

Socio-Economic Determinants Influencing Truancy among Primary School Learners: An In-Depth Case Study of Chivi South, Zimbabwe

Theresa Joakim Kanyopa^{1*}, Munyaradzi Chidarikire², Gale Esmè Davids³

¹Department of Education Foundations, University of the Free State

*Corresponding author: kanyopatj@ufs.ac.za, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/956-977-956-977>

²Department of Educational Psychology, University of the Free State

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/956-977-956-977>

³Department of Education Foundations, University of the Free State

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/956-977-956-977>

HOW TO CITE:

Theresa Joakim Kanyopa,
Munyaradzi Chidarikire, Gale Esmè
Davids (2026).
Socio-Economic Determinants
Influencing Truancy among Primary
School Learners: An In-Depth Case
Study of Chivi South, Zimbabwe.
International Journal of Special
Education, 41(24s), 956-977

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT:

Copyright: © 2026 Authors.
Open access publication under the
terms and conditions
of the Creative Commons Attribution
(CC BY)
license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

ABSTRACT:

This qualitative study investigates the socio-economic determinants of absenteeism among primary school learners in Chivi South, Zimbabwe, addressing a notable research gap regarding the effects of socio-cultural factors on school attendance. Employing a qualitative approach within an interpretivist framework allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of learners, teachers, parents, and community members. A sample of 15 participants was purposively selected to ensure diverse perspectives, including four learners (two males and two females), four teachers (balanced by gender), four parents, a local counsellor, a village head, and a representative from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Data were generated through focus group discussions, which facilitated open dialogue among participants. Triangulation was employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the data by drawing on insights from multiple sources. Thematic analysis, based on Braun and Clarke's framework, was utilised to identify patterns within the data. One key finding revealed that economic hardship significantly contributes to absenteeism, as families prioritise immediate financial needs over education. Based on this finding, it is recommended that community stakeholders collaborate to establish support systems for families and address economic barriers that hinder learners' educational participation. Ethical considerations were prioritised, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality for all participants.

Keywords: absenteeism, education, learner, primary school, socio-economic factors.

Introduction

The persistent issue of absenteeism among primary school learners represents a significant barrier to educational attainment, particularly within the socio-economic context of Chivi South, Zimbabwe (Chidarikire & Saruchera, 2024). This phenomenon transcends individual behavioural choices and is fundamentally embedded in structural inequities that systematically disadvantage marginalised communities globally. Absenteeism serves as both a symptom and a contributor to educational inequality, with far-reaching implications for sustainable development and social justice agendas worldwide (Calhoun, 2025). Factors such as poverty, household dynamics, cultural beliefs, and limited access to educational resources intertwine to form a complex tapestry that influences attendance patterns among learners (Kanyopa & Munyaradzi, 2025). International research consistently demonstrates that absenteeism rates are disproportionately concentrated in regions experiencing economic precarity, yet the mechanisms through which socio-economic disadvantage translates into educational exclusion remain insufficiently theorised, particularly in rural Global South contexts (Mulenga-Hagane, 2021).

Central to this discourse is the understanding that truancy can emanate from systemic inequities that disproportionately affect marginalised communities. The relationship between poverty and educational participation is neither linear nor unidirectional; rather, it operates through multiple intersecting pathways, including material deprivation, psychosocial stress, and compromised parental capacity for educational engagement (Dube & Jita, 2018). In Chivi South, where economic challenges are particularly pronounced, the ramifications of absenteeism extend beyond individual learners, adversely affecting community development and societal progress (Kanyopa & Munyaradzi, 2025). Children who are unable to attend school regularly face diminished opportunities for cognitive and social development, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting their potential for future socio-economic mobility (Chidarikire et

al., 2025). This intergenerational transmission of disadvantage underscores the urgency of understanding absenteeism as a critical site for intervention in broader struggles for educational equity and social transformation.

Existing literature on truancy largely focuses on isolated socio-economic factors or predominantly urban contexts, often neglecting the intricate interplay of variables that influence attendance in rural settings such as Chivi South (Mutonhodza, 2024). This analytical fragmentation has produced an incomplete understanding of how multiple forms of disadvantage converge to produce educational exclusion, particularly in contexts characterised by extreme poverty and limited institutional capacity. Furthermore, much of the existing scholarship adopts deficit-based frameworks that position families and communities as passive recipients of external interventions, rather than recognising their agency and local knowledge as resources for addressing absenteeism (Del Río et al., 2025). This lack of comprehensive analysis presents a significant research gap. While some studies have identified broad socio-economic trends influencing educational outcomes, few have delved into the nuanced perspectives of local communities to explore how these factors specifically manifest in absenteeism among primary school learners (Adu & Okeke, 2022). The relative absence of emic perspectives, those derived from within the community, represents a critical limitation in current knowledge production, as externally imposed frameworks may fail to capture locally salient meanings and experiences of educational exclusion. Moreover, other research studies generally fail to consider the local socio-cultural dynamics that inform learners' perceptions of education and attendance (Chikwiri & Musiyiwa, 2017). This oversight is particularly significant given that cultural values, community norms, and intergenerational expectations profoundly shape educational engagement in rural African contexts (Ncube et al., 2015). By overlooking these aspects, the existing body of literature fails to adequately address the unique challenges faced by primary school learners in Chivi South

(Calhoun, 2025). This study addresses these gaps by employing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as an analytical lens to illuminate how unmet basic needs fundamentally undermine educational participation. Maslow's framework provides a theoretically grounded mechanism for understanding why learners facing material deprivation prioritise survival over educational engagement, thereby explaining the deep connections between poverty and absenteeism that previous research has described but not adequately theorised. Through centring the voices of community members themselves, this research contributes to decolonising knowledge production about educational inequality, challenging deficit discourses that pathologise families experiencing poverty.

Literature Review

The issue of absenteeism among primary school learners has been explored extensively across various socio-economic contexts, revealing distinct patterns and determinants that vary by region. This review critically synthesises contributions from diverse geographical contexts, identifying both convergent findings and unresolved tensions that this study seeks to address. In the American context, Bryman (2021) argues that Socio-Economic Status (SES) is a primary predictor of school attendance. Their research emphasises that children from low SES backgrounds often face multiple barriers to consistent attendance, including unstable housing, food insecurity, and healthcare access issues. This work has been influential in establishing the statistical relationship between poverty and absenteeism, yet it has been criticised for treating SES as a monolithic variable rather than examining the specific mechanisms through which deprivation operates (Sosu et al., 2021). These factors create an environment where educational disengagement is common, leading to chronic absenteeism. Conversely, Creswell and Clark (2017) provide a contrasting perspective, focusing on the role of school climate and community resources in influencing attendance patterns. Their findings suggest that even within low SES populations, positive school environments and supportive

community initiatives can significantly mitigate absenteeism. This research introduces the important concept of protective factors that can buffer against the negative effects of poverty, suggesting that school-level interventions may partially compensate for socio-economic disadvantage (Kanyopa, 2022). This indicates that while socio-economic factors are influential, the quality of educational settings can serve as a buffer against absenteeism. However, these studies predominantly draw on quantitative methodologies that, while establishing correlational patterns, cannot adequately capture the lived experiences of families navigating poverty and educational exclusion (Adefunke, 2015).

