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The Interface of Child-Headed Households and Academic Performance: A Case of Primary School Learners in the Beatrice Resettlement Area, Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

This study sought to establish the impact of the child-headed household on the academic performance of learners in Beatrice fast track land reform resettlement area in Zimbabwe. The study adopted a qualitative approach and utilised the case study design. The target population of the study comprised 15 learners from 5 primary schools, 84 teachers as well as the learners' relatives. Data for the study were generated through interviews with child household heads, 10 teachers and 4 school heads. The data were presented as cases and themes. In interpreting the data, Bourdieu's theory of practice was utilised. The child-headed household context of child development due to severe economic challenges which are undermining the ability of families to cope with orphans. In contemporary Zimbabwean society very few extended families can provide the support needed to struggle to look after their own children. The child-headed household presents numerous social and economic challenges not favourable for the academic performance of learners from such households. Living in conditions of poverty characterised by hunger, stigma and discrimination, child labour, failure to afford school fees, lack of health is impacting negatively on the academic performance of the children. Household challenges take a gender dimension with girls overburdened and their academic performance affected. These challenges are a result of limited support from the government, donor organisations and the family safety net. It is therefore imperative for communities with support of the government, donor organisations to establish community orphanages. These orphanages will not only enhance the academic performance of orphaned and vulnerable children, but also mould them into acceptable and productive members of society.

Keywords: *child-headed household, child household headed and academic performance.*

1. Introduction and Background