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A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE LEARNING FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS IN ZIMBABWEAN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS

ПІДХІД СПІВРОБІТНИЦТВА ДЛЯ СПРИЯННЯ СТАЛОМУ НАВЧАННЮ
ВРАЗЛИВИХ УЧНІВ У СІЛЬСЬКИХ ЗАКЛАДАХ СЕРЕДНЬОЇ ОСВІТИ ЗІМБАБВЕ

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. Many children who attend rural schools are faced with challenges which make them vulnerable. Vulnerability does not only affect those learners, but it also disrupts the teaching and learning process; that is teachers and other learners and the well-being of people in the community.

Arguably, the responsibility of supporting learners who are vulnerable so that they can attain an education which is sustainable rests in the hands of the entire community.

The purpose of this study was to explore how a collaborative approach utilising community capitals can promote sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in Zimbabwean rural secondary schools. The study used the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) as the analytical framework for the study.

Methodology. The study employed a qualitative methodology using Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Critical Emancipatory Research (CER) paradigms. Data were generated through discussion meetings and photovoice with learners, teachers, and parents from two rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis principles and a photovoice methodology were used for data analysis.

Results. Results show that there is a need to develop a good learning environment, community engagement, and untap opportunities in local capitals to support the vulnerable learners, enhancing sustainable learning. The study also stresses the need for a positive relationship and engagement with communities, alongside leveraging all the types of capital in the community, including human capital, cultural capital, built capital, and social capital to mitigate some of the risks that learners may face.

Conclusions. From the study, it is evident that a stakeholder-supported approach and leveraging on community capital is an appropriate way of addressing learner vulnerability and fostering learning in the rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The involvement of the community can also be used as a force to encourage the development of an environment conducive to learning that will foster the achievement of the education goals for vulnerable learners.

Мета. Багато дітей, які відвідують сільські школи, стикаються з проблемами, що роблять їх уразливими. Вразливість не лише впливає на постраждалих учнів, але й порушує процес викладання та навчання, стосується вчителів та інших учнів, а також благополуччя людей у громаді. Можна стверджувати, що відповідальність за підтримку вразливих учнів, щоб вони могли отримати стабільну освіту, лежить на всій громаді.

Мета цього дослідження полягає в тому, щоб дослідити, як спільний підхід із використанням капіталу громади може сприяти сталому навчанню для вразливих учнів у сільських середніх школах Зімбабве. У дослідженні в якості аналітичної основи використовувалася структура капіталів громад (CCF).

Методологія. У дослідженні використано якісну методологію з використанням парадигм «Дослідження Партисипативної Дії» (PAR) та «Критичні Емансипативні Дослідження» (CER). Дані були отримані під час дискусійних зустрічей і фотозйомки з учнями, вчителями та батьками у двох сільських середніх шкіл у Зімбабве. Принципи критичного аналізу дискурсу Ферклафа використовувалися для аналізу даних. Також була використана методика фотозйомки самими учнями – методика «фотоголосу».

Результати. Результати показують, що існує потреба у створенні міцного навчального середовища, залучення громади та використання можливостей у місцевих столицях, щоб підтримати вразливих учнів, сприяючи стійкому навчанню. Дослідження також наголошує на необхідності позитивних стосунків, взаємодії з громадами та використання всіх типів капіталу в громаді, включаючи людський капітал, культурний капітал, основний капітал і соціальний капітал, щоб зменшити деякі ризики, з якими можуть зіткнутися учні.

Висновки. З дослідження стає очевидним, що підхід, який підтримується зацікавленими сторонами, і залучення капіталу громади є відповідним способом вирішення проблеми вразливості учнів і сприяння навчанню в сільських середніх школах у Зімбабве. Залучення громади також може бути використано як потужність для заохочення розвитку середовища, сприятливого для навчання, що допомагатиме досягненню цілей освіти для вразливих учнів.

Keywords: *community capitals framework, learner vulnerabilities, rural school, sustainable learning.*

Ключові слова: *структура капіталу громади, вразливість учнів, сільська школа, стале навчання.*

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that learner vulnerabilities pose serious challenges not only to learners themselves but also to teachers, school administrators, and parents (Ajoodha, 2022; Chidakwa, 2020; Chidakwa & Hlalele, 2021) because of the interruptions to advancements in teaching and learning not only in the rural schools but in communities at large. ZIMVAC (2022) points out that in Zimbabwe, rural school communities constitute the largest proportion of learners who are vulnerable hence sustainable learning is largely compromised. Vulnerable learners experience quite a number of life risks which adversely affect their livelihoods and access to sustainable learning.

Vulnerable learners in rural Zimbabwe face multiple challenges including economic hardships, long commutes, poor infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers (Katunga & Lombard, 2016). Chidakwa (2020) adds that these learners face limited access to educational materials and technology, language barriers, and health issues like malnutrition further hinder their education. Furthermore, Chinyoka (2013) found that many of the cultural norms often prioritise boys' education while girls face early marriages and household duties. This is also exacerbated by psychosocial issues and inconsistent government policies with insufficient funding problems (Pillay, 2018), highlighting the need for targeted support and reforms.

