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AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF BASIC EDUCATION IN ENHANCING WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN CHIWARIDZO BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

BY

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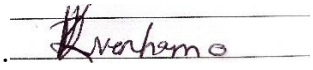
JUNE 2026

DECLARATION

I, Zvenhamo Kuzivakwashe, certify that this research project is the outcome of my own self labor. No sources have been used without acknowledging the original publisher or author. All references and sources have been properly credit.

Signed……

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APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that they have supervised the student Zvenhamo Kuzivakwashe dissertation entitled an examination of the role of basic education in enhancing women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo Bindura. Submitted in partial fulfillment of Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Development Studies at Bindura University of Science Education.

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DEDICATION

My heartfelt gratitude and dedication goes to the Almighty for His guidance and grace throughout this research journey. I also dedicate this work to my parents especially my mother who supported me constantly financially and spiritually. I also appreciate my entire family for their support and blessings. May God bless each and every one of them.

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment remains a key objective in global development discourse, however gender disparities in education continue to constrain women's agency in economic, social, and political spheres. The dissertation explores the contribution of basic education to women empowerment. It specifically examines the impact of basic education on decision-making autonomy, economic participation, health outcomes, and civic engagement. The study employed a mixed methods approach. It included quantitative analysis of questioners and qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with women who finished primary and lower secondary education. The quantitative component analyses the correlation between the years of basic schooling and indicators of empowerment, and the qualitative component analyses the lived experiences of how schooling shaped women's perceptions of self-efficacy, mobility and rights awareness. "Basic education empowers in three ways: it increases literacy and numeracy, so that people can access information and formal employment; it increases critical consciousness, challenging restrictive gender norms; and it increases social networks, facilitating collective action". But the extent of this effect is tempered by contextual factors such as the attitudes of the household, the quality of the school, and the availability of supportive community structures. The study concludes that basic education is necessary for women's empowerment but not sufficient. The policy implications point to the necessity of integrated interventions that combine universal access to quality basic education with the overcoming of cultural barriers, economic constraints and institutional biases.

KEY TERMS

1. Basic Education
2. Non-Governmental Organizations
3. Women's Empowerment
4. Gender Equality

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UNICEF	United Nation Children's Fund
IG	Interview Guide
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
NDS1	National Development Strategy

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research project titled "An Examination of The Role of Basic Education in Enhancing Women's Empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe." It gives a context to the study by reflecting on the global, regional, and local discussion and debates around women empowerment and basic education. The chapter introduces the problem statement for the research, states the aim and objectives of the research, and formulates the guiding research questions. It also provides a scope for the investigation, explains why the investigation is important and clarifies the meaning of certain terms used throughout the dissertation. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the organisation of the entire study.

1.2 Background of the Study

The link between basic education and gender empowerment has emerged as a key issue in the debates about development worldwide. Education is considered one of the most powerful tools for empowering women, enhancing their means of living and their full involvement in social, economic and political life (World Bank, 2021; UNESCO, 2022; Williams et al., 2022). Education is a necessary condition and also a pathway to empowerment of women and the United Nations recognises that empowerment is essential to achieve sustainable development (Kabeer, 2005, United Nations, 2015 and Williams et al., 2022). Basic education empowers women to make decisions, support household livelihoods, and participate in community development processes, promoting their confidence and ability (Nhuta & Mukuma, 2017; UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2021).

In history, the world has witnessed that women in all corners of the globe have been exposed to systemic discrimination based on patriarchal traditions, religious beliefs, and deeply entrenched cultural norms that emphasise men's access to education and public life (Unterhalter, 2007; Maclean et al., 2012; Urhibo & Orhero, 2023). For centuries, the dominant view of education was that it was reserved for males, and women were assigned to domestic duties, where they received little education or participated in public affairs. The late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were, however, a turning point, as the international community called for women's rights, gender equality, and universal education (Kabeer, 2005; UNESCO, 2022). Such advocacy led to historic

global instruments, such as the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Millennium Development Goals (2000), and more recently the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals(2015 onwards), which all recognise that education is an inalienable component of gender equality and women's empowerment (UNESCO, 2022; UNICEF, 2023; United Nations, 2015). Regardless of these forward looking frameworks, millions of girls and women, especially in low-income countries, still experience high rates of structural inequities in their access to and completion of basic education (UNICEF, 2023; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021; Urhibo & Orhero, 2023). Poverty, early and forced marriage, sexism and the lack of gender friendly learning environments, domestic workload and insecurity are among these barriers. UNICEF (2023) estimates that some 129 million girls are currently out of school, with the highest rates of out-of-school in sub Saharan Africa and South Asia.

This ongoing educational marginalisation also undermines women's rights to equality as it contributes to intergenerational cycles of poverty and disempowerment in communities and countries (World Bank, 2021; Williams et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2022). Zimbabwe is one of the few countries in sub-Saharan Africa to have a high national literacy rate, largely due to the sustained investments of the government in public education since independence in 1980 (Mupangwa, 2023; Nhuta & Mukuma, 2017). The Constitution of Zimbabwe, and government policies like the Education Amendment Act and the Zimbabwe National Gender Policy, have aimed to ensure equal access and enrolment of both genders in education and equal learning outcomes (Mupangwa, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). However, some communities still experience certain limitations with women's educational involvement, such as sociocultural norms, unpaid domestic work and economic difficulties (Mupangwa, 2023; Urhibo & Orhero, 2023; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021).

Women in urban areas face the challenges of being trapped in multiple layers of poverty and traditional gender roles that hinder them in accessing opportunities to receive equal benefit from education. The case study of the Chiwaridzo community in Bindura is a compelling one for a local-level study of the link between basic education and women's empowerment. Despite being located in an urban setting and thus being part of the national educational system, women in Chiwaridzo still face socio-cultural and economic barriers to their educational participation and empowerment outcomes (Mupangwa, 2023; Nhuta & Mukumba, 2017). Women in this community face difficulties due to being responsible for caring for others, having a poor financial status and a lack

of cultural support for women's education and its pursuit over careers. This reality points to a large gap between the progressive discourse associated with the national-level gender policy, and the at the community-level reality of women's lives (Maclean et al., 2012; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021; Urhibo & Orhero, 2023). There is strong empirical evidence from previous research that education is associated with better empowerment outcomes for women. Basic education helps women to delay marriage, gain more autonomy in their reproductive decisions, make more active contributions to household decision making, and access income generating activities, compared with those who have not completed basic education (Williams et al., 2022; World Bank, 2021; Nhuta & Mukuma, 2017). Studies also have found that education lowers fertility rates, enhances maternal and child health and reduces the vulnerability of women to claim their legal and civic rights (UNESCO, 2022; Kabeer, 2005; UNICEF, 2023). The study findings in the sub-Saharan African context support that education has a positive impact on increasing women's socio-agency and awareness of rights even in areas with limited formal employment (Urhibo & Orhero, 2023; Mupangwa, 2023; Williams et al., 2022). Yet study on the local dynamics of the connection between basic education and women's empowerment in urban Zimbabwe is still rather scarce. Existing studies are mostly national or regional based but limited studies on the linkage between the education and empowerment in the specific urban areas, such as Chiwaridzo, have been conducted by some researchers (Mupangwa, 2023; Nhuta & Mukuma, 2017; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021).

