion respectively as exhibited by the emigrants in their process of migration because we felt that such factors were key ingredients in one's schooling since they were the sign posts to parental involvement in the education of their children.

Johnson (2010) explains that the family systems' emotional system works hand in glove with the feelings and intellectual systems which in their own right influence one's ability to comprehend and communicate, key factors in successful learning hence we regard it as a key concept when analysing the way LLB by emigrants experienced schooling in the Mwenezi district of Zimbabwe.

As we delved into the school experiences of LLB in the Mwenezi district of Zimbabwe, we also drew wisdom from Bowen who opines that a family is an emotional unit where members are sometimes measured on the basis of their ability to control emotions and that has a bearing on how one performs or makes judgments relating to education. In the emotional unit, Bowen explains that socialization within the family influences one's level of differentiation that is one's ability to separate thinking from feelings, guided by rational capacity and the ability to maintain a solid sense of self regardless of social pressure to conform, while at the same time being able to maintain an intimate meaningful relationship to others (ISSFI, 2015). We became interested in establishing how learners who seemingly had inadequate strict family socialization or who were socialized by social parents fared in terms of differentiation and subsequently in their schooling.

The other proposition of the differentiation of self within the context of the current study was the aspect of roles, boundaries, and personal responsibilities that characterize family functionality (Ceka & Murti, 2016; Moreno, 2013). We took the position that after the emigration of their parents, the LLB assumed new roles and responsibilities that in one way or the other could have impacted on their school experiences and it was also on such basis that we found these guiding principles of the family systems theory enriching in terms of guiding this study on the influence of diaspora orphanhood on the education of the LLB.

We assessed interaction patterns among guardians, educators, and emigrants to establish how they impacted LLB schooling because according to Smith (2016) family systems theory attempts to shed light on the nature and patterns of interaction among family members and their effects on family functionality. One major assumption of the family systems

theory is that behaviour is family specific which means that people from different families portray behavior characteristics peculiar to their family backgrounds. Drawing from the idea that stable families are intact and structurally integrated, we postulate that the family social equilibrium (working balance) significantly change upon migration of some member hence the need to relook at the educational role of the biological parents and the guardians of the affected learners.

Also, the family systems theory postulates that changes in family structure influence family processes which encompass family function, family communication and transactional patterns, family conflict, separateness and connectedness among members, cohesion, integration, and adoption to change (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000; Morgaine, 2001; Sun, 2017). In a study related to the current one Teja and Rutger (2017) found out that some learners were affected by structural changes to their families because some functions such as visits to the school by parents, consultation with teachers, celebration parties when a learner performs well among others were not fulfilled under social parents. Since the current study drew participants from families in changed structures, the probable changes as presented by the family systems theory namely family communication, transactional patterns, and family conflict among others together with the cited literature findings became the signposts from which data relating to possible school experiences of LLB by emigrants from Mwenezi district of Zimbabwe could also be formulated.

### ***Global trends on 'diaspora orphanhood'***

According to UNESCO (2018), the global population of people residing in more than one country stood at 258 million by 2017. Some destination countries have put up legislative measures to limit the entry of children of immigrants leading to

exponential growth of 'diaspora orphanhood'. In the case of the Philippines for instance, Rojas and Taylor (2013) established in their study that 1.1 million children have been left behind by emigrant biological parents to be cared for by other people. Similarly, studies carried out in Zimbabwe, Dube (2014) and Zirima (2016) also established that many children were left under self-care or under the care of old relatives while their biological parents emigrated to South Africa and all this further points to the widespread of the phenomenon of children orphaned by the diaspora whose school experiences this study sought to unravel.

### ***LLB's readiness and participation in school curricula upon biological parents' emigration***

Literature reveals that when children are separated from their biological parents for a long period, there are bound to be some challenges associated with adaptation to the new family setup (Teja & Rutger, 2017). Guendell, Saab, and Taylor (2013) opine that, parental migration may expose children left behind to a new material culture which may create new aspirations that are difficult to realize. In studies in the Philippines, Ghana, Nigeria, and Angola, it was found that girls left behind experienced a very significant reduction in their time spent on school activities in response to the absence of the mother in the household and this dovetails with the family systems theorization that structural changes to the family also come with changes in roles by family members (Mazzucato, Cebotori, Veale, White, Grassi&Vivet, 2015; Portner, 2014).