In Britain, the World Bank (2019) identifies socio-economic deprivation as a major cause of absenteeism, noting that children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods are more prone to truancy. The report emphasises systemic issues such as inadequate mental health support for families and limited access to extracurricular activities as exacerbating factors. This institutional perspective highlights the role of welfare state provisions in mediating the relationship between poverty and educational participation, raising important questions about how different policy regimes shape absenteeism patterns (Babbie, 2021). In contrast, research by Del Río et al. (2025) introduced a more nuanced approach, highlighting the importance of parental engagement and community involvement in combating absenteeism. They assert that interventions that foster parental involvement can significantly improve attendance rates, suggesting that the socio-economic context should be considered alongside social and familial variables. This focus on parental engagement has been influential in shaping intervention design, yet it risks placing disproportionate responsibility on families while underplaying structural constraints on parental capacity for engagement, such as work schedules, transportation barriers, and institutional racism (Duze, 2010).

Nigerian scholars present diverse views on the socio-economic determinants of absenteeism.

Oneya and Onyango (2021) examine the interplay between socio-economic status and cultural beliefs, arguing that traditional views on education, particularly regarding gender roles, significantly affect attendance. Their research reveals that families prioritising child labour over education particularly impacts girls' attendance. This intersectional analysis makes a crucial contribution by demonstrating how economic pressures intersect with gendered cultural norms to produce differential patterns of educational exclusion (Watch, 2017). However, the study's reliance on household surveys cannot capture the complex negotiations within families about resource allocation and educational investment. On the other hand, Chikwiri and Musiyiwa (2017) emphasise the inadequacy of school infrastructure in rural Nigeria as a primary determinant of absenteeism. This study found that poor facilities, coupled with the economic necessity for children to work, create an environment where educational engagement becomes secondary to survival. This focus on infrastructural deficits highlights how the material conditions of schooling itself can produce absenteeism, even when families are committed to education (Kanyopa, 2018). Yet this analysis remains at the level of institutional description rather than theorising the relationship between infrastructure, pedagogy, and learner motivation.

In Botswana, Mohammed and Kinyo (2020) contend that although government educational reforms have been implemented to reduce absenteeism, persistent socio-economic disparities undermine their effectiveness. They point out that rural schools often lack basic resources, impeding learners' ability to attend regularly. This research reveals the gap between policy intentions and implementation realities, a common theme across African educational contexts that remains underexamined (Kanyopa, 2022). Conversely, a study by Nhundu (2023) highlights the role of community initiatives in fostering educational persistence, arguing that grassroots programs providing financial support to low-income families can significantly reduce absenteeism, emphasising the necessity for local-

level interventions amid broader economic challenges. This community-centred approach suggests that externally imposed solutions may be less effective than locally developed interventions that build on existing social networks and community resources (Creswell & Clark, 2017). However, such initiatives often operate on a small scale and may not be sustainable without broader structural changes.

The complex legacy of apartheid continues to shape educational access in South Africa. Dube and Jita (2018); Mufanechiya et al. (2024) noted that socio-economic inequalities are a significant contributor to absenteeism, particularly among learners in under-resourced rural areas. Their research demonstrates how historical patterns of spatial segregation continue to structure educational opportunities, producing a racialised geography of educational disadvantage that cannot be understood solely through current economic indicators. This research indicates that the lack of psychosocial support systems further compounds absenteeism rates. In contrast, Ncube et al. (2015) argue that systemic policy failures, rather than socio-economic status alone, significantly influence attendance. They advocate comprehensive educational reforms that address both socioeconomic factors and the need for more equitable access to quality education, arguing that mere financial support is insufficient without structural changes. This argument raises important questions about the appropriate balance between social protection measures and the transformation of the education system (Mufanechiya et al., 2024). They advocate comprehensive educational reforms that address both socioeconomic factors and the need for more equitable access to quality education, arguing that mere financial support is insufficient without structural changes.

The situation in Zimbabwe, particularly in Chivi South, has garnered limited scholarly attention. Chidarikire et al. (2025) emphasise the severe economic challenges facing families, identifying financial instability and inadequate access to educational resources as key determinants of absenteeism. While this research identifies important variables, it does not adequately

theorise how economic pressures operate at the household level to produce educational decisions. However, there is a noticeable lack of empirical studies specifically addressing localised factors in Chivi South that contribute to truancy. This is not merely a geographical gap; it also reflects broader patterns in educational research, in which rural contexts in Africa remain systematically understudied, and community perspectives are often marginalised (Mufanechiya et al., 2024). Conversely, Nhundu (2023) explores community perceptions of education in Zimbabwe, highlighting that cultural attitudes towards schooling can deeply influence attendance. This study observed that while economic factors are critical, local beliefs and values significantly shape learners' engagement with education. This attention to cultural dimensions is important, yet it remains descriptive rather than analytically engaging with how cultural values interact with economic constraints to shape educational decisions.

Despite the wealth of research examining socio-economic determinants of absenteeism across these varied contexts, several gaps remain unresolved. First, there is limited theoretical engagement with the mechanisms by which poverty leads to absenteeism; most studies identify correlations without explaining causal pathways. Second, the predominance of quantitative approaches has marginalised the experiential knowledge of those directly affected by educational exclusion. Third, research has struggled to integrate analysis of material deprivation, cultural factors, and institutional dynamics into coherent explanatory frameworks. Fourth, there is limited attention to the emotional and psychological dimensions of educational exclusion, including how shame, stigma, and diminished self-worth contribute to absenteeism. Finally, existing studies rarely draw on established theoretical frameworks, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, that could explain why learners facing severe deprivation might disengage from education. A critical gap remains in understanding the specific socioeconomic dynamics influencing school attendance in rural Zimbabwe, particularly in Chivi South. Existing

studies tend to generalise findings without delving into localised complexities or employing comprehensive methodologies that integrate qualitative approaches. This study aims to address this gap by offering a nuanced examination of socio-economic determinants influencing absenteeism among primary school learners in Chivi South, utilising Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a theoretical lens to interpret findings and generate insights that contribute to international debates on educational inequality, inclusive education, and the eradication of learner exclusion.

Brief State of the Chivi South Constituency and Its Economic Background

Chivi South, a constituency situated within Zimbabwe's Masvingo Province, is emblematic of the multifaceted economic and educational challenges faced by many rural areas in the country (Kanyopa & Munyaradzi, 2025). The region's socio-economic landscape is characterised by entrenched poverty, a lack of infrastructural development, and pronounced educational deficits, culminating in alarmingly low academic performance at both primary and secondary school levels (Chidarikire et al., 2025). Reports indicate that some institutions in Chivi South are achieving a disconcerting zero-pass rate, underscoring a critical crisis in the education sector (Mutohodza, 2025). This educational crisis must be understood within broader regional patterns of underdevelopment and the specific historical trajectory of Zimbabwe's political economy (Ndlovu, 2026). The underlying reasons for these academic failures are manifold and complex. A significant contributing factor is the scarcity of qualified educators, which severely hampers learners' learning experience. Many schools are staffed by inadequately trained personnel, resulting in diminished instructional quality and an inability to foster an effective educational environment (Mufanechiya et al., 2024). Furthermore, the persistent lack of essential resources, such as stationery and basic learning materials, exacerbates the situation, leaving learners ill-equipped to engage meaningfully with their curriculum (Oneya & Onyango, 2021). These

resource deficits are not incidental; they reflect the systematic underfunding of rural education, which entrenches regional inequalities and reproduces patterns of disadvantage (Wangombe, 2018).