This implies that learner vulnerabilities create a great deal of social inequality for the voiceless and powerless rural learners. These social inequalities have psychological, emotional, social, and cultural effects on learners which are a hindrance to quality education. Due to learner vulnerabilities, learners may also develop behavioural problems that expose them to other vulnerabilities.

Chidakwa (2020), Hlalele (2012) and Lunga (2020) agree with the view that there is a significant relationship between learner vulnerability and lack of sustainability in learning. Studies have been conducted in both rural and urban schools which reveal learner vulnerabilities have negative effects on learners' performance (Chinyoka, 2013; Myende, 2014; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011). However, these studies were unable to create opportunities for rural schools and communities to support sustainable learning for rural learners.

Lunga (2020) explains sustainable learning as scholastic customs that have a lasting contribution to a beneficial environment allowing the creation of relevant knowledge which can be shared with the community. This implies that sustainable learning aims to increase the value of learning not only to learners but also to communities and the nation at large.

The concern found in several rural schools is an increase in the number of vulnerable learners who are failing to attend school owing to their circumstances. In this regard, the present study intended to address the research question, 'How can a collaborative approach be used to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in Zimbabwean rural secondary schools?' The section that follows outlines the theoretical framework that underpins this investigation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To appreciate how communities operate, we located this study within the theory of community capitals framework (CCF) as explained by Flora and Flora (2013). We considered this theory to be the best for the current study because of its focus on working together to create a joint perspective in solving existing challenges. Nel (2018) explains that CCF emphasises utilisation of different capitals to enhance appropriate development in any community.

We consider these capitals to be resources and characteristics that are associated with the success and sustainability of communities. Anglin (2015) explains CCF was developed to identify the resources present in communities, which can be used for positive change in a community. It is possible in this study that capitals can be utilised to assist learners facing vulnerabilities in rural school communities to have access to education.

We acknowledge that CCF shares the principle of engaging in constructive enquiries that will result in constructive chronicles with positive psychology (Myende & Hlalele, 2018; Teise & Alexander, 2017). Therefore, using CCF as the lens of our study could be useful in developing agency along with transforming and enhancing educational democracy in vulnerable learners and other communal fellows in a rural context. The CCF consists of seven forms of community capitals which can be split into two groups, *tangible* and *intangible* capitals (Flora & Flora, 2013). Figure 1 below summarises the seven capitals of CCF.

Figure 1

Community capitals

Key: Intangible capitals
 Tangible capitals



It is clear from this diagram CCF stresses the importance of utilising different capitals in an effort to help those who are in need (Jopling & Vincent, 2016; Nel, 2018). For example, vulnerable learners in rural settings require different people to work together to make sure they have access to education. It is acknowledged in this study the use of CCF is likely to facilitate the discovery of new knowledge and ideas in mitigating learner vulnerabilities using resources available in the local community. This is because the philosophy within CCF is cherished for its optimistic and appreciated change in people through the utilisation of capitals to collaboratively find solutions to problems faced in the community (Anglin, 2015; Jopling & Vincent, 2016; Kent County Council, 2018). In this study, we argue that CCF is the best framework for revealing the emancipatory and agency-developing skills that school community members have at their disposal in their efforts to promote sustainable learning for learners with particular vulnerabilities in rural schools.

In this understanding, CCF can be useful as a framework because it values the following: (i) *everyone has gifts* – change is within people, relationships build a community, thus, mobilisation and utilisation of resources are from the community; (ii) *citizens are at the centre* – community engagement is crucial; and (iii) *active participation of community members* – empowerment and sustainable livelihoods are guaranteed (Rippon and South, 2017; Teise & Alexander, 2017). This conceptual framework can be applied to rural school communities because such capitals have the potential to promote sustainable learning among those with learner vulnerabilities.

Research states when vulnerabilities affect rural learners in their learning processes, they become learner vulnerabilities (Chidakwa, 2020; Lunga & Chidakwa, 2023; Mackenzie et al., 2014; ZIMVAC, 2022). In this study, it seems as if using the CCF as the underpinning framework can be helpful in finding solutions to the challenges faced by learners living in vulnerable circumstances in rural settings.

Lunga and Chidakwa (2023), Katunga and Lombard (2016), Lunga (2020), Lunga, Koen and Mthiyane (2021) and the Children's Commissioner for England (2018) agree that if learners live in vulnerable situations, this does not only lead to behavioural problems but can also expose learners to other vicious cycles of problems which derail the achievement of sustainable learning. From this perspective, learner vulnerabilities can be described as multifaceted situations necessary for effective behaviour change among learners, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders in the community (Motsa & Morojele, 2016).

This implies learner vulnerabilities are not always negative and destructive, but they carry some benefits in knowledge generation which can transform communities for the better. Implementing the seven CCF capitals in this research has the potential to enable individuals in the rural community to work together to improve sustainable learning for vulnerable learners in rural secondary schools.

According to Motsa and Morojele (2016) and Pillay (2018), learner vulnerabilities assist many stakeholders in identifying techniques to deal with such challenging situations. This is relevant to this research because school community members may collaborate to support the compulsory activities in aiding vulnerable learners to attain sustainable learning, as well as the identification, mobilisation, and use of community capitals in rural environments.