The question of why, for example, some women with similar educational backgrounds are able to use their education to build an economic enterprise and increase their social position, while others remain disempowered despite their level of education, has been left unanswered. This needs to be addressed through contextualised community-level investigation that goes beyond macro-level data to understand women lived experiences and the structural conditions that influence them in specific localities (Kabeer, 2005; Williams et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2022). The research highlights local evidence on the contribution of basic education to women's empowerment with reference to Chiwaridzo and Bindura. The results will guide teachers, development community and policy makers in developing better and context-specific approaches to women empowerment through education in urban Zimbabwe.

1.3Problem Statement

The importance of education as a key means of strengthening women's ability to take part in a meaningful way in economic, social and political life is well established worldwide. While there has been tremendous progress in providing access to learning for girls and women, there are significant structural inequalities that remain in place. According to UNICEF (2023), some 129 million girls are currently out of school globally, and a range of factors such as poverty, gender discrimination, early marriage, and deeply embedded social norms and practices which favour boys' education have been identified as main reasons for the exclusion of girls from school. The challenges highlight the pressing need for targeted and evidence-based interventions that tackle access to education, and that enhance the conditions under which education can be meaningful for women's empowerment.

The Government and its development partners in Zimbabwe have implemented a number of measures to improve access to education and the empowerment of women and girls. UNICEF has partnered with government agencies to create programs that boost learning outcomes, strengthen life skills and leadership abilities among disadvantaged youth, particularly young women (UNICEF, 2024). Furthermore, the Forum for African Women Educationalists in Zimbabwe (FAWEZI) has promoted campaigns to retain girls in school and provide them with skills for their economic and social participation (FAWEZI, 2025; Mupangwa, 2023). The efforts are an indication of the national level appreciation of the critical role of education in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

Despite the national-level initiatives, there is a key knowledge gap in locally relevant evidence on the extent of women's empowerment outcomes at the community level that can be attributed to basic education (Nhuta & Mukuma, 2017). In Chiwaridzo, Bindura, it is not known if and how improved access to basic education equates to economic capacity, social agency, greater participation in decision making, and capacity to access social or legal services. Lack of localised data also poses a serious knowledge gap that hinders the capacity of policy makers, community organisations and development practitioners to design and implement programmes that are sensitive to women's realities in Chiwaridzo (Mupangwa, 2023).

A very important dimension of this issue relates to the lack of equity in basic education outcomes of women in Chiwaridzo in terms of empowerment outcomes. Although some women with low levels of education have shown the ability to mobilise their learning towards small business activities and thereby enhancing the welfare of the household, some women with similar or even better education levels suffer from economic marginalisation and social disempowerment (Kabeer, 2005; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021). This variation indicates that education alone cannot ensure empowerment, and other factors like gender norms, household dynamics, access to credit and institutional support have complex influences on the relationship between education and empowerment (Mupangwa, 2023). This study aims to find out and explain how basic education affects empowerment of women in Chiwaridzo, Bindura and why some women can use basic education as an economic and social empowerment tool while others continue to encounter consistent problems when using the education tool.

1.4 Aim of the study

This study aims to investigate the role of basic education and its contribution to women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe.

1.5 Research Objectives

The following objectives guide this study:

I. To assess the current state of women's access to education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

II. To evaluate the extent to which basic education contributes to women's social, economic, and political participation in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

III. To propose strategies for strengthening the role of basic education in promoting women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

1.6 Research Questions

1.6.1 Primary Research Question

What role does basic education play in enhancing women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe?

Subsidiary Research Questions

I. What is the current state of women's access to education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura?

II. To what extent has basic education contributed to improving women's social, economic, and political participation in Chiwaridzo, Bindura?

III. What strategies can be implemented to strengthen the role of basic education in further promoting women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura?

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The study is geographically confined to Chiwaridzo suburb of Bindura, Zimbabwe and the particular population is limited to women living in the community. The research is limited to the study of the role of basic education in improving women empowerment with emphasis on its impact on women's social, economic and political participation. The study purposefully examines the education-empowerment nexus, leaving aside the influence of multiple intersecting factors such as culture, religion, government policy and economic conditions to provide a systematic and clear analytical examination of the central independent variable of education.

The study also restricts the sample to adult women aged 18-50 and with different levels of formality (from primary to secondary level) to allow for meaningful comparisons and data analysis of the relationship between levels of formal education and empowerment outcomes. The study excludes school going children, because it aims to describe what Chiwaridzo women live and think about the role of education in their lives.

The methodological approach for this study is a mixed method approach, which is in-depth interviews and focus group discussion that can yield rich and in-depth data. Consequently, the results of the study are specific to Chiwaridzo and cannot be extrapolated to other parts of Zimbabwe or the greater sub-Saharan Africa but they may provide some relevance and applicability to other urban communities in Zimbabwe and the rest of the country.

1.8 Justification of the Study

This study is important because it has the potential of both practical and theoretical implications in understanding and solving the existing educational participation and empowerment gap among women in Chiwaridzo, Bindura. Despite the positive progress in access to basic education, women's empowerment remains marginalised in their economic, social and political lives in many of the poor communities in the city (Mupangwa, 2023; Kabeer, 2005). This study seeks to make a specific contribution to this divide by looking at the local realities of the women in Chiwaridzo, to draw out locally relevant and important lessons that can help to close the gap and make education a true and transformative empowering tool.

In practice, the results of this research can be applied as a basis for intervention that is targeted to ensure that learning to read and write does not only result in literacy, but also in a tangible empowerment process as increasing abilities in decision making, economic independence, and community leadership (Williams et al., 2022). In particular, the study highlights the need for vocational training, entrepreneurship development and community awareness programmes to be included in women education curriculum. The integration would allow the work of women in Chiwaridzo to apply the knowledge they have gained in school to sustainable livelihoods, bridging the gap between formal education and empowerment in the real world. The research in this context brings novel and evidence-based solutions which are directly responsive to the socio-economic situation of the peri urban communities in Zimbabwe.