Compounding these educational challenges are the adverse climatic conditions experienced by Chivi South, characterised by erratic and insufficient rainfall (Mutohodza, 2024). The resultant impact on agricultural productivity has been catastrophic, as the locale is heavily reliant on farming for both sustenance and economic activity. Crop failure not only deprives learners of the necessary nutrition to support their academic endeavours but also eliminates a primary economic activity for their families, leading to widespread food insecurity (Wangombe, 2018). Climate change thus intersects with educational exclusion in ways that are rarely adequately addressed in educational policy frameworks, highlighting the need for approaches that recognise the ecological dimensions of educational inequality (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The absence of industrialisation within the constituency compounds these challenges, as local employment opportunities are severely limited. Many parents find themselves without viable means of earning income, forcing some learners into precarious circumstances in which they must seek informal work in the households of wealthier community members or engage in menial labour to augment their families' income (Stanley et al., 2017). Such arrangements often lead to further educational neglect, as time that could be spent in school is instead devoted to supporting household financial needs.

Moreover, the cumulative effects of poverty manifest in families' inability to afford school fees, purchase uniforms, or provide adequate nourishment for their children, ultimately compelling many learners to remain at home (Kanyopa, 2018; Ndlovu, 2026). This vicious cycle of poverty and educational neglect creates an environment where the potential for academic success is severely compromised, thereby perpetuating the socio-economic challenges that characterise Chivi South. This cycle has been

extensively documented in the international literature on educational inequality, yet the specific dynamics in rural Zimbabwe remain underexplored (World Bank, 2019). Consequently, the state of Chivi South reveals a complex interplay of socio-economic factors that significantly hinder educational attainment. Addressing these interrelated challenges requires a concerted effort by stakeholders at all levels to implement targeted interventions that enhance educational resources, improve teacher training, and foster economic opportunities within the constituency. Only through a holistic and integrated approach can the entrenched cycle of poverty and educational failure in Chivi South be effectively mitigated.

Problem Statement

The rising prevalence of absenteeism among primary school learners in Chivi South, Zimbabwe, poses a formidable challenge, undermining educational attainment and socio-economic development in the region. Despite the recognition of education as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of sustainable progress, many learners continue to face systemic barriers that lead to chronic school absenteeism (Kanyopa & Mahlo, 2026). This alarming trend can be attributed to a confluence of socio-economic determinants that include, but are not limited to, pervasive poverty, familial instability, inadequate access to educational resources, and socio-cultural attitudes towards education. These factors are not discrete but operate synergistically, producing a cumulative disadvantage that fundamentally constrains educational participation. Moreover, the intersectionality of these factors creates a complex environment wherein children from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently encounter heightened vulnerabilities that inhibit their consistent participation in the educational process.

Internationally, scholars have demonstrated that absenteeism is a critical mechanism through which socio-economic inequality is reproduced across generations, yet the specific pathways through which this occurs in rural African

contexts remain inadequately theorised. This study addresses the theoretical gap identified in existing scholarship by applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to understand how unmet basic needs fundamentally undermine educational engagement. While previous research has documented the correlation between poverty and absenteeism, the mechanisms through which deprivation translates into educational exclusion require deeper theoretical explication. Maslow's framework provides a compelling explanatory lens by demonstrating how the failure to satisfy physiological needs, such as adequate nutrition, clothing, and shelter, creates a psychological state in which education becomes secondary to survival. This theoretical contribution extends beyond descriptive accounts to offer a coherent explanation for why learners in contexts of extreme poverty disengage from education, and why interventions that focus solely on improving school quality without addressing basic needs are unlikely to succeed.

Research Objectives

This study is anchored on the following objectives:

1. To examine the economic challenges' impact on the academic performance of learners.
2. To explore potential solutions aimed at mitigating the economic challenges that contribute to truancy among primary school learners.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this investigation is Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a pivotal psychological theory formulated by Abraham Maslow in 1943, which delineates human motivation through a hierarchical structure comprising five distinct levels: physiological needs, safety needs, social belonging, esteem needs, and self-actualisation (Adefunke, 2015). This framework has been extensively applied in educational contexts to understand learner motivation, engagement, and achievement, though its potential for analysing absenteeism, particularly in resource-constrained

environments, remains underexplored (Ndlovu, 2026). In the context of examining absenteeism among primary school learners in Chivi South, Zimbabwe, the physiological needs tier is particularly salient, encompassing fundamental requirements such as adequate food, appropriate clothing, internet access, and essential educational materials like stationery. Maslow's theory posits that these basic physiological needs must be substantially satisfied before higher-order needs can meaningfully motivate behaviour. In the educational domain, this suggests that learners cannot be expected to engage meaningfully with academic content when they are experiencing hunger, cold, or the shame of inadequate clothing (Zeragaber et al., 2024). These basic physiological needs serve as the foundation for all subsequent levels of motivation; therefore, learners who lack sufficient nourishment may endure detrimental effects on their physical health and cognitive functioning, thereby increasing their likelihood of absenteeism (Chidarikire et al., 2025). The cognitive effects of malnutrition are well-documented in international research, with studies demonstrating that undernourished children experience difficulties with attention, memory, and problem-solving that fundamentally compromise their capacity to benefit from educational opportunities (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021).

Similarly, inadequate clothing can cause discomfort and social stigmatisation, discouraging attendance due to fear of ridicule or exclusion (Kanyopa & Munyaradzi, 2025). This insight reveals how physiological needs are not merely physical but also carry profound social and emotional significance. The embarrassment of wearing torn or inadequate clothing may be experienced as a threat to social belonging and self-esteem, which Maslow identifies as higher-level needs, demonstrating that the hierarchy is not rigidly sequential but involves complex interactions between different need levels (Dube & Jita, 2018). Learners who anticipate shame or stigma may choose to absent themselves to avoid psychological harm, illustrating how unmet basic needs can disrupt educational participation

through multiple pathways. Furthermore, in an increasingly digitised educational framework, the absence of reliable internet access and essential stationery can severely impede a learner's ability to participate in assignments and engage effectively with the curriculum (Nhundu, 2023).

Maslow's framework has been the subject of scholarly critique for its individualistic assumptions and its limited attention to structural constraints on need satisfaction (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021). In the context of this study, the framework is used not as a universal prescription but as an analytical lens for understanding how structural poverty shapes individual and family priorities. The application of Maslow's theory in this research recognises that the hierarchy functions differently when basic needs are systematically unmet due to broader political and economic forces beyond individual control. This contextualised application enables the study to bridge individual psychological processes with structural analysis, demonstrating how socio-economic determinants operate at both macro and micro levels to produce educational exclusion. By framing the study through the lens of Maslow's physiological needs, this research seeks to explore how deficiencies in these critical resources not only contribute to increased absenteeism but also reflect a broader socio-economic context that undermines learners' educational commitment and academic success in this locality.

This framework guides the interpretation of findings by providing a structured lens for analysing participant narratives about the factors that facilitate or impede school attendance. When participants describe hunger, inadequate clothing, or family financial struggles, Maslow's framework enables the researcher to interpret these not merely as economic problems but as fundamental disruptions to the motivational system that supports educational engagement (Del Río et al., 2025). This theoretical grounding thus links participant experiences to broader psychological processes and contributes to the development of context-sensitive theory about

the relationship between poverty and educational participation.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

The case study employed in this study is characterised by a qualitative approach, specifically designed to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the socio-economic determinants influencing absenteeism among primary school learners (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is particularly advantageous for understanding the intricate, multifaceted nature of human experiences, as it enables the collection of rich, detailed data from participants' narratives and interactions. Unlike quantitative designs that seek to identify statistically generalizable patterns, the qualitative case study approach enables deep engagement with context-specific meanings and processes, providing insights essential to understanding how socio-economic disadvantage translates into educational exclusion (Dube, 2010). The case study design was selected because it permits intensive investigation of a bounded system, in this instance, the community of Chivi South, enabling the researcher to capture the complexity and nuance of the phenomenon under investigation.