– The need for sustainable learning in rural schools

For rural institutions to accomplish sustainable learning, the issue of learner vulnerabilities must be addressed collaboratively. The study argues that CCF provides a starting point for soliciting community governments' input. The strategy strengthens collaborative processes between vulnerable learners and community resources in order to improve educational outcomes. The strategy permits the exchange of thoughts, direct action, and deliverance (Lunga & Chidakwa, 2023; Myende, 2017; UNESCO, 2018).

Lunga (2020) explains that sustainable learning progresses when people deliberate the challenges in their community and the way they affect them, taking collaborative action to transform themselves and enhance their communities. Through this collaborative method, greater conceptual comprehension is accomplished.

We contend that sustainable learning requires critical thinking skills, focussed attention, and an open mind. The exchange of ideas produces a deeper level of comprehension than individual opinions. Sustainable learning is therefore described by Hlalele (2012) as an all-encompassing, complex, and trans-disciplinary notion that fosters social justice, cultural development, and economic growth while taking into account the needs of future generations. Intergenerational responsibility, interconnection, ecological systems, economic systems, social and cultural systems, and individual and group action are the seven main elements of sustainability (Lunga & Chidakwa, 2023; Vines, 2018).

It is acknowledged that addressing the vulnerabilities of rural school pupils can be done sustainably by utilising the CCF strategy. Through this ongoing connection, people are able to work together to achieve their intended goals and, in reality, to change their perceptions of themselves, the environment around them, and their capacity to transform for the welfare of themselves and their community.

– Approaches to mitigating learner vulnerabilities in rural schools

This study provides some practical activities that rural schools can utilise in their own practice area to benefit their learners. To achieve this positive outcome, there is a need for *agenda building* in attempting to address learner vulnerabilities in rural schools (Flora & Flora, 2013; Myende, 2014). The process means the participants attempt to transfer their interests so that it becomes the interest of the troubled individuals. Since the ultimate goal of every school is to provide sustainable learning (Mattiesen et al., 2014), agenda building clarifies the aim for proposing and accepting the CCF approach in mitigating learner vulnerabilities.

Agenda building supports participant coordination, including resource utilisation management, distribution, and vulnerability management procedure analysis. Knowing the needs helps participants to clearly state the benefits and drawbacks of the method to mitigate learner vulnerabilities. Therefore, regardless of how impoverished and disadvantaged the community is, agenda creation is essential to the mitigation process.

In addition, it is necessary to foster positive relationships through group participation in community engagement activities. According to Anglin (2015), community engagement entails collaboration and reciprocity among all parties involved. The engagement is between the troubled learners and the members of the rural school community in order to facilitate the exchange of information. Real community participation promotes

independence and trust in the community based on mutual respect, as well as collective decision-making and action (McLean et al., 2017; Vines, 2018).

Partnerships built on sincere community involvement initiatives serve as the cornerstone for boosting the strategy's efficacy and long-term viability. Community involvement aims to empower underprivileged people by giving them the chance to actively participate in solutions that lessen learner vulnerabilities in their local area. According to McLean et al., (2017), partnerships and participation can help rural school communities feel more capable of solving their own problems, which can lead to chances for empowerment and transformation.

To ensure the community values development programs, it is essential for planned activities to involve the institution's appreciative leadership (Chikoko & Khanare, 2012; Myende, 2014; Vines, 2018). According to Nel (2018), Shannon (2018), and Katherine (2018), appreciative leadership makes it easier for schools to match their goals with community growth methods and values (autonomous, transformative, supportive, involved, and communal).

Participants in school-community growth-promoting programs may experience spikes in self-assurance, vivacity, enthusiasm, and cohesion as a result of appreciating leadership. It is crucial that the school community establish a leadership plan in order to guarantee that its members are engaged, empowered, and working hard to become who they want to be.

Myende (2014) contends that the school should offer a welcoming environment for all members to participate in and places to demonstrate their strengths to ensure effective mitigation. The supportive environment encourages individuals to actively identify hidden, dormant talents and gifts and enables them to use these abilities to address their issues (Nel, 2018).

Ebersöhn (2016) asserts that a welcoming setting develops harmony, encourages teamwork and self-assurance, and piques people's curiosity. Renkly & Bertolini (2018) and McLean et al. (2017) argue that a friendly environment connects civilizations and offers residents the courage and authority to manage their own lives. We believe CCF can mitigate learner vulnerabilities with the right conditions.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method of inquiry was used to carry out this study. Using this method, researchers can better understand the recent and historical experiences of learners in rural schools and suggest community capitals for reducing learner vulnerabilities. To lessen learner vulnerabilities, we suggested community capital using Critical Emancipatory Research (CER), which is the study's research paradigm.

According to Crossman (2017), CER researchers understand that knowledge develops dialectically (collaboratively) and consensually through participatory methods of data collection. Thus, CER encourages openness, involvement, responsibility, independence, and reciprocity. We do not contest that, as a result, learners will experience social, physiological, and psychological changes as well as acquire survival skills, establish collaborative connections, and develop critical thinking.