The study also has valuable policy implications and contributes positively to policy implementation. Its evidence can inform the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and local authorities in developing community-specific frameworks that can foster women's empowerment through education (UNESCO, 2022). For instance, research results can support policy efforts to keep girls in school, to address their low rates of marriage and to increase adult literacy initiatives. In addition, the research will provide information for creating gender responsive curricula and mentorship programs for women in leadership. The study thus directly contributes to Zimbabwe's efforts in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) especially SDG 4 on inclusive and quality education and SDG 5 on gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nations, 2015).

Theoretically, this study helps to cover the gaps in the current literature. Although education is widely recognised as a tool for empowering women, there is a paucity of research on this link in the localised community-based contexts of Chiwaridzo (Mupangwa, 2023; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021). The study is based on a specific community setting, thus enriching the theories on the relationship between education, socio-cultural and economic structure, and the empowerment of women. In addition, the study expands Kabeer's (2005) framework of achievements of resources by showing that structural/cultural constraints can hinder educational resources from leading to meaningful empowerment outcomes for women in urban Zimbabwe. The study thus contributes to the academic discourse by placing women empowerment in a complex community-based Zimbabwean context (Nhuta & Mukuma 2017).

To conclude, this study is important because it aims at identifying and critically analysing the factors that hinder attainment of empowerment outcomes of basic education in Chiwaridzo and recommendations that can be developed to make basic education a genuine instrument for transformative change in Chiwaridzo. It offers locally relevant answers that feed into practice, evidence-based inputs to policy and theoretical contributions that fill the void between what's on the ground and the causal link between education and women's empowerment.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Basic education – Basic education is the lowest level of formal schooling where people learn to read, write and count and gain life skills they need to be active citizens in their social, economic and civic lives. In this study, basic education is defined as primary, secondary education and adult literacy and numeracy programmes which are accessible to women in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

Women's Empowerment – Women's empowerment is defined as the process whereby women acquire capacity, confidence and power to make strategic decisions over their lives, access resources and engage in decision-making at the household, community and societal levels (Kabeer, 2005). For this study, the concept of empowerment is explored in three intertwined areas: economic participation, social agency, and decision-making power.

Access to Education – Accessibility to educational opportunities for women in basic education that enable them to participate and attend without physical, economic or social constraints.

Educational Attainment – Educational attainment refers to the highest grade level (from kindergarten through senior high school) completed by a person. The term in this study is used in the context of basic education that is being attained by the women participants in Chiwaridzo, Bindura and means primary, secondary or adult education.

Decision-Making Power – Decision-making power refers to a woman's capacity to influence and make decisions around household, financial, health, and reproductive, and community matters. It is an essential part of empowerment, and is the extent to which women have autonomy and control over their daily lives.

Economic Participation – Economic participation involves women's participation in income-generating activities, formal and informal employment, entrepreneurship and the management of financial resources. For this study, the focus is on the economic participation of the women as a function of their basic educational levels and what opportunities they have in the community of Chiwaridzo.

Social Agency – The ability of a woman to take action and express her ideas, to participate in social activities and community development. This includes involvement in civic societies, leadership and community-based collective action.

Gender Norms: Gender norms are the expectations, roles and behaviours that a society imposes on men and women as socially constructed. The entrenched gender norms in Chiwaridzo, Bindura are defined in this study as a major obstacle to girls' education and empowerment outputs which negatively affect their mobility, aspirations and involvement in public life (Urhibo & Orhero, 2023; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021).

1.10 Organisation of the Study

The present dissertation is divided into five chapters which have different roles in the overall research process.

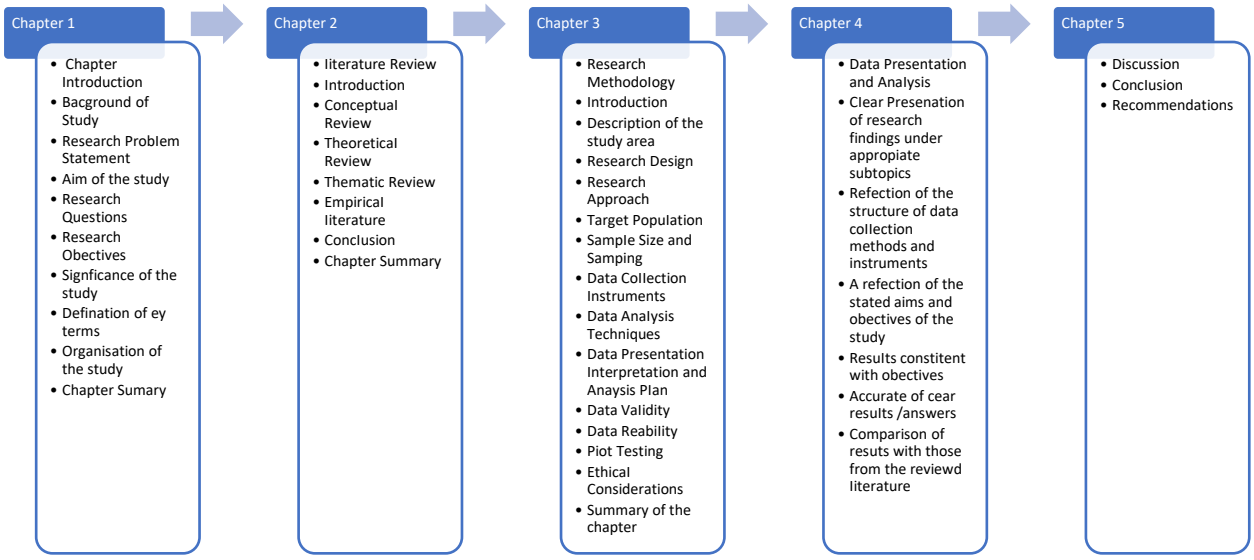
Chapter One introduces the study by presenting its background, problem statement, aim, objectives, and research questions. It also sets boundaries to the investigation, explains why it is important, explains the terms and gives a general structure of the investigation itself.

Chapter Two is a detailed literature review of basic education and women's empowerment. It reviews the theory and empirical research, pinpoints gaps and gaps in the current research and outlines the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings for the investigation. The fundamental intellectual underpinning for the research provided by the review is the education's impact on the social, economic and political empowerment of women.

Chapter Three details the research methodology used for the study; research design, study site, selection procedures, data collection tools, and data analysis and quality assurance are described.

The research findings in relation to the objectives and research questions are presented and analysed in Chapter Four, highlighting themes and patterns that shed light on the connection between basic education and women empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

The key findings, conclusions and recommendations for policy, practice and future research are summarized at the end of chapter Five.