Research Paradigm

The underlying research paradigm is interpretivist, which posits that reality is socially constructed and context-dependent (Bryman, 2021). This paradigm emphasises understanding the participants' perspectives and experiences within their unique socio-cultural contexts, thereby fostering an appreciation of how individual beliefs and values shape their realities (Sosu et al., 2021). Through adopting this interpretive lens, the study aims to uncover deep insights into the myriad factors that contribute to absenteeism, viewed through the lived experiences of those directly affected by the issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This paradigmatic stance is congruent with the study's theoretical framework, as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs recognises that the meaning and significance of need satisfaction are mediated by cultural and

contextual factors. The interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that understandings of what constitutes "adequate" food, clothing, or educational resources are not universal but are shaped by local norms and comparative reference points (Adefunke, 2015). This methodological congruence between paradigm and theory ensures epistemological coherence throughout the research process.

Selection of the Participants

For this study, nine participants were purposively selected to ensure a diverse representation of voices and perspectives within the community. Purposive sampling was chosen as the most appropriate strategy for this qualitative research because it enables the deliberate selection of participants who possess specific knowledge, experience, or perspectives relevant to the research questions (Kanyopa, 2022). This approach is consistent with the study's interpretive paradigm, which prioritises depth of understanding over statistical representativeness. The selection criteria were meticulously established, focusing on variables such as gender, geographical location, age, and specific expertise (Mutonhodza, 2025). The sample size of nine participants was determined using the principle of data saturation, which, in qualitative research, refers to the point at which additional data collection no longer yields new insights or themes relevant to the research questions (Nhundu, 2023). Saturation was achieved by the end of the second focus group discussion, as indicated by the repetition of themes and the absence of novel perspectives across participant groups.

Among the participants, two learners aged between 10 and 15 years were included, comprising a male and a female, thereby ensuring gender parity and capturing the youth perspective on the issue (Bubbe, 2021). The inclusion of learners as participants is particularly significant, given that much research on

absenteeism relies on adult proxy reports, potentially missing the perspectives of those most directly affected by the phenomenon (Ndlovu, 2026). Learner perspectives are essential for understanding the subjective experience of educational exclusion and the factors that facilitate or impede attendance from the child's perspective.

Additionally, two teachers, balanced by gender (male and female), were selected to provide insights into educational dynamics and their perceptions of learner attendance behaviours. Teachers occupy a unique position in the educational system, serving as institutional representatives while also engaging directly with learners and families (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Their perspectives bridge micro-level classroom interactions and meso-level institutional processes, making their insights essential to understanding absenteeism as a systemic phenomenon (Del Río et al., 2025). The inclusion of two parents, also evenly distributed by gender, sought to illuminate parental experiences and concerns regarding their children's education. Parents are the primary decision-makers regarding children's school attendance, and their perspectives reveal how household economic decisions are negotiated and how educational values are transmitted across generations (Oneya & Onyango, 2021). Furthermore, the research team included one local counsellor, who could offer expert insights into the psychological and emotional factors that impact learner absenteeism, alongside a local village head and a representative from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to provide broader socio-political context and perspectives on educational policies (Kanyopa, 2018). The inclusion of these community leaders and institutional representatives enables the study to capture perspectives across different levels of social organisation, from individual experiences to institutional policies.

Biographic results**Table 1: Biographic results**

Participants	Age between	Gender	Work Experience	Function
Teacher 1	956-977 years	Male	20 years	Secondary school Teacher
Teacher 2	956-977 years	Female	15 years	Primary school Teacher
Parent 1	956-977 years	Female	20 years	Nurse
Parent 2	956-977 years	Male	15 years	Farmer
Learner 1	956-977 years	Male	N/A	Secondary school learner
Learner 2	956-977 years	Female	N/A	Primary school learner
Counsellor	956-977 years	Male	30 years	School counsellor
The village Head	956-977 years	Male	16 years	Village head
Ministry of primary and secondary education	55- 60 years	Female	25 years	Representative of the Ministry of primary and secondary education

Data Generation Process

Data were generated through two focus group discussions, one comprising learners and the other involving adult participants (Chikwiri & Muiyiwa, 2017). Focus group discussions were selected as the primary method for data generation because they facilitate interaction and dialogue among participants, enabling the exploration of shared meanings and the identification of areas of consensus and disagreement (Adu & Okeke, 2022). The group dynamic often elicits more detailed responses than individual interviews, as participants build on each other's contributions and challenge one another's assumptions. Separating learners from adult participants ensured that children could express themselves freely without the inhibiting presence of authority figures, an important ethical consideration given the power

differentials between children and adults in African cultural contexts (Chidarikire & Saruchera, 2024). This dual-group approach fostered an atmosphere conducive to dialogue, allowing participants to express their thoughts openly and engage with one another's viewpoints (Creswell, 2021).

Trustworthiness and Rigour

To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was employed, integrating insights from multiple participant groups and sources to corroborate findings and enrich the overall analysis (Adu & Okeke, 2022). Specifically, triangulation was achieved through: (1) data source triangulation, by collecting data from learners, teachers, parents, and community leaders; (2) methodological triangulation, through the use of focus groups with different participant groups; and (3) investigator

triangulation, involving multiple researchers in data collection and analysis to reduce individual bias. This multi-faceted triangulation strategy serves to cross-validate findings and ensure that the interpretations are grounded in diverse perspectives (Dube & Jita, 2018).

Member checking was implemented by presenting preliminary findings and interpretations to participants for verification (Kanyopa, 2022). After the initial analysis, a summary of emergent themes was shared with a subgroup of participants, who were asked to confirm whether these interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives (Chidarikire et al, 2025). Participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback, corrections, or additional insights, which were then incorporated into the final analysis. This process enhances the credibility of the findings by ensuring that interpretations remain faithful to participants' intended meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Credibility was further established through prolonged engagement in the research setting and persistent observation. The research team spent substantial time in Chivi South, building relationships with community members and developing contextual understanding that informs the interpretation of participants' accounts. This engagement helps ensure that the findings represent credible interpretations of the phenomenon rather than imposing external frameworks (Duze, 2010).

Dependability was addressed by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail that documented all research decisions and processes. This includes raw data transcripts, coding matrices, analytical memos, and records of methodological choices (Sosu et al., 2021). The audit trail enables external researchers to trace the research process and evaluate the appropriateness of methodological decisions, thereby establishing the dependability of the research findings (Mutonhodza, 2025).

Confirmability was achieved through reflexive practice and the maintenance of detailed researcher journals that documented the researchers' assumptions, biases, and positions

regarding the research (Mutonhodza, 2024). These reflexive accounts enable readers to understand how the researchers' social positions and theoretical orientations may have shaped the research process and interpretations. Through making these influences explicit, confirmability is enhanced, as the link between data and interpretation becomes transparent and auditable (Nhundu, 2023).

Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process, with researchers engaging in systematic reflection on how their positions, including professional backgrounds, educational experiences, and social identities, may shape their engagement with participants and interpretation of findings (Ncube et al, 2015). This reflexive practice was documented through regular debriefing sessions among researchers and the maintenance of personal journals. The reflexive approach acknowledges that knowledge production is always situated, and that researcher positionality influences what is observed and how it is interpreted (Creswell, 2021).

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, ensuring that participants' rights and well-being were safeguarded (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Confidentiality was rigorously maintained by anonymising participants' identities in reporting findings, thereby protecting their privacy (Calhoun, 2025). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were thoroughly briefed about the study's purpose, objectives, and potential implications (Chidarikire et al., 2025). This transparency not only fosters trust but also empowers participants to make informed decisions about their involvement in the research.