### ***Role of biological parents in the education of learners left behind.***

IFFD (2017) reports that, upon migration, some emigrants tended to abandon some basic parental roles in the developmental affairs of the children such as food, health, education provisions as well as interaction and general engagement

in the child's life. Non-involvement in the education of the LLB was viewed as a bad practice by Fagbeminiyi (2011) who found out that in Nigeria, pre-school learners whose parents were involved in their education performed fairly well academically and this cascades into the family systems theory's postulation that it is the role of the family to provide primary socialisation as well as life-long guidance to its members to maintain the emotional character of the family.

### ***Guardians' participation in the education of 'diaspora orphans'***

In a study in Thailand, Jampaklay, Vappattawong, and Prasithina (2012) found that, guardians participated minimally in the education of the children under their care because they could not control the children. Results of the Thailand study were similar to what ACPF (2012) also found in China as well as Mensah and Omigbodun (2020) in Angola where the children were reported to disregard guardian authority and engaging in anti-social behavior that resulted in the learners performing badly in school. In Zimbabwe, Dube (2014) in his study in Plumtree and Beit-bridge found out that guardians were largely inactive in the educational affairs of the learners left behind because most of the guardians were illiterate.

### ***Schools' responsiveness to the educational welfare of 'diaspora orphans'***

Surveys carried out in several countries by OECD (2015) reveal that while there were programmes and strategies developed in affluent countries to mitigate challenges faced by LLB by migrant biological parents, little was done in the majority of the migrant-sending countries. Exceptions were however noted in countries such as Jamaica and Romania where Brown and Grinter (2014) in their studies established that educators visited the homes of the learners left behind to have the physical experience of what the learners went through as well as awarding learners'

high marks to motivate them in their education which suggests that the education policy in that country had such provisions.

### **STUDY FOCUS**

This study focussed to explore;

- The nature of orphan-hood among LLB
- The role of educators, guardians and biological parents on the education of LLB.
- The school participation of LLB

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

A descriptive collective case study entailing a design for investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Kivunja & Kiyini, 2017) was used to gather data. McCusker and Gunaydini (2015) link the case study design to qualitative research, a procedure employed when one intends to understand how a community or individuals perceive a particular issue, in our case school experiences of children orphaned by the diaspora. The design proved instrumental in the current study because it generated thick descriptions in the form of words since participants discussed extensively and shared views of the school experiences of orphans. (Creswell, 2014; Vaisimoradi, Jones, Turunem, & Snelgrove, 2016).

### ***Sampling and research sample***

A purposive sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 27 participants from two primary schools. The purposive sampling technique involves selecting participants rich in the phenomenon at hand (Gray, 2014). The sample that comprised 2 school heads, 13 teachers, 6 guardians of LLB, and 6 LLB was found to be suitable for the current study because school heads and teachers are responsible for the day-to-day planning and execution of education programs for learners so they had adequate information about how learners experienced schooling and so were the guardians of the learners

who also participated in the general school welfare of the LLB.

### ***Research instruments***

The face-to-face key participant interview protocol (leedy & Osmroid, 2016) was administered to school heads, guardians of LLB, and the LLB because it afforded the participants extensive data since it enabled probing. Also, the private and individualistic nature through which the face-to-face interviews were conducted improved rapport between the participants and the researchers thereby enhancing data reliability and research worthiness (Creswell, 2014). A focus group discussion interview protocol, a tool that allowed the teacher participants to discuss their views on school experiences of LLB was also used and it resulted in thick descriptions of data that also improved the trustworthiness of the results (Vaisimoradi, Jones, Turunem, & Snelgrove, 2016).

### ***Ethical considerations***

Prior to the execution of the study, measures to safeguard the interests and rights of the participants (ethical considerations) (Amalki, 2016) were put in place. Realizing that some participants were minors (primary school learners) and hence immature to decide on their own whether they could be involved in the study, consent of the guardians was sought first. Six learners thus made it into the sample because it was these on which assent was granted. Consent was also obtained from the guardians of the learners and from the educators who participated in the study. Pseudonyms of the participants and their schools were used in the report as a way to protect their identity.