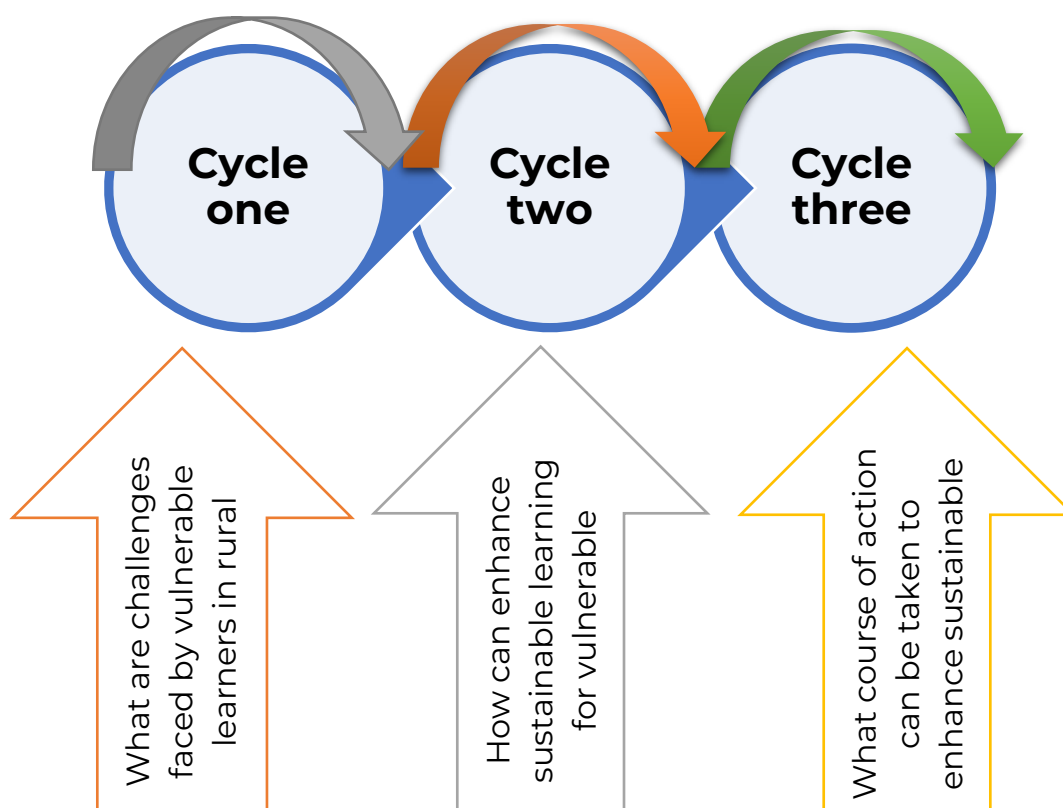
For the purpose of allowing full and free participation of all the participants in the study, we made use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the research design. Wood (2020) stresses that action research should be democratic and transformative in nature to allow members of the community to be part of the knowledge-generation process.

Therefore, in this study, we aimed to bring people together to identify the problems faced by vulnerable learners and find solutions through participatory activities throughout the entire research process (Chidarikire, 2017; MacDonald, 2012). Using PAR in this study was relevant because it is (i) *participatory*, (ii) *emancipatory*, (iii) *transformative*, (iv) *flexible and iterative*, and (v) *defined by a need for action*. We acknowledged the fact that action research is conducted in a cyclic nature (Wood, 2020). Figure 2 below shows a diagrammatical representation of the research process followed in the current study.

A *photovoice methodology* was also used. It involves participants taking photos and providing narratives that reflect their current situation and the topic under discussion. While the images may not directly depict teaching or learning scenarios, the accompanying explanations are relevant to the issues being studied. This approach allows participants to express their perspectives and experiences in a more personal and impactful way, providing valuable insights into their lived realities.

Figure 2

Cyclic research process



Throughout the research process, we followed the four principles of action research namely, plan, act, observe and reflect, in each cycle. Since we wanted to take action at

each cycle, we reported the results of this study per cycle hence this paper presents the findings of only the second cycle.

In order to obtain diverse ideas and perceptions on a topic of interest in a relaxed environment with no pressure for consensus, we utilised discussion meetings (DM), where we met as a group to get insights from each other regarding the ways of enhancing sustainable learning, and photovoice, where we requested every participant take a photograph using their smartphones and explain them in relation to the ideas raised in the discussions as a data generation method. We noted that there were unequal power relation issues among participants so to reduce their impact in this study we asked everyone to use their first names regardless of who they were. This made everyone feel at ease and freely express themselves.

Using Fairclough's (1992) simple talk analysis (CDA), we looked into complex information that was compiled to be easier to understand to determine the practicality of CCF. Information was broken down into two steps in a cooperative manner: a realistic assessment and a speculative study. This type of research resonates with Wood (2020), who stated that in actual research all the exploration participants should take part in collectively deconstructing information before the academic scientist investigates it in accordance with the hypothetical standards in anticipation of distribution.

In this discussion, the participants and the analyst analysed the research's output on three levels: text, rambling, and social level assessment (Fairclough, 2012). The main goal of the investigation was to show the relationships between certain texts, discussions, practices and social practices. The three levels were not viewed as separate components but as a whole that interacted and consistently represented significance. The rationale for the use of CDA is that it aids in speculating changes and creating a familiarity with what is, how it has changed, and what it might change into, based on which people may have the option to make and redo their life (MacDonald, 2012; Crossman, 2017).