Data Analysis

The data generated from these discussions were subjected to thematic analysis. This process encompasses several pivotal stages: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and composing the final report. Such a systematic approach enables the researchers to extract meaningful patterns

and insights from the data, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic factors influencing absenteeism (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The coding process proceeded through multiple iterative phases. Initially, two researchers independently engaged in open coding of the transcripts, identifying discrete units of meaning relevant to the research questions (Wangombe, 2018). This initial coding was conducted without predetermined categories, allowing codes to emerge from the data. The researchers then met to compare their coding and resolve discrepancies through discussion, resulting in a consensus coding framework (Kanyopa, 2022). These initial codes were organised into potential themes by grouping related codes and identifying patterns of meaning across the dataset. The themes were then reviewed in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset, checking that themes were coherent internally and distinct externally (Ncube et al, 2015).

Themes were further refined through an iterative process, with researchers returning to the data to verify that themes accurately represented participants' accounts and that no significant themes had been overlooked. Throughout this process, the researchers engaged in reflexive practice, documenting their analytical decisions and considering how their theoretical orientations, particularly Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs framework, might have shaped their interpretations (Mufanechiya et al., 2024). The theoretical framework was used sensitively to guide attention to particular dimensions of experience while remaining open to unexpected themes that might challenge or extend the theoretical perspective (Duze, 2010).

The Findings

Theme 1: Impact of Economic Challenges on Academic Performance

This theme focuses on analysing how various economic difficulties, such as poverty, resource scarcity, and family financial instability, affect learners' academic performance. The goal is to identify specific challenges that hinder educational achievement and to understand the

broader implications for learners' future opportunities. The participants narrated the following:

The male teacher commented that:

"I see firsthand how financial struggles affect my learners. Many come to school without proper supplies or even meals. It's hard for them to focus when their minds are preoccupied with worries about what they're going to eat or if they'll be able to participate in class activities due to a lack of materials."

More so, the male learner shared that:

"It is really tough sometimes. My family can't always pay for the things I need for school, like uniforms or books. I feel embarrassed when I have to borrow things from classmates. It makes me feel like I don't belong, and when I'm stressed about home, I can't concentrate in class."

Furthermore, the female parent expressed that:

"I worry every day about making ends meet. I want to help my children with their schoolwork, but I often have to work late just to put food on the table. The little assistance we get from the school has been a blessing, but I still feel overwhelmed. These financial strains affect my kids' ability to do well in school."

Additionally, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education official noted that:

"Our education system is facing significant challenges due to unequal funding distribution. Schools in low-income areas often receive the least support. We have initiatives in place, like scholarships and free meal programs, but they are not enough to address the deep-rooted issues of financial instability that our learners face daily."

Lastly, the counsellor mentioned that:

"The emotional impact of economic hardship on learners cannot be ignored. Many of them come to school carrying the burden of their parents' financial struggles. I often hear learners say things like, 'I can't focus because I'm worried about my family.' We must create an environment where they feel supported and can learn coping strategies for their stress."

The findings from the above thematic exploration of the impact of economic challenges on academic performance reveal profound insights into the intricate relationship

between financial stability and learner achievement. Participants' narratives demonstrate that economic hardships manifest in various debilitating ways, inhibiting learners' potential (Dube, 2010). The male teacher's observations highlight the acute distress experienced by learners who arrive at school without essential supplies or adequate nutrition (Dube & Jita, 2018). This condition creates a barrier to cognitive engagement, as their minds are preoccupied with immediate survival concerns, such as hunger or anxiety about being unprepared for class discussions. This finding resonates with Maslow's conceptualisation of physiological needs as foundational to motivation; when learners experience food insecurity and material deprivation, their cognitive resources are diverted toward addressing these immediate survival concerns, compromising their capacity for the sustained attention and engagement that academic learning requires (Kanyopa, 2022).

The embarrassment the male learner expresses when borrowing materials from peers symbolises a deeper struggle for belonging and self-worth (Sosu et al., 2021). In Maslow's framework, this reflects the interaction between physiological needs (lack of resources) and higher-level needs for esteem and belonging. The shame of being unable to afford basic educational materials threatens the learner's sense of social worth and belonging, creating psychological barriers to attendance that compound the material barriers. This finding demonstrates the inadequacy of simplistic economic explanations for absenteeism and reveals the complex psychosocial mechanisms through which poverty operates. International research has similarly documented the role of shame and stigma in educational exclusion, with scholars noting that the experience of poverty in educational settings is not merely about material deprivation but about social comparison and the threat to dignity (Nhundu, 2023).

The female parent's account further emphasises the emotional and psychological toll of financial hardship (Kanyopa & Hlalele, 2021). Although she longs to assist her children with their

academic responsibilities, the necessity of long working hours impedes her involvement. Findings also revealed that family disconnection can leave learners feeling unsupported and disengaged, creating an environment in which academic performance suffers (Mutonhodza, 2025). This reveals the structural constraints on parental engagement that research has identified as a barrier to educational achievement in low-income contexts (World Bank, 2019). The parents' narrative challenges deficit-based assumptions about parental disengagement, demonstrating that parents in poverty are often highly committed to their children's education but face structural barriers such as labour market demands and economic precarity that limit their capacity for involvement. This finding contributes to international debates on parental engagement by demonstrating how economic constraints shape the form and quality of parental involvement (Mutonhodza, 2025).

The remarks by Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education officials highlight systemic inequities in funding allocation, particularly towards schools in impoverished areas (Mahommed & Kinyo, 2020). Despite existing interventions such as scholarships and free meal programs, these measures often fall short of addressing the pervasive challenges of financial instability. This finding highlights the limitations of piecemeal interventions that fail to address the structural roots of educational inequality, contributing to international debates over the appropriate scope and scale of educational policy interventions (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The official's acknowledgement of insufficient funding echoes scholarship on the politics of educational resource allocation and on how historical patterns of inequality are reproduced through educational finance systems (Mufanechiya et al., 2024).

Finally, the counsellor's insights reveal the learners' emotional burdens, emphasising how stress related to parental financial difficulties can significantly detract from their learning experience (Kanyopa, 2018). This finding adds an important psychological dimension to understanding how economic challenges affect

academic performance, demonstrating that poverty affects not only material conditions but also emotional well-being and cognitive functioning. The counsellor's observation that learners carry their families' financial burdens resonates with Maslow's emphasis on the holistic nature of human needs and the psychological effects of unmet needs. When children are anxious about family finances, their capacity for cognitive engagement in the classroom is compromised, as their psychological resources are redirected toward managing emotional distress (Chidarikire et al., 2025; Kanyopa & Mahlo, 2026). This finding has implications for educational practice, suggesting that schools in impoverished areas may need to incorporate trauma-informed and socio-emotional approaches to support learners experiencing economic stress (Oneya & Onyango, 2021).

The testimonies collectively paint a portrait of a fragile education framework hindered by economic adversities. This aligns with international research demonstrating that educational achievement is significantly influenced by socio-economic factors, though the specific mechanisms differ across contexts (World Bank, 2019). The narratives from Chivi South add to this literature by providing rich qualitative evidence of how poverty operates in a specific rural context, highlighting the interactions between material deprivation, emotional distress, and educational disengagement. The findings extend existing knowledge by demonstrating that absenteeism is not merely a behavioural problem but a response to inadequate conditions that enable educational participation.