### ***Data analysis***

Data were analyzed using the thematic content analysis technique which is conceptualized by Thahn and Thahn (2015) as a process by which huge volumes of textual or pictorial data are summarised and classified into fewer categories that are

easy to comprehend. Furthermore, the thematic content analysis technique is recommended for studies that seek to gather data about unfamiliar subjects (Creswell, 2014; Vaisimoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). The study generated huge volumes of narrative data about school experiences of LLB and the data that were recorded verbatim needed to be filtered systematically to produce meaningful themes hence the suitability of the thematic content analysis technique. Furthermore, the thematic content analysis technique was found helpful in this study which produced unfamiliar data about the school experiences of primary school learners from a rural setting which also was somehow divergent from earlier studies on the experiences and challenges faced by learners with absent parents in Zimbabwe who concentrated on adolescents and urbanites (Kufakurinani, McGregor & Pasura, 2014; Tawodzera, 2019).

## **RESULTS**

Three themes emerged from this study thus, the causal factors of the diaspora orphanhood, the relationship matrix among the LLB and their significant others, and the learners' school participation and performance.

### ***Causal factors for the development of diaspora orphanhood***

Teacher Max reported that there was a growing number of LLBs by emigrant biological parents in the part of the Mwenzezi district where the study was done because families needed to fork for a living since "*In this area seeking employment means going to the diaspora.*" One learner Tichaona identified the actual necessities that the parents intended to accumulate upon finding employment in the diaspora; thus, "*They went out to seek money for our education, clothing and food.*" Even though the learners attested that parental emigration was meant to improve family economic life, it later came out that the move bred some orphanhood to

as revealed by Chipo who could not control her emotions as she narrated that; *“they don’t send money and I don’t have uniforms, my friend gave me two books only.”* Even Chipo’s guardian Dorothy alluded to the same predicament and commented; *“It’s not enough to be in South Africa, those people are useless their children here live in abject poverty, who would you think will be serious about someone’s child when the biological parent doesn’t care.”*

Guardian Lucy also bemoaned child neglect tendencies by some emigrants which she attributed largely to dishonesty interaction patterns within the communities where the truth was sometimes concealed about the life experiences of the LLB citing the case of greedy community leaders who she cautioned that; *“The community leaders must not accept beer from those people and tell them the truth about the experiences of their children and advise them to take their children with them.”* From the family systems perspective, interactions of family members bind the families together as challenges are shared and resolved before they get out of hand which unfortunately was not the case in the current study revelations thereby exposing the LLB to diaspora-induced orphanhood.

The other guardian, Colletta, added that the LLB suffered double orphan-hood because other than the neglect by their parents, the local leadership in the communities neglected them as well by not considering them in welfare programmes because *“my grand-daughters have never benefited from the BEAM, they say their parents work in the diaspora but it boggles my mind because no-one has seen those people here it’s me who fend for these kids through engaging in menial jobs if I am lucky to get them otherwise it’s just poverty.”* The sentiments of neglect of LLB raised against the community leadership seemed to depart from the African spirit of Ubuntu or communalism that recognised the community as a family and that the

children belonged to the community hence every parent was responsible for giving a hand or advice to any child belonging to the community whenever the need arises (Gomba, 2018). It seems there was a gap between policy formulation and implementation that needed to be filled in through monitoring and supervision of government programmes to reduce orphanhood among the LLB.

Other than the economic disadvantage, the orphan-hood of the LLB was measured on the basis of the learners spending most of the time alone, unsure of where the parents were and whether they would one day meet them and this was illustrated by a learner, Diana who tearfully lamented, *“I don’t know where they are, they don’t phone, I had never seen them since they went and it pains me.”* Though some parents visited their families, they rarely did so, and the visits were too short as one learner Mercy revealed that *“They come back every December and leave in January after a short stay.”* Another learner reported that despite all the provisions she got from her parents, she still felt that there was a void because *“I just want to see them often (Mavis).”* The negative effects of non-returning parents on learners’ education expressed by the participants were not unique to this study since Zirima (2016) also reported the negative psycho-social effects on children of non-returning parents. In another study, IFFD (2018) reports that children in Jordan were also traumatized by their parental absence irrespective of remittances sent to them by their parents in the diaspora. Similarly, studies in Ghana, Angola, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe also revealed that LLB exhibited anxiety disorders. (Filippa, Cronje & Feirns, 2013; Mensah & Omigbodun 2020; Tawodzera & Themane, 2019). The current study therefore upholds that non-returning of emigrants was negatively impacting on the education of LLB in ways similar to what some orphans go through hence should be discouraged.