1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has laid a foundation for the study by introducing the central research problem, which is basic education and its role in improving women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe. The background of the study positioned the study in the global, regional, and local discourses on gender, education, and empowerment, highlighting the presence of such barriers in many parts of the globe even as there was good progress in the policies of education. The problem statement clearly explained the problem this study is looking to address, specifically the lack of contextualised, community-level information regarding the relationship between education and empowerment in urban Zimbabwe. The aim, objectives and research questions were explicitly presented to give direction and focus to the investigation. In the delimitation of the study, the researcher set the boundaries of the study and in the justification, the researcher established the practical, policy and theoretical significance of the study. To clarify the concepts throughout the dissertation, key terms were defined. The elements outlined in this chapter are comprehensive and solid in providing the base for the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to systematically and critically review the existing scholarly literature on the role of basic education in improving women's empowerment. The review provides a theoretical, empirical, and conceptual framework for the study and places it in the context of the wider academic and policy debates about gender equality and education in developing countries. The chapter is organised in four main parts, a theoretical review that explores three main theoretical frameworks suitable for this study, followed by an empirical review organised with a funnel approach that takes the analysis from the global to the regional and local level, a conceptual review that explains the central constructs and their interrelationships and a research gap analysis that identifies what is not known and how this study can contribute to filling those gaps. These sections are combined to address what is currently known, where there are scholarly debates and why the evidence needed to be locally sourced from Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe is necessary and significant.

2.2 Theoretical Review

The three related theoretical frameworks used to understand and analyse the relationship between basic education and women's empowerment are Kabeer's Resources Agency Achievement Framework, Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory and the Gender and Development (GAD) Approach. All these theories offer a multi-level analysis and an analytical lens through which processes, mediators and results of education-based empowerment can be analysed in the socio-cultural context of Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

2.2.1 Kabeer's Resources Agency Achievement Framework

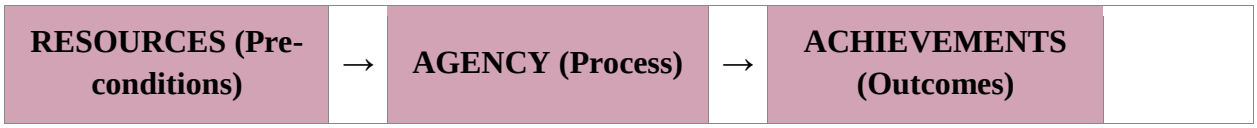
The Resources Agency Achievement (RAA) model developed by Naila Kabeer is one of the most commonly used theoretical frameworks in the analysis of women's empowerment. This is the first conceptualisation of empowerment, as a process that takes place over three interrelated dimensions of resources, agency, and achievements, as described by Kabeer (1999) and later by Costa et al.

(2023). Resources are pre-conditions of empowerment and are not only material like income, land, and education, but also human and social like knowledge, skills, and social networks. Agency is defined as the capacity to set goals and take action while achievements are the actual results of the exercise of agency, such as better livelihoods, decision-making power and social participation (Kabeer, 2005; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

In the context of this study, basic education serves as a resource that can help or hinder women's ability to act as agents. However, in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, women are confronted with multiple disadvantages related to poverty, household labour requirements and gender norms, in which education can be a key asset that unlocks socio-economic choices for women (Mupangwa, 2023; Nhuta & Mukuma 2017). But Kabeer (2005) warns that the role of resources in empowering learners is not deterministic, the conversion to structural and socio-cultural factors such as household power relations, community attitudes, and institutional responsiveness are crucial in helping to determine if education resources can be translated into meaningful agency and outcomes. This is especially relevant in Chiwaridzo where there is an absence of the consistent achievement of national-level educational gains at the community level that empowers women (Williams et al., 2022).

The RAA framework also recognises the complexity of empowerment, which is that success can be translated back into the process of acquiring resources and developing agency, thus establishing cycles of empowerment or disempowerment. The framework has been further elaborated by other scholars including Malhotra and Schuler (2005) and Costa et al. (2023) who added the community and societal levels of analysis to recognise women's empowerment as a relational and structural process rather than an individual one. Kabeer's framework offers a solid analytical basis for understanding the interaction among basic education, as a resource, and structural mediating factors to produce empowerment outcomes for women in Chiwaridzo for this study.

Figure 2.1: Kabeer's Resources–Agency–Achievement Framework Applied to Basic Education and Women's Empowerment



• Access to basic education • Financial assets • Social networks • Legal rights		• Decision-making capacity • Negotiation power • Freedom of movement • Critical consciousness		• Economic independence • Household authority • Community participation • Reduced gender inequality		← Feedback loop ←	

Figure 2.1: Adaptation of Kabeer's (1999, 2005)

Source: Adapted from Kabeer (1999); Costa et al. (2023).

The three pillars of Kabeer's framework are shown above to be in sequence. Basic education is seen as an important asset other than financial resources, legal rights and social networks as a gateway to empowerment. Women's acquisition of educational resources creates agency in the forms of increased decision making, negotiation and critical consciousness, which results in a range of achievements including economic independence, household authority and community participation. The feedback loop is an important element in this process because as women are able to achieve better results, they have more resources to use and gain more empowerment, thereby closing the circle. What this framework does however, warn is that any denial at the resource level, whether in the form of access to education or not, can stall the entire empowerment process and that this is a fundamental need for basic education.

2.2.2 Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory

Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory provides an additional perspective on how people and communities can become empowered, become critical, and expand their ability to shape the institutions that shape their lives (Zimmerman, 1995; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Zimmerman (2000) defines empowerment as a process that unfolds at three interrelated levels, namely individual, organisational and community, and is dynamic and embedded in the context. The multi-level architecture is especially useful for a study set in a certain urban community like Chiwaridzo, Bindura where individual experiences of learning are not separated from the norms, institutional capacities and wider social structures of the community.

On an individual basis, education builds self-efficacy, critical consciousness and assertiveness the psychological aspects of empowerment that help women identify, question, and advocate for

women's rights against gender inequalities in households and communities (Zimmerman, 1995; Hossain & Islam, 2024). Access to basic education helps women to express their wants, engage in household financial decision making and defy societal pressures that restrict their living (Kabeer, 1999; Nhuta & Mukuma, 2017). This is reflected in research carried out in sub-Saharan Africa which indicates that women with low levels of education are more likely to feel confident and engaged in decision making (Williams et al., 2022; Anfaara et al. 2024).