Through Maslow's theoretical lens, these findings demonstrate that educational engagement is contingent on the satisfaction of physiological and safety needs. The learners in Chivi South are not failing to prioritise education; rather, they are responding to circumstances in which basic needs have been systematically unmet. This insight challenges individualistic interpretations of absenteeism that blame learners or families and instead foregrounds the structural conditions that make educational

participation impossible. This theoretical contribution has significance for international debates on educational inequality, as it provides a mechanism for understanding why resource-poor communities often exhibit low educational participation and how interventions might be designed to address the root causes of absenteeism.

Theme 2: Mitigating Economic Challenges and Truancy

This theme aims to investigate and propose potential solutions to reduce the economic factors that lead to truancy among primary school learners. Through exploring interventions, support systems, and community programs, the research seeks to initiate strategies that promote consistent school attendance and enhance educational outcomes for vulnerable populations. The participants shared the following:

The female teacher commented that:

"Many learners miss school because they have to help their families earn a living. We must provide support to these families, perhaps through school meal programs or financial assistance, so children can focus on their education."

Additionally, a female learner shared her perspective, saying:

"Sometimes, I do not come to school because there is not enough food at home. If my parents had help with their jobs or if we had free meals at school, I could attend more regularly."

Also, the male parent reflected on the pressures faced by families, stating:

"It is difficult to send my children to school when there's not enough money for basic needs. If there were community programs that help parents find jobs or give financial support, it would help improve attendance."

Moreover, the official from the Ministry emphasised the need for systemic change, noting:

"We understand that economic hardships impact school attendance. We are exploring partnerships with

NGOs to create programs that directly address these issues, such as vocational training for parents."

Lastly, the village head remarked on community involvement, saying:

"As a community, we must come together to support our children's education. Initiatives such as after-school programs or local fundraising for school supplies could make a significant difference in keeping learners in class."

The findings, based on data on mitigating economic challenges and truancy, reveal a complex relationship between financial hardship and consistent school attendance among primary school learners. Participants' narratives underscore various economic pressures that frequently compel learners to miss school. The context of financial constraints, as explained by the female teacher, aligns with the findings of Zeragaber et al. (2024), who noted that many learners are forced to prioritise their families' financial needs over their educational pursuits. This observation reveals a fundamental tension between immediate survival needs and long-term educational investments that characterises poverty contexts internationally (Sosu et al., 2021).

The provision of school meal programs and financial assistance emerges as a crucial intervention, shifting the emphasis back to education (Nhundu, 2023). This perspective highlights an urgent need for support systems to address immediate nutritional deficits, enabling learners to focus on their academic engagement. The emphasis on nutritional interventions aligns with international research demonstrating the effectiveness of school feeding programs in improving attendance and educational outcomes, particularly in contexts of food insecurity (Kanyopa, 2018). The female learner's narrative underscores the direct link between food insecurity and school attendance, explaining how unmet physiological needs impede access to education (World Bank, 2019). This personal testimony vividly illustrates Maslow's proposition that physiological needs must be satisfied before higher-order motivations can emerge.

The male parent's reflections emphasise the overwhelming financial stress that renders school attendance unsustainable when basic needs remain unaddressed (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020). He advocated for community programs to enhance economic stability for families, underscoring the need to integrate educational support with broader economic initiatives. This call for community-level interventions resonates with international scholarship on comprehensive approaches to educational inequality, which argues that educational interventions cannot succeed in isolation from broader strategies addressing poverty, health, and employment (Del Río et al., 2025). This perspective challenges narrow, school-focused interventions and suggests that addressing absenteeism requires broader attention to community development.

The remarks from the Ministry's official stress the crucial need for systemic reform to address the root causes of truancy linked to economic hardship. The exploration of partnerships with NGOs to establish programs, such as vocational training for parents, signifies an acknowledgement that sustainable, long-term solutions are imperative (Creswell & Clark, 2017). This institutional perspective recognises that interventions that address the symptoms of poverty without addressing its structural causes are unlikely to achieve a lasting impact. The official's emphasis on partnerships reflects international trends toward multisectoral approaches to educational challenges, involving collaboration among the education, social welfare, and economic development sectors (Kanyopa & Munyaradzi, 2025).

The village head's emphasis on community engagement reflects a shared responsibility in fostering an environment conducive to educational success. Initiatives such as after-school programs and community fundraising efforts serve as tangible examples of how collective action can enhance school attendance and, ultimately, improve educational outcomes for vulnerable populations (Mutonhodza, 2025). This community-centred perspective challenges top-down approaches to educational

intervention and recognises the agency and resources within communities themselves. This finding aligns with scholarship on community-based education that emphasises the importance of local ownership and participation in educational development (Chikwiri & Musiyiwa, 2017).

These findings can be contextualised through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, particularly regarding the physiological level. According to Maslow, the satisfaction of basic physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter is critical before individuals can address higher-level needs, including safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation (Stanley et al., 2017; Kanyopa & Mahlo, 2026). In the educational landscape, learners must first fulfil their basic physiological needs to ensure consistent school attendance and active participation in their learning environments. The teacher's acknowledgement of learners missing school to help support their families highlights a troubling reality: when children are drawn into economic responsibilities that emphasise survival over education, their academic success becomes intricately linked with familial financial instability (Adefunke, 2015). This predicament jeopardises not only immediate learning experiences but also diminishes long-term educational trajectories, perpetuating cycles of poverty.

Comments from the participants emphasise that hunger exemplifies how foundational needs directly influence educational experiences. This implies that when food insecurity prevails, learning capacity diminishes as cognitive resources are diverted to meeting immediate sustenance needs rather than academic engagement (Babbie, 2021). This narrative highlights the critical need for community-based programs that could alleviate such burdens, allowing learners to pursue their education free from the anxieties of financial instability. The Ministry official's focus on systemic change underscores the importance of holistic solutions. Partnerships with NGOs for vocational training reflect strategic initiatives aimed at immediate and long-term family empowerment (Calhoun, 2025). By addressing the layered complexities of

economic hardship, these policies can create more stable conditions in which school attendance becomes feasible and sustainable for affected learners.

Participants' contributions supporting community involvement signify a growing recognition that collaborative efforts can bridge the gaps in support for struggling families. Implementing after-school programs and community fundraising not only enhances resource availability but also fosters a sense of belonging and solidarity, fulfilling higher-level needs within the educational continuum (Chidarikire et al., 2025; Kanyopa & Mahlo, 2026). Therefore, the intertwining of economic challenges, truancy, and educational performance underscores the urgent need for multidimensional interventions. Through addressing basic physiological needs, communities can lay the groundwork for meaningful educational engagement and success. Learners can strive towards their fullest potential both academically and personally, made possible through the collaborative efforts of educators, parents, community members, and government entities. This concerted approach is vital in fostering an ecosystem that not only promotes regular school attendance but also champions long-term educational equity.

The contribution of these findings to international debates is threefold. First, they provide empirical evidence from a context rarely centred in global educational research, thereby decentering Northern perspectives and contributing to more diverse knowledge production about educational inequality. Second, they demonstrate the salience of Maslow's framework for understanding educational exclusion in resource-constrained contexts, offering a theoretically grounded explanation for the persistence of absenteeism. Third, they highlight the inadequacy of narrowly educational interventions in addressing absenteeism, pointing to the need for multisectoral approaches that address families' material and social conditions.

Discussion

This study set out to examine the socio-economic determinants of absenteeism among primary school learners in Chivi South, Zimbabwe, employing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as a theoretical framework to guide analysis and interpretation. The findings reveal a complex, multi-layered relationship between economic deprivation and educational participation that extends beyond simplistic cause-and-effect explanations. The discussion that follows synthesises these findings in relation to existing international scholarship, examining their implications for understanding educational inequality and considering their significance for policy and practice. The findings from both themes demonstrate consistent evidence that economic deprivation fundamentally compromises educational participation through multiple pathways. First, they provide qualitative evidence from the Zimbabwean context, which is often marginalised in global educational research. The dominance of research from North American and European contexts has produced theories and frameworks that may not adequately capture the dynamics of educational inequality in contexts of extreme poverty (Calhoun, 2025).