– **Research context**

The review was conducted in a single unassuming optional school in Masvingo, Zimbabwe's Chiredzi South region. The school is underrated and immature as seen by the unfavourable street organisation, the dearth of skilled teachers, and the weak educational and learning foundations. The school's graduation percentage has been incredibly low over the past five years. Because they encounter learner weaknesses, the majority of learners drop out of school.

The school has five (5) study hall blocks, each with two homerooms and one that is still being built. At the school, there are no structures for research centres or studios. These facts motivated us to select the school to try the CCF to address learner weaknesses.

The selection criteria included the participants' knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under study. The ten participants included three teachers, three parents (two being the parents of some of the learners who had faced learner vulnerabilities and one was a volunteer) and four O'level (forms three and four) learners (two boys and two girls). Their demographical information is presented in Table 1 below who were purposively selected based on their knowledge, relationships and expertise regarding research objectives.

Table 1*Participants demographical information*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Language	Designation
TP1	Male	32	Shona	Teacher
TP2	Female	33	Shona	Teacher
TP3	Female	38	Xichangana	Teacher
PP1	Female	34	Xichangana	Parent
PP2	Male	40	Shona	Parent
PP3	Male	45	Xichangana	Parent
LP1	Male	16	Shona	Learner
LP2	Female	15	Shona	Learner
LP3	Female	17	Xichangana	Learner
LP4	Male	18	Xichangana	Learner

– Ethical considerations

The review received approval from the ethics Committees of the University Johannesburg and North West University, and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) also gave their permission to focus on Zimbabwe. All members gave their consent. Participation was voluntarily made, and members were assured of maintaining certain levels of discretion, secrecy, and usefulness (MacDonald, 2012; Crossman, 2017).

Reliability problems were secured by believability using a combination of information-age tactics. The use of PAR and CER in members' everyday situations also tended to aspects of constancy, resemblance, and adaptation. We were aware that we might have had a bias that could have affected the outcome of the evaluation. We made sure that we were objective, forward-thinking, and sensitive to others' feelings.

RESULTS

Verbatim data generated from discussion meetings and photovoice are presented, interpreted, and substantiated with relevant literature. The findings are presented under three emerged themes, and these are: creating a favourable learning environment to enhance sustainable learning; community participation in supporting vulnerable children, and tapping into local capital opportunities to promote sustainable learning.

Theme 1: Creating a favourable learning environment to enhance sustainable learning

The empirical data revealed that learners living with different vulnerabilities are faced with diverse challenges which have *negative effects* on their livelihoods and their *access to education*. Lunga and Chidakwa (2023) explain that vulnerable circumstances cause psychological, emotional, social, and cultural harm to most learners, especially in rural communities. Different participants expressed their opinions on how vulnerabilities affect the educational life of learners. TP1 explained that:

I understand that we have learners from very worrisome background, and these create ... several problems to the affected learners resulting in multiple and complex educational challenges, so we need to provide them with all the support in and out of the classroom.

It is clear from the words used by TP3 who says, 'learners from very worrisome background' that the participants acknowledge some learners in rural ecologies are living in vulnerable circumstances. TP3 went on to say, 'we need to provide ... support in and out of the classroom' which suggests that the learning environment should allow all learners to learn regardless of their background. Learners also have the same sentiments for LP8 added that:

being poor cause us to have low self-esteem, self-reproach, and moody behaviours ... we feel helplessness, hopelessness ... we practice social withdrawal, bullying, and this affects us from acquiring quality education

It is clear from participant LP2 that if learners are vulnerable, they cannot feel free to be in the same learning setting as other learners. The participant used the words, 'cause us to have low self-esteem', 'feel helplessness, hopelessness'.

These words point to the fact that learning environments are not welcoming to vulnerable learners hence they fail to achieve their educational goals. It seems that the learners felt some pain and needed assistance. This is evidenced by the expression that, 'we practice social withdrawal ... this affects us'. One of the parents echoed the same sentiments as she said:

Honestly, I am touched with what the learners say, and it is very true, so I think they need our support ... meaning that sound teacher-learner relationships are essential to for them to feel safe and willing to learning regardless of the circumstances they are in. [PP1]

From PP1's excerpt, it is clear that the parent is empathising with learners who are living in vulnerable circumstances, as she used the phrase, 'I am touched with what the learners ... it is very true'. It is interesting to note that PP1 went on to suggest that teachers should be approachable, allowing learners to feel comfortable seeking assistance. Listening to the parent saying, 'they need our support', 'teacher-learner relationships are essential' brought to us [authors] the understanding that parents are willing to help in making sure that the classroom atmosphere allows for vulnerable learners to share the difficulties they face. PP2 said:

Our children are right to say they have low self-esteem as a result of vulnerabilities they face, so as teacher we should be warm, natural, have pleasant attitude, and approachable individuals who are tolerant in build good relationships with them. So what I can say is that they need guidance both from home and at school to perform better. It depends on visionary leadership.