Institutions such as schools, women's cooperatives, non-governmental organisations and faith based organisations at the organisational level either empower or constrain individual empowerment as highlighted by Zimmerman's theory (Narayan, 2005; Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2006). Organisational platforms like community based women's groups and education programs facilitated by local NGOs in Chiwaridzo are essential enabling contexts that can contribute towards the individual's journey of learning towards collective empowerment. Empowerment at the community level involves women's ability to collectively advocate, participate in governance and influence change in unwritten cultural norms that limit women's participation (Cornwall & Edwards, 2014; Stromquist, 2015). Zimmerman's approach thus suggests that women empowerment strategies through education need to take into account individual confidence, organisational support, and community transformation of norms.

Figure 2.2: Zimmerman's Multi-Level Empowerment Theory Applied to Women's Education in Chiwaridzo, Bindura

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL	ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL	COMMUNITY LEVEL
• Self-efficacy & confidence • Critical consciousness • Assertiveness in decisions • Personal goal-setting	• Women's groups & cooperatives • School & church networks • Leadership training programs • NGO-supported initiatives	• Collective advocacy • Policy influence • Community health & development • Reduced gender-based norms
Education builds knowledge, self-worth, and negotiation ability	Education links women to empowering structures and institutions	Education enables women to reshape norms and contribute to development

Figure 2.2: Multi-level application of Zimmerman's (1995, 2000)

Source: Adapted from Zimmerman (1995); Perkins & Zimmerman (1995).

The three-level model of Zimmerman is applied in Chiwaridzo education empowerment relationship as shown in figure 2.2. On the personal level, education creates the confidence and skills of empowerment psychological and cognitive along with critical thinking and negotiation capabilities. Organisations link people to empowering structures and resources, at the organisational level, education institutions and women's networks. A trained, empowered woman can change the collective mindset at the community level and help communities to question entrenched gender norms. The bottom line of the diagram makes it clear that the education role is made explicit at every level, and that empowerment is a process that is social and thus needs enabling environments at multiple scales.

2.2.3 Gender and Development (GAD) Approach

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach was born as a response to the Women in Development (WID) approach that mainly worked on bringing women into the development process, while ignoring the structural causes and processes that had created gender inequalities (Rathgeber, 1990; March et al., 1999). The GAD approach does not treat women as a group, but sees gender as a social relation, as it is power, cultural norms and institutional structures that are responsible for the inequalities between women and men (Moser, 1993; Connell, 2014). But for this study the change perspective of GAD's approach to development is significant the development itself is not just meant to make women's lives better, but to change the relations between men and women that limit their freedoms.

In the GAD context, education is considered as a strategic point for Gender Transformation. Basic education that is planned and implemented with a gender transformative approach provides women with the skills of literacy, critical consciousness and rights awareness to challenge and shift gender inequities (Unterhalter, 2019; Stromquist, 2015). GAD scholars, however, view education not as a gender free arena that automatically improves the situation of women but as a product of gender norms and power dynamics that are reflected in the content, delivery and social context of education (Moser, 1993; Fredman, 2016). The curricula that reinforce stereotypical gender roles, school environments that hinder girls from participating, and school organisation that does not

allow for the accommodation of women's domestic responsibilities can perpetuate inequality rather than challenge it.

GAD approach is of special relevance in this context because it would help to shed more light on what women's experiences are like in Chiwaridzo, Bindura where the impact of socio-cultural norms is still being felt in terms of educational access and outcomes of empowerment are concerned. Studies in similar contexts in Zimbabwe and other sub-Saharan countries have shown that, although there are policy provisions for gender equity in education, the actual experiences of women are shaped by patriarchal household dynamics, resistance from the community, and institutional responsiveness (Mupangwa, 2023; Muchabveyo et al., 2025; Radiowala & Molwane, 2021). The GAD framework is therefore an important analytical tool to question not just access to education for women, but potential for transformative change in the gender relations that impact their lives.

Figure 2.3: Gender and Development (GAD) Transformative Pathway from Unequal Gender Relations to Transformed Gender Relations through Basic Education

Unequal Gender Relations	→	**Basic Education Access for Women**	→	**Critical Awareness & Skills**	→	**Challenge of Patriarchal Norms**	→	**Transformed Gender Relations**
Women confined to domestic roles; limited voice	→	Education as entry point: literacy, numeracy, life skills	→	Women develop confidence, negotiation, civic knowledge	→	Women actively question & reshape cultural expectations	→	Equitable households, communities, and institutions

Figure 2.3: The GAD transformative pathway

Source: Adapted from Moser (1993); Unterhalter (2019); Stromquist (2015).

The GAD approach is mapped in figure 2.3. It starts with unequal gender relations, women are excluded from the public sphere and are restricted to the private sphere. Access to basic education is the crucial intervention point when women are provided with literacy, numeracy and life skills.

As women become critical and gain skills, they become equipped to question the norms of patriarchy in their homes and communities. This incremental challenge, supported by positive community attitudes and supportive policy, ultimately leads to changed gender relations that are marked by equal participation in households, communities and institutions. This model highlights the need to not only focus on the access of women to education in Chiwaridzo, but on whether that education is actually transformative, as well as which structural conditions mediate the degree to which the education is transformative.

Together these three theories Kabeer's RAA model, Zimmerman's multi-level Empowerment Theory and GAD approach offer a complete and complementary basis for this study. Kabeer's framework highlights the processes by which education resources affect agency and achievement, while Zimmerman's theory focuses on agency and achievement at the individual, organisational and community levels and the GAD approach maintains that agency and achievement remain at the heart of the analysis but is not the outcome of education, rather it is the result of structural gender relations shaped by education. They allows a contextual analysis to be undertaken of the role of basic education in women empowerment or its limitation in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

2.3 Empirical Review

The empirical review shows the existing research evidence on the importance of basic education for the empowerment of women. The evidence presented is presented in a funnel format, from the general, to the specific and back to the general, for instance from global to regional African evidence, and then to the local evidence from Zimbabwe and the community-specific evidence. This makes it possible to achieve progressive contextualisation of global knowledge in the sociocultural and economic context of Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe. The review is organised in such a way as to address the three research objectives of the study which include: Assessing Women's access to and participation in basic education; The impact of basic education on women's social, economic and political participation; Strategies for enhancing the role of basic education in the empowerment of women.

Figure 2.4: Funnel Approach to the Empirical Literature Review

GLOBAL STUDIES	Broad international evidence — Asia, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa; large-scale datasets (UNESCO, World Bank, UNICEF)
REGIONAL STUDIES	African context — East, West & Southern Africa; comparative national studies
LOCAL / NATIONAL	Zimbabwe-specific evidence — national policy, Bindura, Mashonaland Central research
COMMUNITY-LEVEL	Chiwaridzo-specific insights — primary data, lived experiences

Figure 2.4: The funnel approach to the empirical review, moving from global to community-level evidence.