Another guardian Susan was much critical about leaving the girl child alone whom she viewed as more vulnerable to sexual abuse because *“most of the time the girls are without basics which unfortunately drive them into promiscuity.”* With respect to school necessities, one of the school heads commended that; *“fees are not paid in time then behaviour wise such learners do not behave well.”* (Head School A).

Parallels can be drawn with respect to the findings of the current study to Mabharani (2014) in a study in Dzivaresekwa in Harare, Zimbabwe, and another by Chakombera and Mubikwa (2018) at Nemakonde High School still in Zimbabwe where it was also established that some emigrant parents rarely supported education of their children resulting in decline in learner motivation. On the basis of these corroborating findings, we concluded that ‘diaspora orphaned hood’ remained a challenge for the education of the affected learners in Zimbabwe.

#### ***Effects of the orphaned learners and educators' relationship on schooling.***

For the teachers, the learners with emigrant parents were difficult to work with as teacher Andrew laments; *“very few respect teachers because their parents view teachers as people at the extreme bottom end of the social ladder hence bad-mouth teachers in the presence of their children so learners in the upper classes are disrespectful, they say their destiny is South Africa.”* All the teacher participants who raised concerns regarding their relationship with the LLB linked that poor relationship to the learners` parental influence as another teacher also lamented *“They look down upon me just because I am poor. When I have seen that this one is looking down upon me, I develop a negative attitude towards him or her.”* (Diana).

The finding that biological parents viewed teachers negatively, a perception which they recklessly passed on to their

children as they bad mouthed teachers in the vicinity of the children share related connotations to what Brown and Grinter (2014) also found in their study in Jamaica where teacher participants reported that LLB adopted a ‘waiting to migrate’, the assumption that one does not have to work hard now because he or she will migrate to another country at any time. On the basis of these related findings, it could be concluded that some biological parents of LLB were responsible for the poor relationship that existed between their children and the significant others back home culminating in orphanhood as counsel rarely came in such strained relationships.

#### ***Influence of the Orphaned Learners' biological parents and educators' interaction patterns on schooling.***

It emerged from the interviews that there was largely a dearth of communication between educators and emigrant biological parents of LLB. One of the educators attested to this when she revealed that; *“the parents communicate when they are about to return otherwise its two, three years without a word.”* (Molly). Head of school A was very critical of infrequent communication between biological parents and teachers because; *“guardians only give food and are not concerned about school so if the biological parents are not linking up with the school, the learners dodge lessons knowing that no one will question them.”* According to the triangulation argument of the family systems theory (Smith, 2016) the dearth of communication between educators and parents normally results in more challenges because the educational experiences of the learners remain hidden, and unresolved thus exacerbating the orphanhood of the learners.

#### ***Guardians and biological parental relationship and schooling***

There were two categories of guardians that emerged from our study, old grandmothers and then of nieces, aunts or



housemaids. Apparently, the grandmothers reported that they rarely communicated with the biological parents of the children they took care of as one of them tearfully lamented; *“We had never been in contact since he left.”* (Sandile). Another guardian Mary revealed that there was no direct communication between her and the biological parents of the learners since she only learned about them through other people thus, she commended *“We are not communicating.”* Even though the youthful guardians reported that they communicated with the biological parents of the learners, they too raised the concern that the communication was ineffective in addressing the educational issues of the learners because according to one of them it was infrequent because *“Sometimes it’s two or three months between calls depending on availability of airtime.”* (Susan).

Generally, the current study revealed that there was poor relationship among learners, guardians, biological parents of LLB and teachers which unfortunately limited LLB’s educational access. Similarly, Dube (2014) in another study on socio-economic effects of cross-border migration established that learners in Beit-bridge and Plumtree also despised both guardians and teachers resulting in the teachers failing to control the learners. The lack of adequate contact time among biological parents, guardians and teachers increased the learners’ orphanhood because it limited triangulation of the truth about their educational experiences which Brown and Grinter (2014) and Nguyen (2016) found helpful in their studies in Japan and Ethiopia respectively.