The above excerpts suggest that the school communities' capitals need to liberate learners from futile thoughts by ensuring a favourable learning environment that supports their education journey. This can be done by building relationships with learners, teachers, heads, and different stakeholders to transform and empower the learner educationally. Moreover, the success of the approach depends on the *leadership of the school* in solving such *topical issues*, as participant PP2 highlighted 'it depends on

visionary leadership'. This implies that community and school leadership can work together in planning programmes that support vulnerable learners. One participant took a photograph to explain how the learning environment should be prepared to accommodate vulnerable learners in schools.

Figure 1

Photograph 1: Favourable learning environment



This picture reminds me of a situation where one has to explore using every opportunity to acquire knowledge. Different materials in this case represent different capitals one can use to attain quality education. I see different materials as a ladder that can give an individual to excel. So, it is important for the us to different opportunities to achieve what we want in life. [PP1]

Photograph 1 was provided by PP1 to explain how different capitals can be useful in making the learning environment user-friendly to all learners including those who are vulnerable. In his response, RP1 took a picture of a table which has different materials on it which he explained using the following phrase, '*materials in this case represent different capitals*'. These words indicate that for sustainable learning to be promoted the environment should provide diverse opportunities so that vulnerable learners can explore as they learn. This idea resonates with the theoretical framework used in the current study, CCF, which emphasises that tangible capitals are crucial in supporting sustainable learning (Flora & Flora, 2013; Chidakwa, 2020).

Drawing from the data presented above, it is clear that learner vulnerability can destroy the well-being of learners hence their learning abilities are disturbed. For that reason, it is argued that the learning environment should be favourable to support vulnerable learners to access sustainable learning. The notion of creating a favourable learning environment resonates with Chidakwa (2020) and Myende (2014), who explain that good learning environments for learners mean lovely and enjoyable schooling, which is safe, healthy and protective.

According to Jopling and Vincent (2016), Kent County Council (2018), Nel (2018), and others, the child-friendly schools model (CFSs) encourages inclusivity, gender awareness, tolerance, respect for others, and self-empowerment in learners. By using child-friendly schools, for instance, schools can provide a school culture, teaching behaviours and curriculum content that is centred on learning and the learner and work in the learners' best interests (Jopling & Vincent, 2016; Lunga, Koen, & Mthiyane, 2021).

As they face the challenges of the twenty-first century, learners are helped by their school culture to understand what they must do. Additionally, it increases their prosperity and ensures that they have secure locations where they may learn. A learning environment free from violence and abuse strengthens the resolve and motivation of both learners and teachers and gets the community ready to support education (Ebersöhn, 2016; Kent Nation Board, 2018).

We claim that focusing on the learner's global needs in the overall learning environment – where teaching and learning take place – transmits the value of education to the learner. In the unlikely event that this is not accomplished at schools, there may be significant dropout rates, especially in rural schools where the learning environment is not conducive to figuring out how to occur.

Writing also echoes with revelations that a visionary leader is essential for unification in all capitals and for resolving 'effective issues' (Myende, 2017). According to Shannon, Katherine, and Nel (2018) as well as Renkly and Bertolini (2018), the school's approaches include autonomous, ground-breaking, partner, esteem-driven, participatory, aggregate, and thankful initiative. In the context of a learning environment, a visionary leader works to build social trust and a strong relationship with anticipated capital benefactors (Renkly & Bertolini, 2018; Ebersöhn, 2016).

We believe that visionary authority and preparation aid in handling delicate topics, such as cultural challenges, in a way that can foster social confidence in schools. In order to generally address learner shortcomings in rural schools, the administration places a priority on establishing relationships between the school and the local community at large.

Theme 2: Community participation in supporting vulnerable learners

Through active involvement, the participants demonstrated that a 'collective' effort, as opposed to an 'individual' struggle, is necessary for the sustained learning of learners who live with vulnerabilities. Participants also believed that the mobilisation of local is not an individual struggle but requires school community engagement in order to mitigate learner vulnerabilities. Another participant, PP3, who is a male village head took a picture and gave a narrative of how it reminded him of this to say:

This picture of a dish full of potatoes reminds of our Shona culture called 'zunde ramambo' where the community grow crops such as maize or provide food which is kept at the chief's place so that it can be given to people who are in need. So, what I can say is that if people participate in such type of a programmes, children in need in the community can get help. This can also be helpful especially those children who live in child-headed families so that they can concentrate of their education rather than dropping out. The same programme can also help children who come to school with empty stomachs so that they focus on their schoolwork.

Figure 2

Photograph 2: Provisions needed by vulnerable learners



The above extract stresses the importance of community involvement in supporting vulnerable learners. It is clear that in some cases vulnerable learners such as orphans fail to get food, which makes it difficult for them to focus on their education. On the same note another teacher echoed the sentiments when she said:

The involvement of school community members in informative programmes is critical in supporting children who are in desperate need of help, for example, those who victims of HIV/AIDS. I know that most of those children are living in extended families, and some are taking care of themselves as children. [TP2]

The extracts from the two participants above explain the need to involve the school community in order to have an informative success of community capitals utilisation. The participants made a list of challenges which vulnerable learners face in the school community, which they thought needed different 'capitals' for them to be solved.