2.3.1 Objective One: Women's Access to and Participation in Basic Education

Global Evidence

At the global level, there is ample evidence of enduring and overlapping obstacles that impede the access to and attainment of basic education for women and girls. Women make up 2/3 of the global 773 million adults who are illiterate, most of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UNESCO, 2022). This is reflected in the World Bank (2021) which finds that although the gender gap in primary school enrolment is declining globally, enrolment and learning outcomes remain significantly different across gender lines, especially in lower and middle-income countries. Economics is one of the most important obstacles to girls' education worldwide. UNICEF (2023) estimates that there are 129 million girls currently out of school, with one of the key drivers identified as poverty, with households with financial constraints focusing their education budgets on boys' education.

Socio-cultural norms have been found to be a significant factor in the pursuit of girls' education in research efforts around the world, in addition to financial constraints. Heath and Jayachandran (2017) using large-scale evidence from South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, show that the returns to girls' education, as perceived by adolescents and their parents, is significantly lowered by patriarchal norms, especially those linking the future of girls to marriage and domestic work. Likewise, Kaffenberger and Pritchett (2021) state in their important international review that the

issue of educational exclusion is not only access but also quality and relevance, as even girls who attend school often learn little that is useful in their everyday lives. This vision of quality as part of access is a major departure from the existing paradigm of world education research.

Intersectionality has also come to the fore as a conceptual perspective in emerging global literature on educational exclusion. Intersectionality is also an emerging concept in global scholarship that has foregrounded as a way of understanding educational exclusion. There are several other disadvantages that rural women face beyond their disadvantageous gender status, poverty, geographic isolation, disability and ethnicity are all intersecting disadvantages that rural women experience, and which may not be captured by gender-disaggregated statistics (Hossain and Islam, 2024). Such an inter-sectional approach is relevant to the study of communities, as interventions need to be designed for the set of disadvantageal situations faced by women in particular contexts.

Regional Evidence

In the African regional context, evidence reflects, and highlights, global trends and adds culturally specific aspects. A comparative study of the education attainment gap between men and women across the member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) by Radiowala and Molwane (2021) attribute the gender education gap to a unique mix of factors such as poverty, early marriage, lack of paid work and inadequate infrastructure, all of which negatively affect girls and women in rural areas of the region. Girls in rural Southern Africa are three times more likely than boys to drop out of secondary school, and the main reason they are dropping out is due to domestic responsibilities, concludes the study.

Anfaara et al. (2024) report from West Africa that girls' access to school is systematically and routinely denied to them, even as they are pushed into domestic or agricultural work, with lack of challenge from community leaders and parents. Most crucially, their research reveals that although school fees have been eliminated in some countries, indirect costs, such as uniform, stationery and transport, still exclude economically poor girls. This result is consistent with the outcomes of Arif et al. (2025) in a cross-country study of financial incentives for school attendance in Africa, which showed that while financial incentives such as conditional cash transfers benefit school enrolment, they are not always effective in ensuring school completion, especially in the absence of socio-cultural norms.

The study carried out specifically in East Africa by Msuya (2017) shows that household workload pressures are a significant determinant of women's education. Women and girls in rural Tanzania and Uganda spend on average 4-6 hours daily, before and after school, in unpaid domestic work which limits study time, adds to fatigue and can lead to higher dropout rates. The parallels with similar situations in sub-Saharan Africa are useful in the understanding of the dynamics in the peri-urban communities of Chiwaridzo, Zimbabwe.

Local / National Evidence (Zimbabwe)

The education system in Zimbabwe is determined by the high literacy rate in the country, which stands among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, due in great part to the strong investment made by the government in education since independence (Nhuta & Mukumu, 2017). In fact, as Mupangwa (2023) shows through a detailed analysis of gender differences in educational outcomes within urban communities in Zimbabwe, country-level data do not reflect intra-country differences. Socio-cultural norms, economic precarity and unequal distribution of domestic labour continue to pose challenges for women in peri-urban and marginalised communities, including those residing in Bindura's residential suburbs, in accessing education.

At the local level, Muchabveyo et al. (2025) also present evidence on the ongoing obstacles experienced by girls in completing their secondary school education due to early marriage in Zimbabwe's provincial towns, specifically. In their study, across communities similar to Chiwaridzo, girls who marry before age 18 are far more likely to not return to formal school, and that re-entry policies are poorly implemented at the community level. In Zimbabwean communities that have limited resources, Dube (2015) also concludes that families tend to invest more in educating men than women because they believe that education offers greater economic returns to boys, and because there are fewer role models that are visibly educated women in leadership or professional positions, the gender norm holds.

These locally specific findings all highlight the fact that although Zimbabwe's national education system affords women a relatively supportive environment, at the community level, socio-cultural factors still cause marked differences in girls' access to and attainment in basic education. The findings indicate a need for contextually appropriate research in the community, which looks into

the functioning of these dynamics within specific localities, for instance, in Chiwaridzo and Bindura which this study directly addresses.

2.3.2 Objective Two: Influence of Basic Education on Women's Social, Economic, and Political Participation

Global Evidence

The idea that basic education improves women's agency in social, economic, and political spheres is supported by global evidence. Using data from 48 sub-Saharan African countries, Williams et al. (2022) show that women who have completed the primary and secondary school education are significantly more likely to be involved in a household's decision-making processes, to have access to formal banking services and mobile money services, and to participate in community governance structures than women with no formal education. The results are consistent with the theoretical insights of the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2005) and Kabeer's RAA framework which sees education as a basic resource that increases women's capabilities and agency.

Women's education, on average, provides a 25 per cent return to earnings for every year of schooling built, according to the World Bank (2021), a rate that is higher than that of males in many developing country settings. Heath and Jayachandran (2017) provide a comprehensive global review that shows that educating women leads to lower fertility rates, improved maternal and child health, and more resources available for children's education and nutrition, all of which have a positive impact on children's development and are passed down to subsequent generations. These conclusions are supported by the work of Unterhalter (2019) and Fredman (2016), who from a capabilities approach, conclude that education broadens women's freedoms in ways that transcend the economic benefits of working for themselves and their families, and that impact their social participation, political voice and ability to challenge discriminatory practices.

In a quantitative study in Ghana, Uganda, and Malawi, Seidu et al. (2020) reported higher likelihood of women with basic education compared to uneducated women to be involved in household decisions on major purchases, health care, and their children's education by 30 to 45 percent, after controlling for wealth, household size, and urban-rural location. But Frempong and Stadelmann (2024), based on an econometric examination of multi-country data, have provided a

much-needed counterpoint to show that the link between education and empowerment is also much more mediated by the attitudes of men and the power dynamics in the household, indicating that the empowering effects of education are not inevitable, but conditionally dependent.