#### ***School participation and performance of learners left behind by emigrant parents.***

The teacher participants observed that while some LLB were completing their primary education, they did so at older ages than their age mates since they repeated grades because of their school attendance

inconsistence as illustrated here; *“in my case, about 16 did not return from holiday in South Africa, those who returned did not complete their Grade 4 so their performance is deteriorating hence they may complete but with poor grades because they missed a lot.”* (Tapiwa). The other factor that affected the LLB’s completion rate was the age at which they enrolled since; *“They start Grade 1 at 7 to 8 years which makes it difficult to control them when they get to upper classes.”* (Molly).

Teachers’ concerns regarding poor completion rate among the LLB were also raised by the school heads who singled out boys for absconding lessons and truant behavior because; *“they do not have parental care and most of them are left behind under the control of uneducated people who do not have quality education to encourage children.”* (Head School B).

The participants emphasised that some biological parents kept the learners too long when they visited them resulting in the learners missing learning time and subsequently underperform in class. One may conclude that it is the disintegration of the family network that was largely responsible for the challenges of the learners’ poor school experience. The results of the current study highly relate with those found in rural Albania where it was reported that school performance was largely poor especially where fathers had emigrated (Botezat & Pfeiffer 2014; Giannelli & Mangiavachi, 2010). The opposite was however true for Albanian urbanites where Botezat and Pfeiffer (2014) in a study established that grades of LLB improved since the learners worked hard in school knowing that educational success would land them into the diaspora, a scenario different from the situation of emigrants in our study who were largely undocumented and had rarely completed primary education.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the study results, we deduced three key effects of parental emigration on LLB, namely material and social poverty as the root cause of diaspora orphanhood, the disruptive effects of parental absenteeism on the family's functioning system and consequently on the diaspora orphaned children's education. In this section, we therefore compare our findings with the study theoretical underpinning of family systems theory and the findings from earlier studies.

### *Material and social poverty as the face of diaspora orphanhood.*

Though our study revealed that migration from Mwenezi district has largely been a result of poverty due to the volatile economic environment and therefore intended to ease financial pressure on the families concerned, it did little overall in that respect because those challenges seemed to have been passed on to the learners since they also experienced school poverty as illustrated by one learner; *"Sometimes I come to school without food."* (Tichaona). The other learner participant attributed her school poverty (lack of school necessities such as stationery, fees, and uniforms) to her guardian whom she accused of misappropriating educational funds remitted by her parents because, *"my mother's sister does not pay our school fees although my mother could have sent the money, she pays for her children first so at times we are sent home from school for non-payment of fees"* (Susan). In a related study in Romania, the learners who experienced material needs deprivation similar to those articulated in the current study lost learning time as they sought employment to offset the impact of poverty (Sanduleasa & Matei, 2015). These findings feed into the family systems theory concept of projection of problems onto the child hence one can say that the emigration of parents from the Mwenezi district was largely morally defective in the sense that it

created orphanhood to some learners on account of their fees and food provision at school not adequately met. However, the negative effects of parental emigration seem to emanate from the relationship between social parents and emigrants because Nguyen (2016) in a study in Ethiopia found the practice largely benefited the learners as it afforded them school provisions.

Other than the material poverty most LLB experienced, the teacher participants noted that the learners had inadequate and proper guidance that could see them develop into responsible adults in the future because, *"they are in disciplined, they challenge teachers and some guardians bring similar concerns here, it's because of the culture they adopt from their parents who are violent"* (Molly). Even Head School A had this to say about the learners *"their behaviour is not under the strict control of the teachers; the teachers are weak."* These concerns of disrespect of significant others by the LLB in as much as it is largely believed to be the result of the influence of the emigrants show to a larger degree the extent to which the lack of coordination between the emigrants and the social parents and the importation of culture has worsened the orphan-hood status of the learners as they grow inadequately socialized in line with their local community culture because both teachers and the guardians would rarely guide and counsel such powerful learners.