Their responses suggest that critical capitals within the school community, if collectively engaged, would assist in mitigating learner vulnerabilities. The strategy encourages productive collaboration between the school, parents, learners, and other community stakeholders. Finding solutions to the issues that the school community is facing will help those in need, as seen in the excerpt from a learner's comment below:

After the separation of my parents, it was difficult for my mother to pay school fees for me and my young brother so I dropped out to assist my mother. Two years later I was lucky to be selected as one of the children to get support from the MP (member of parliament) of our constituency, CAMFED and Chilojo club from Gonarezhou Trustee, and this year I will be writing my O'level. I would like to encourage people to have the spirit of helping children to go to school so that they can achieve their dreams and reduce poverty.

The learner exposed her vulnerable circumstances which hindered her access to education. However, she gratefully mentioned the help that she received from the constituency representative, CAMFED and trustee cooperatives, which allowed her to complete her secondary education.

The provided excerpts make it obvious participants thought the aforementioned tools were beneficial in giving concrete and metaphorical support to learners in instances where they were vulnerable as learners. Participants clearly held the opinion that coordination, planning, and scheduling by all the capitals were necessary for the local school community resources to be engaged. We contend that the strategy should be: (i) by the school community, (ii) for the school community, (iii) from the school community, in finding solutions for the school community (Chidakwa, 2020; Lunga, 2020; Lunga & Chidakwa, 2023; Myende, 2017).

The participants noted four important community capitals within the rural school community under study that should be utilised *collectively and collaboratively* in mitigating learner vulnerabilities. This fits well with the CCF, which stresses that people should collectively assist others in the community they live. Anglin (2015) and Myende (2014) support the ideas of teamwork in finding solutions to community problems and emphasise that cooperative planning and scheduling to mitigate learner vulnerabilities is good for reflecting learners' priorities.

The research studies conducted by Lunga and Chidakwa (2023) in Zimbabwe, McLean, et al. (2017) in Scotland, and Myende (2014) in South Africa all came to the same conclusions: good preparation and planning lead to complementary interactions between learners, educators, the overseers, and the school local area; they help schools foster a dream for the future, and they manage internal and external resources to support activities to achieve the ideal result.

Individuals in the school population possess intriguing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are crucial to improving comprehensible learning (Lunga, 2020). The benefits of collective and cooperative learning bring together a variety of skills and ideas that could enhance the capacity for sustained learning in students with learning difficulties. It serves as a forum for provincial learners to address their interpersonal and educational deficiencies.

Theme 3: Tapping into local capital opportunities to promote sustainable learning

Participants identified the utilisation of the school community capitals as an effective way to create collaborations to promote sustainable learning for learners with certain vulnerabilities. They first claimed that peers, teachers, teachers in charge, deputies, and heads should work together to provide guidance and counselling for learners in vulnerable situations and to forge relationships with learners and their educational environment to mitigate the issue. Responding to the question on what can enhance sustainable learning of vulnerable learners one parent expressed the following:

Some of our strengths are as follows: peer learners, teachers, and teachers in charge (TICs), deputies and head whom we trust ... with experience and knowledge in guiding and counselling learners with behavioural and psychological problems.
[PP3]

PP3 focussed on *guidance and counselling* as an important action in assisting the troubled learners to attain sustainable learning. In order to reduce learner vulnerabilities, schools must make use of these beneficial human traits. They should establish an environment that enables these staff to support and guide learners in their stressful circumstances, establish positive relationships and feel comfortable, leading to the achievement of sustainable learning. Adding on to PP3's response, TP3 (a female teacher) took a photograph of a doll sleeping on a bed and explained it saying:

When I see this picture, I think of a learner who was depressed due to loss of her beloved ones and failing to make ends meet. After she got some assistance from the local charity organisation as well as from the health professional, she is now feeling at ease and ready to return to school. This alarms to me that schools should not undermine the help that can come from their local communities because it can go a long way in supporting the well-being of vulnerable learners.

Figure 3

Photograph 3: Stress relief



The explanation given by TP3 implies she acknowledges different stakeholders have a lot to offer to support vulnerable learners' happiness. She used the phrase, '*schools should not undermine the help ... come from their local communities*'. The idea she gave resonates with the theoretical framework principles of utilising certain capitals for the benefit of learners (Teise & Alexander, 2017) and the idea of collaboration as emphasised in PAR design (Chidarikire, 2017; MacDonald, 2012). PP2 added to that:

Learners, within the school community should be aware of the school values, vision and mission ... so that they can work positively to mitigating their learner vulnerabilities that affect them academically.

The excerpt by PP2 implies that mitigation of learner vulnerabilities begins with learners knowing their *life values, vision and mission*, in relation to the school community. Learners should grasp the school culture once this has been made known so that they are aware of the effects of the learner's vulnerabilities. This was regarded by teachers as

one of the effective strategies for reducing learners' vulnerabilities. One parent, PP3, added:

It is almost impossible to totally mitigate learner vulnerabilities. However, I believe we must first communicate the school culture to all stakeholders so that they understand what is expected of them to support vulnerable learners in their communities ... so that they can access sustainable learning.