Regional Evidence

There is evidence that education and social and economic involvement are positively correlated in the African region, however, there are structural and normative barriers that inhibit this correlation. In a study carried out in rural Ghana, Anfaara et al. (2024) find that women with at least primary school education are significantly more likely to be involved in market based economic activities, in a savings group, and community development committees than uneducated women. They find financial literacy and increased self-confidence as the two intermediate processes that link education and economic participation.

Muhanguzi (2019), based on qualitative data from Uganda, shows that basic education provides women with communication and knowledge about local government that are less studied in quantitative research and are crucial for women's political empowerment. Likewise, Nyaberi (2020) reports that educated women in rural Kenya are more likely to be involved in community health committees, school boards and other community development committees all of which have a role in influencing community governance and development outcomes. These results indicate that the empowerment impact of education is not just at the household but also meaningful community level participation.

However, there are also some important constraints and interventions that emerge from the regional research. In a cross-national study in West Africa, Urhibo and Orhero (2023) hint that basic education alone does not lead to economic participation in areas where there is little formal employment and gender-discriminatory labour market practices. Their study highlights instances where women's educational achievements are not translated into economic potential due to structural factors such as a lack of capital, transport, and discriminatory social norms. This critique is particularly relevant to the Chiwaridzo context, where women's education can face similar constraints as a result of the low levels of formal employment and high levels of urban poverty.

Local / National Evidence (Zimbabwe)

The effects of basic education on women's participation in Zimbabwe are mixed and sometimes clear. Women with secondary school education are significantly more likely to be involved in the decision-making of their households, in other informal economic activities like small scale trading, or in community savings groups than women with only primary or no education, according to Nhuta and Mukuma (2017) in their study of women in urban communities in Zimbabwe. The overall findings are consistent with the main argument of the thesis that basic education provides increased agency and economic participation for women, even in contexts with limited formal employment opportunities.

Yet Mupangwa (2023) reveals, in many urban Zimbabwean communities, educated women still suffer from substantial limitations in their role in economic and social life, as many of them continue to be excluded from the labour force, and in the allocation of household work, because gendered norms attribute primary responsibility for domestic work to women regardless of their levels of education. This implies that in Zimbabwe's context, empowerment is not only a function of education but is also shaped by a number of structural and socio-cultural conversion factors as suggested by Kabeer (2005) in her theoretical work. The findings of Muchabveyo et al. (2025) in their study of peri-urban Zimbabwean communities confirm this, as they found that educated women lacking economic opportunities or family support may not have access to the agency they have acquired through their education, hence the need for additional structural interventions.

2.3.3 Objective Three: Strategies for Strengthening the Role of Basic Education in Promoting Women's Empowerment

Global Evidence

In the last two decades, there has been tremendous growth in research and literature on how to enhance the educational empowerment of women, driven by a general understanding that access to education is not enough to lead to lasting empowerment. The central difficulty facing many developing nations, as Kaffenberger and Pritchett (2021) make a convincing case, is not enrolment, but meaningful learning acquiring literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and life skills that are transferable to the outside world. Their global review reveals that boosting enrolments can have little impact on enhancing women's capabilities or agency if the quality of education is neglected.

International experiences show that financial incentive programmes have a proven and effective impact on the enrolment of girls. In a systematic review of conditional cash transfer and scholarship programmes in Africa, Asia and Latin America, Arif et al. (2025) report that these interventions have a strong impact on gender gaps in enrolment, on average driving up increases by 12 to 18 percentage points, especially through targeting payments to mothers or girls rather than male household heads. The review does, however, highlight that incentives can be effective in boosting completion and quality only when supported by other interventions to tackle socio-cultural barriers. In the same way, the authors of Hahn et al. (2017) report that the effects of school fee abolition policies in Sub-Saharan Africa were notable, and though they led to important increases in enrolment, they also often caused problems with school quality due to overcrowding and lack of resources.

Gender transformative teaching is a growing paradigm that makes sure that education is not just a tool for empowerment, but a positive part of it. S. Stromquist (2015) suggests that critical consciousness, rights awareness, and gender norms that are embedded in curricula can be powerful agents of change in individual attitudes and community gender norms. UNESCO (2022) conducted a global review of approaches that involve teachers in gender-responsive education and determined that teachers who had been trained in gender-sensitive teaching had measurably better outcomes for girls such as higher holding rates, better learning outcomes and higher self-reported confidence. Klugman et al. (2015) further show that adding life skills, financial literacy and leadership training to the school curricula of basic education can substantially improve the agency and economic participation of women after school.

Regional Evidence

In Africa the community involvement has become a key factor in supporting educational enhancement of girls in the region. In the context of West Africa and East Africa, Arif et al. (2025) report that instructional involvement of fathers, community and religious leaders has significantly enhanced enrolment and retention of girls in school. Notably, their research reveals that involving men in the community is especially effective when it comes to changing the social-cultural norms that underlie early marriage and educational dropouts among girls. This is in keeping with the findings of Tawana and Higgs (2021) in a study of community awareness campaigns in Southern

Africa, which explicitly focus on changing gender norms, leading to more lasting improvements in girls' educational outcomes.

Another key strategy at a regional level is flexible and alternative education pathways. In a review of the accelerated learning and alternative education programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, Evans and Yuan (2019) conclude that these programmes allow women and girls who have left formal learning to return to school in a learning environment and at a pace that suits their domestic duties. Married women and mothers who cannot attend normal school as a day student have been the key target group for formation centres, adult literacy programmes and evening school provision, which have proved effective (Evans et al., 2023). But Evans and Yuan (2019) highlight that these programmes are frequently poorly resourced and geographically targeted to urban areas, and dependent on short-term donor money to sustain their operations.

Local / National Evidence (Zimbabwe)

The policy environment at the national level is generally supportive of women's education, with the policy on gender-based education and adult literacy programmes, as well as SDG 4 and SDG 5 targets, in place (UNICEF, 2024; United Nations, 2015). FAWEZI (2025) and UNICEF's RISE programme are key national initiatives that look at the intersection of education with life skills and economic empowerment for adolescent girls and young women in Zimbabwe. Dube (2015) and Nhuta and Mukuma (2017) report that such interventions have helped to improve the completion rates in communities where they have been introduced.