This study's findings demonstrate that while some patterns of educational inequality are universal, such as the association between poverty and educational outcomes, the specific mechanisms through which poverty operates are context-dependent and require local investigation (Chikwiri & Musiyiwa, 2017). Second, the findings contribute to debates on the relationship between educational and social policy. International scholarship has increasingly recognised that educational inequality cannot be addressed through school-based interventions alone (Sosu et al., 2021). This study's findings support this perspective by demonstrating the limitations of school-focused interventions in the absence of broader social and economic support for families. Participants across all groups consistently emphasised that educational interventions must be accompanied by measures addressing food insecurity, employment, and economic empowerment. This suggests that

debates on educational inequality need to engage more seriously with the structural determinants of educational participation and the limitations of narrowly educational interventions.

Third, this research contributes to the growing body of scholarship that challenges deficit-based discourses in educational research and policy. International scholars have critiqued the tendency to attribute educational challenges to the perceived inadequacies of families and communities experiencing poverty, rather than to structural inequalities (Kanyopa, 2022). The narratives from this study demonstrate that families in Chivi South are deeply committed to their children's education but face structural constraints that limit their capacity for educational engagement. This finding has policy implications, suggesting that effective interventions must work with families and communities as partners rather than as targets. Lastly, the study also reveals the inadequacy of piecemeal interventions that address symptoms rather than root causes. Participants acknowledged that existing interventions, such as school meal programs and scholarships, are valuable but insufficient (Mutonhodza, 2024). This finding aligns with international research demonstrating the limited impact of targeted interventions in the absence of structural change (Wangombe, 2018). The implication is that addressing absenteeism in contexts of extreme poverty requires comprehensive approaches that address housing, food security, employment, and healthcare alongside educational supports.

Limitations of the study

Limitations of the study include a relatively small sample size and a focus on a single community, which limits the generalizability of the findings (Bryman, 2021). However, the qualitative approach was appropriate for the research objectives, enabling deep exploration of meanings and processes that would not be accessible through large-scale surveys (Creswell, 2021). Future research could extend these findings by employing comparative case study designs across multiple communities or by

exploring the perspectives of learners who have dropped out of school entirely.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the investigation into the socio-economic determinants affecting absenteeism among primary school learners in Chivi South, Zimbabwe, underscores a critical nexus between economic hardships and academic performance. The research shows how pervasive factors such as poverty, inadequate access to educational resources, and socio-cultural obstacles contribute to increased truancy, which in turn undermines the educational aspirations of young learners. Employing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as an analytical lens has revealed that absenteeism is fundamentally a response to unmet physiological and safety needs, with learners and families prioritising survival over education in contexts of extreme deprivation. These findings illustrate not only the adverse ramifications for individual learners but also highlight a systemic issue that threatens to perpetuate intergenerational cycles of poverty and educational disenfranchisement. The study demonstrates that addressing absenteeism requires moving beyond narrow educational interventions to encompass comprehensive strategies addressing the material conditions of families and communities.

Therefore, addressing the complex interplay of these socio-economic variables is paramount to ensuring that all children have equitable access to education and the opportunity to achieve their full potential. The contribution of this research to international debates lies in providing qualitative, community-centred evidence from a context often marginalised in global educational scholarship, and in demonstrating the salience of Maslow's framework for understanding educational exclusion in resource-constrained settings.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are directly linked to the empirical evidence presented in this study and are framed within the contextual limitations of the research conducted in Chivi South.

Recommendations for Teachers

To effectively mitigate absenteeism and enhance the educational experience, teachers should adopt individualised instructional strategies that recognise the diverse challenges learners face due to economic deprivation. Given evidence that learners experiencing hunger and material deprivation have a compromised capacity for concentration, teachers should consider how pedagogical approaches might be adapted to accommodate learners' physiological states, such as incorporating short breaks for those who have not eaten. Based on participants' narratives of shame and embarrassment related to borrowing materials, teachers should create classroom cultures that minimise stigma and ensure that all learners can participate fully regardless of material resources. Furthermore, teachers should establish open lines of communication with parents to better understand the challenges families face, enabling them to provide more targeted support while respecting families' dignity and agency. Given evidence that economic constraints significantly shape patterns of parental involvement, teachers should avoid deficit-based assumptions about parental disengagement and instead collaborate with families to identify feasible forms of participation.

Recommendations for Learners

Learners are encouraged to take a proactive role in their education by engaging with peers, forming study groups, and utilising available resources. Building a sense of agency and responsibility for their educational journeys can significantly ameliorate the pressures that contribute to absenteeism. However, these recommendations must be tempered with recognition of the structural constraints on learner agency; expecting learners to overcome poverty-related barriers through individual effort alone is unrealistic and potentially harmful. Peer support networks may be valuable for providing social and emotional support, but they cannot compensate for material deprivation.

Recommendations for Parents

Parents play a crucial role in reinforcing the value of education within the home. Through creating a supportive environment that prioritises education and establishes consistent routines, parents can instil a sense of responsibility in their children regarding school attendance. However, the evidence from this study demonstrates that parental engagement is significantly constrained by economic pressures. Therefore, recommendations for parents must be realistic and avoid imposing additional burdens on families already experiencing extreme stress. Community-based support structures that alleviate economic pressures, such as cooperative childcare arrangements or community kitchens, may be more feasible than individual parental action.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should implement policies to facilitate equitable access to education, including establishing scholarship programs for economically disadvantaged learners and providing essential learning materials. Given the evidence that existing interventions are insufficient, these efforts must be significantly scaled up and targeted to ensure they reach the most disadvantaged learners. Furthermore, the evidence of systemic funding inequities requires attention; policies that address the unequal distribution of educational resources, including qualified teachers and learning materials, should be prioritised. Enhanced teacher training to incorporate sensitivity to socio-economic disparities will further equip educators to address the unique needs of their learners. The Ministry should also consider establishing cross-sectoral collaboration with social welfare, agriculture, and economic development ministries to address the structural determinants of educational exclusion.

Recommendations for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are encouraged to launch initiatives that target the holistic needs of families, including mentorship

programs, educational resource distribution, and financial literacy workshops. Such efforts can alleviate some of the economic burdens that compromise learners' ability to attend school regularly. However, these programs must be designed in genuine partnership with communities, building on existing strengths and resources rather than imposing externally developed solutions. Evidence from this study suggests that community participation and local ownership are essential for program sustainability. NGOs should also consider how their programming might inadvertently create dependency or undermine local institutions and should therefore prioritise capacity-building approaches.

Recommendations for the Business Community

The business community plays a vital role by engaging in corporate social responsibility initiatives that support educational programs and resources in the local area. Partnerships with schools can lead to innovative solutions that directly benefit the learners and their families. These should be developed with sensitivity to local context and should not be tokenistic or designed primarily to enhance corporate image. Partnerships that involve local businesses in vocational training or employment opportunities for parents may be particularly valuable in addressing the economic pressures that drive absenteeism. However, reliance on corporate philanthropy should not substitute for adequate government funding of education.