Here, parents as well as educators both have the same opinion. As stated in their comments, they 'should be knowledgeable of the school's values, vision, and mission', 'they comprehend what is required of them', and it is critical to grasp the school's culture and how it serves to encourage long-term learning. Moreover, one teacher, TP1, went on to take a photograph of a rockery at the school and explain what it means to him:

This picture reminds me situation in life and the importance of everyone in life. There are a lot of broken bricks, small stones and some shrubs. The broken bricks were used to design and some words were created. The white stones brighten the word well and the path. This reminds me that, regardless of your situation, everyone has a purpose in life. If well utilises, you may brighten ones' future. Some may need to be reduced down to beautify other people's lives, like the hedge over there.

Figure 4

Photograph 4: Community collaboration



With his photograph, TP1 stresses the importance of people working collectively to solve community challenges in an attempt to enhance sustainable learning for vulnerable learners. The emphasis in his extract is that different capitals have different fundamental functions in supporting the education of all learners including those who are vulnerable.

Our results are in line with research conducted around the globe, which demonstrates that human capitals collectively foster moral relationships between the educational institution community and other stakeholders for the benefit of learners by assisting in minimising learner vulnerabilities (Jopling & Vincent, 2016; Myende, 2014).

The same human capitals can also effectively and persistently communicate the school's cultural capitals (*school values, vision and mission*) among the school community members. The voices that are being heard and listened to as well as the voices that have influence in the school community are further influenced by cultural capital (Teise & Alexander, 2017). The eclectic approach between human and cultural capitals thus affects what voices are heard and taken into account, which voices have influence in what areas, and how creativity, innovation, and influence arise and are fostered in reducing learner vulnerabilities (Myende, 2014).

The development of cooperative working connections is a crucial component of a collective approach. We argue that to succeed in mitigating learner vulnerabilities, school communities must capitalise on the skills, knowledge, abilities, and experiences of the human capitals they possess. This improves school performance – including team effectiveness, learner academic and social improvement, and innovation.

This perspective is in line with CCF's recommendations that marginalised group members be given the tools they need to break free from repressive norms. Using PAR allowed the research participants to freely collaborate and identify strategies to support learners with learner vulnerabilities to enhance sustainable learning. Thus, investing in human capitals builds positive school place cultures that tend to have greater efficiency and better outcomes.

Constructed capitals create spaces for connections and involvement advancement that liberate, enable, and transform people in their academic lives while also facilitating the negative effects of learner shortcomings (Chidakwa, 2020; Myende, 2014). Utilising the built capital while working within the overall school strategy is crucial if the school is to develop learners' abilities (Hrona et al., 2022), confront their weaknesses, and engage them in change so they can become dynamic members of society and survive in the current challenging environment.

This is essential to the improvement of practical learning and is consistent with the requirements of CCFs, PAR, and CER (Hlalele, 2012; Myende & Hlalele, 2018). We further argue that schools should make use of all of their legitimate resources to foster links and participatory growth, ways of thinking that are reflected in their human and social capital. Along with helping the learner and senior guides connect and work together, they also bring common trust, correspondence, overall character, cooperation, and a sense of shared success (Greenery & Verdure, 2013; Myende, 2014).

Emery and Verdure's (2006) research made it clear that integrating the aforementioned friendly capitals would ensure that learners had otherworldly, financial, and business skills, as well as social, profound, and mental support. In this way, we argue that learner shortcomings can be lessened through the external use of the capitals mentioned by the members, through an aggregate methodology.

Therefore, a step toward reducing overall learner vulnerabilities in rural schools would be the overall collective bridling of the relative variety of potential social capitals to cooperate. Different capitals evolved as a result of the synergistic advancement of capitalistic thought among the educational institutions' local area capitals.

We realise that when communities assist one another, it creates a viable and self-sustaining learning environment that promotes the social and economic well-being of

learners by addressing their areas of weakness and enhancing their academic performance. In the unlikely event that the school community achieves the ideal balance between various capitals, they will typically promote strength toward the challenges that the learners encounter.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools working with vulnerable learners in Zimbabwean rural secondary schools should:

- Improve infrastructure, ensure resource availability, and assist teachers with professional development, incentives, and flexible teaching approaches to foster a safe and inclusive environment.
- Encouraging local stakeholders to support vulnerable learners, involve parents, community leaders, and organisations in school events, run awareness campaigns, and support initiatives for girls' education, and use local knowledge and resources by incorporating local culture into the curriculum and using local skills.
- Collaborate with businesses and organisations to access funding and resources, introduce programs that align with local economic activities, use local artisans and experts to enhance educational programs, and integrate sustainability projects into the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this analysis highlight the use of local capital in efforts to address learner deficits in rural schools. In light of the findings, we are convinced that a focus on social capital, human capital, social capital, and gathered capital enables school networks to be aware of their capabilities. These resources can be used to strengthen sustainable learning environments and reduce learner vulnerabilities.

According to the study, this can be accomplished through fostering a supportive learning environment, fostering community involvement, and utilising local resources to support sustainable learning for vulnerable learners.

An important element in the promotion of sustained learning was discovered to be the growth of positive relationships among the four capitals. According to the study, this enhances community members' organisational, collaborative, problem-solving, self-direction, and self-learning skills, supporting long-term learning.

Finally, by making good use of school-community resources, rural educational institutions may be better able to improve sustainable learning by reducing learner vulnerabilities. According to the study's findings, the most effective strategy for reducing learner vulnerabilities in rural schools is collaboration across the four community capitals based on mutual respect.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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