### *Disruption of family structure and its negative effects on education of children left behind.*

While the current study findings revealed that two categories of learners emerged depending on whether they were under the custodianship of young guardians or old guardians, the participants reiterated that both categories of learners experienced schooling harshly reflecting orphanhood. For example, Learner Mimmy lamented that since her parents moved to South

Africa, she had not known peace of mind because despite the fact that the parents were remitting; *"I just want to see them often."* Mimmy's emotional response to her separation from her parents indicates that while the parents emigrated on the belief that family economic emancipation was all that the family needed, they were somehow wrong since the decision had led to the apprehension of the learner as she tried to adjust to the altered family set up. We juxtapose our finding on learner emotional outburst to family separation to the family systems concept of anxiety which state that sometimes some family members take long or fail to adjust whenever the nuclear family setup is shaken by separation (Guendell, Saab & Taylor, 2013; Moreno, 2013) hence conclude that alteration of family structure if not mutually agreed upon by all the members may be harmful to the whole family system.

It emerged from the discussions held by the educators that parental emigration demotivated the learners to pursue studies because; *"as the learners grow up, they will be deteriorating academically...as they are ready to go."* (Vinet). Further, the educators reported that the 'orphans' performed dismally because they rarely wrote work given as; *"they hide their books."* (Andrew). Head of school A opined that the diaspora orphaned could not participate in schoolwork taking advantage of some guardians who were not concerned about the learners' schoolwork since; *"what the guardians need is their remuneration, and some are illiterate so they cannot assist the learners."* The negative impact of parental migration on the academic performance of learners that manifests in the current study mirrors results found in related studies carried out in Angola and Nigeria where Mensah and Omigbodun (2020) also established that LLB underperformed due to poor mental well-being adjustments, a development resonating with the family systems theory

concept of anxiety that normally characterize members in split families.

It was also reported that some learners had poor attitudes toward learning and as put by teacher participants, this was due to a lack of guidance from both the biological parents and guardians since some parents; *"flush their children with a lot of things to the extent that the child feels that schooling is insignificant."* (Peter). The teacher participants also reported that they had challenges working with learners whose biological parents were not communicating with them since there was nowhere, they could report the learners' progress and problems. We infer from the teachers' sentiments that learners developed a negative attitude towards schooling and disrespected them because they knew that there was no connection between the teachers and their parents where the learners' behavior could be discussed as suggesting that there is a need to involve schools, biological parents and the guardians to collectively proffer solutions to the negative effects of 'diaspora-orphanhood' as rightly advised in the family systems theorization of triangulation (Johnson, 2010).

What exacerbated the situation for the LLB in Mwenezi district as is reported for other areas in other local related studies (Crush, Tawodzera, Chikanda, Ramachandran & Tevera, 2017; Moyo, 2017; Tawodzera & Themane, 2019), is that the learners were never consulted when the parents decided to leave for the diaspora and a similar concern was also raised in a study in Romania (Sanduleasa & Matei, 2015; UNDESA, 2020). Parental disregard to seek views of their children before migration especially when the children are left behind not only contravenes the children's right to opinion as stipulated in the Convention on the Right of the Child but also results in exposing the learners to anxiety disorders which lead to limited concentration span in class and academic underperformance. According to family

systems theorisation, parental migration may worsen the family relations if not well handled as the perceived problem that could have driven the desire to emigrate for example in our case the need to relieve stress would have been passed on to the children who remained behind (Moreno, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Our study findings revealed that poverty-induced parental emigration came with disruption of family systematic structures leading to the emergence of two categories of 'orphans' in the Zimbabwean district of Mwenezi. One group consisted of children whose emigrant biological parents rarely returned and remitted hence the learners had inadequate stationery, food and uniforms yet the communities never assisted on the assumption that their parents were affluent and were supposed to take care of their children in violation of policy, the constitution and general principle of

Ubuntu that tended to bind African societies. The other category of the 'orphans' involved those children re-socialised into foreign culture by their biological parents who infrequently returned. While the former group largely experienced material orphanhood, the latter experienced social orphanhood more and hence had behavioral challenges both at home and at school. By and large both groups had their biological parents, social parents, and communities not much involved in their education leading to delinquent behavior and poor academic performance, results which mirror those of earlier studies in West Africa (Rupande, 2014). In light of the cited negative impact of emigration on LLB, we conclude that leaving learners as one emigrates is largely unadvisable for now in the Zimbabwean district of Mwenezi and urge the government, communities and schools to set up inclusive community platforms where the new category of orphanhood and learner welfare policies are interrogated.

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