Recommendations for the Social Welfare Department

The Social Welfare Department should enhance its support systems for vulnerable families, focusing on economic empowerment strategies to alleviate the financial constraints that contribute to absenteeism. Given the evidence that food insecurity is a significant factor in absenteeism, Social Welfare should prioritise improving access to nutritional support for learners and their families. Programs that provide direct cash transfers or food assistance, such as the school meal programs mentioned by

participants, should be maintained, scaled up where feasible, and systematically evaluated. In addition, the Department should consider how to support economic development at the community level to reduce the need for child labour and address the structural roots of absenteeism. Social welfare policies should be developed in coordination with educational strategies to ensure integrated, complementary approaches.

General Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should extend the findings of this study through comparative case study designs that examine absenteeism across multiple communities, enabling the identification of context-specific and common patterns. Longitudinal research examining how socio-economic conditions and educational participation change over time would also be valuable. Research should also explore the perspectives of learners who have dropped out of school entirely, as their experiences may reveal additional barriers to educational participation. Intervention research evaluating the effectiveness of specific programs in addressing absenteeism in Zimbabwean rural contexts is

also needed to provide an evidence base for policy and practice. Finally, research employing participatory methods that actively involve community members in research design and implementation would contribute to decolonising educational research.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the participants for their willingness to participate in this study.

Role of authors

TJK- wrote abstract, introduction, background, and literature review.

MC wrote the findings, discussion, and recommendations.

GED- wrote the theoretical framework, research methodology, and conclusion.

All authors proofread the article

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Adefunke, S. E. (2015). Truancy among public secondary school students: implication for counseling. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Education Research and Policy*, 6(7), 331- 338.
- Adu, E. O., & Okeke, C. I. O. (2022). *Fundamentals of research in Humanities, Social Sciences and Science education. A practical step-by-step approach to a successful research journey*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Babbie, E. (2021). *The practice of social research. 13th edition*. Wadsworth. Cengage Learning.
- Bryman, A. (2021). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Calhoun, T. (2025). *Understanding Chronic Absenteeism Through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: Identifying Root Causes and Informing Interventions* (Doctoral dissertation, Alliant International University).
- Chidarikire, M., & Saruchera, M. (2024). Exploring multifaceted impacts of El Niño driven drought on child-headed rural learners' well-being in drought-prone Chivi, Zimbabwe. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Rural and Community Studies*, 6, 956-977. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijrcs-2024.vol6>
- Chidarikire, M., Kanyopa, T. J., & Mokhele-Makgalwa, M. (2025). Protracted distances from home to school influence ECD learners' psychological well-being at rural primary schools in Masvingo South district, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Studies in Psychology*, 5(3), 956-977. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijpspy.v5i3.2167>
- Chikwiri, E., & Musiyiwa, J. (2017). *Challenges and gaps in children's transition from early childhood development to grade one in Zimbabwe*. Harare: Women's University in Africa

- Creswell, J. W. (2021). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed-method approaches*. (5th ed.). London: Sage Publications.
- Del Río, A., Knutsen, C. H., & Lutscher, P. M. (2025). Education policies and systems across modern history: A global dataset. *Comparative Political Studies*, 58(5), 956-977. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140241252075>
- Dube, B., & Jita, T. (2018). Rethinking healthy school relations for curriculum change in Zimbabwe: A relational leadership approach. *Issues in Educational Research*, 28(4), 956-977. <http://www.iier.org.au/iier28/dube.pdf>
- Duze, C. O. (2010). Average Distance Travelled To School by Primary and Secondary Students in Nigeria and its Effect on Attendance. *African Research Review*, 4(4). <https://doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v4i4.69236>
- Kanyopa, T. J. (2018). *Learners transitioning from township to ex-Model C schools: An invitational education perspective* (Master's dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood).
- Kanyopa, T. J. (2022). Understanding and enhancing learner integration in a selected ex-Model C school (Unpublished PhD thesis), Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood, South Africa.
- Kanyopa, T. J., & Hlalele, D. J. (2021). The learning experiences of learners transitioning from rural and township schools to ex-Model C schools. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 16(1), 956-977. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-jitt1-v16-n1-a9>
- Kanyopa, T. J., & Munyaradzi, C. (2025). Peer counselling as an intervention strategy to mitigate adolescent learners' pregnancies in rural primary schools in the Matabeleland North region of Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Studies in Sexuality Education*, 1(2), 55-60. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ijssse.v1i2.2126>
- Kanyopa, T. J., & Mahlo, F. D. (2026). Inclusive Education as a Pathway to Enhancing the Mental Health and Well-Being of Learners with Disabilities in South African Schools. *International Journal of Special Education*, 41(21s), 956-977.
- Mohammed, S. H., & Kinyo, L. (2020). The role of constructivism in the enhancement of social studies education. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(7), 956-977. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.05.01>
- Mufanechiya, A., Kanyopa, T. J., & Mokhele-Makgalwa, M. (2024). Evaluating Primary School Teacher Professional Development Programmes in Zimbabwe: Pre-Service Student Teacher's Views. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 3(8), 956-977. <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i8.5282>
- Mulenga-Hagane, L. M. (2021). *Retention of Girls in School in the face of Absenteeism and Early Marriages: Implications for the 2011 Education Act* (Doctoral dissertation, Ph. D. thesis, University of Zambia, Lusaka).
- Mutonhodza, L. (2024). Teachers' challenges encountered in the marketisation of education systems at primary schools in the Mbare-Hatfield district. *International Journal of Studies in Inclusive Education*, 1(1), 956-977. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-ijisie_v1_n1_a1
- Mutonhodza, L. (2025). Effects of walking long distances by ECD learners in Shamva district, Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Studies in Inclusive Education*, 2(1), 956-977. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-ijisie_v2_n1_a3
- Ncube, A. C., Muranda, A. Z., Tshabalala, T., & Mapolisa, T. (2015). The nature and prevalence of bullying in Primary Schools of Nkayi South Circuit in Zimbabwe. *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science*, 8(1), 956-977.
- Ndlovu, P. S. (2026). Navigating the Constraints: A Critical Analysis of Youth Unemployment, Poverty, and Inequality in Zimbabwe. In *Intergenerational Transmission of Youth Poverty and Unemployment* (pp. 956-977). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/956-977-956-977-9.ch010>
- Nhundu, V. (2023). Early Childhood Teaching and Learning in Zimbabwe—A Critical Analysis. *The Fountain. Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 7(1), 956-977.

- Oneya, L., & Onyango, D. (2021). Perception of School Stakeholders on the Effect of School-Home Distance on Students' Academic Performance among Community Secondary Schools in Rorya District, Tanzania. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 956-977. <https://doi.org/10.46606/eajess2021v02i01.0068>
- Sosu, E. M., Dare, S., Goodfellow, C., & Klein, M. (2021). Socioeconomic status and school absenteeism: A systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Review of Education*, 9(3), e3291. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3291>
- Stanley, E. U., Emmanuel, A. N., & Igboh, U. B. (2017). The relationship between school distance and academic achievement of primary school Pupils, In Ovia North-East Lga, Edo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Advanced Research and Publication*, 1(5), 956-977.
- Wangombe, E. N. (2018). *Impact on lower primary education by the challenges of distance to the preschool centres in Mukogodo division, Laikipia county, Kenya* (Unpublished Masters thesis). Nairobi, Education Kenyatta University, Kenya.
- Watch, H. R. (2017). *I Had a Dream to Finish School": Barriers to Secondary Education in Tanzania*. Retrieved from http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/accessible_document/tanzania0217-accessiblepdf
- World Bank. (2019). *Benin: the multiple benefits of school lunch*. Available from <http://worldbank.org>
- Zeragaber, T. Y., Teame, G. T., & Tsighe, Z. (2024). Assessing the effect of home-to-school distance on student dropout rate in Adi-Keyih sub-zone, Eritrea. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, 7, 100340. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100340>