Muchabveyo et al. (2025), however, point to a disconnect between nation policy intent and community-level action, especially in small urban and peri-urban communities. They found that policy implementation with regard to early marriage and the accompanying re-entry and adult education programmes is variable at the community level, due to the weak administrative capacity and the community's prevailing norms. In a similar vein, Mupangwa (2023) also posits that national education policies do not have much impact on the actual experiences of women in marginalised communities, like Chiwaridzo, when there is a lack of community-level advocacy and multi-sectoral coordination. These findings highlight the need for community-appropriate and locally-informed approaches that engage the gap between policy intent and local practice, a key theme of this study.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the three theories that were reviewed and the empirical findings all put together into a single analytical framework that will be used to guide the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data from Chiwaridzo, Bindura. The framework draws on Kabeer's RAA model (1999, 2005), multi-level Empowerment Theory by Zimmerman (1995, 2000) and the Gender and Development approach (Moser, 1993; Unterhalter, 2019) and is guided by the empirical literature on the factors that influence the extent to which basic education translates into meaningful empowerment outcomes for women.

The central construct of the framework is basic education, from primary to secondary education, adult literacy programmes and life skills education is the independent variable in this study and the women's empowerment is the dependent variable. The link between education and empowerment is not seen as direct and automatic, however, as both theory and empirical research suggest. Instead, it is influenced by a cluster of structural and socio-cultural factors that either promote or hinder transformation of educational resources into empowerment results, such as gender norms, poverty within the household, institutional support, and attitudes of the community (Kabeer, 2005; Frempong & Stadelmann, 2024; Urhibo & Orhero, 2023).

The dependent variable is defined in terms of women's empowerment along three interlinked dimensions of economic participation (income generation, entrepreneurship and financial independence), social agency (decision making power, freedom of movement and community participation) and political voice (local governance participation and community leadership). It is recognised that the outcomes of empowerment improving livelihoods, equitable participation and reducing gender inequality are important for achieving the broader goals of sustainable development and SDG 4 and SDG 5 alignment (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2022).

Importantly, the framework includes a feedback loop, in keeping with Kabeer's (2005) model, in which women's empowerment gains give them the means to access additional resources such as further education, economic assets and social networks, and thus to empower themselves further, which we refer to as cycles of empowerment. In contrast, however, where the factors that mediate between education resources and agency and achievements are absent, disempowerment cycles can continue to take place, and this has been reported in the local Zimbabwean literature by Mupangwa (2023) and Muchabveyo et al. (2025). The framework thus allows the research to

explore the extent to which basic education empowers women in Chiwaridzo, and when, how and how much.

Figure 2.5: Conceptual Framework Basic Education and Women's Empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura

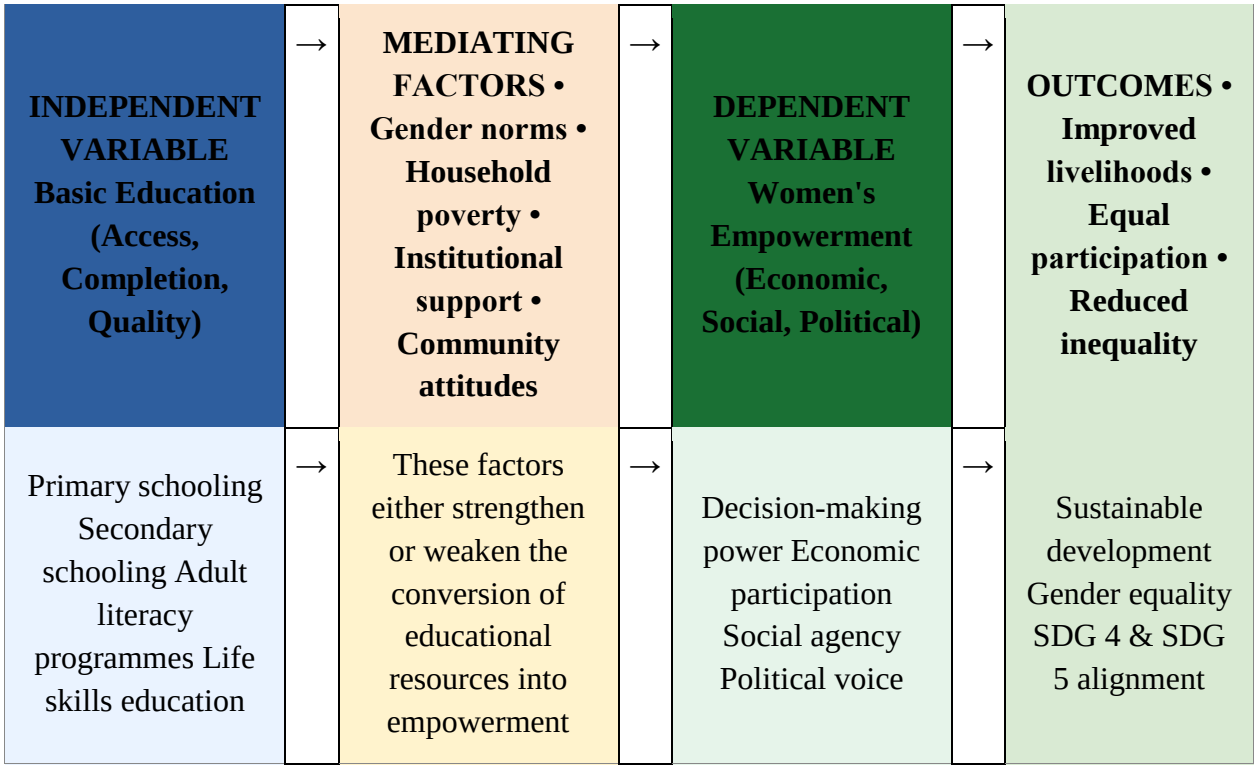


Figure 2.5: Conceptual framework

Source: Author's own construction, adapted from Kabeer (1999, 2005); Zimmerman (1995); Moser (1993); Unterhalter (2019).

The conceptual framework in figure 2.5 places basic education as the entry into the empowerment process. Independent variable basic education covers all types of formal and non-formal education that women have access to in Chiwaridzo starting at the primary and secondary levels and also adult education and life skills programmes. The mediating column reflects the structural and socio-cultural determinants which influence the relationship of education to empowerment gender norms, household poverty, institutional support, and community attitudes. They can act as enablers of empowerment by providing women with empowerment-enabling environments, as well as be barriers to empowerment by preventing the transformation of women's education into empowerment-enabling action.

Women's empowerment is disaggregated into three key dimensions, based on Kabeer (2005) and Stromquist (2015) who conceptualised empowerment as multidimensional in terms of women's decision-making power, economic participation, social agency and political voice. The outcomes column reflects the developmental impacts of empowerment such as better livelihoods, equal access to community and public life, and a decrease in gender-based inequalities outcomes that are linked to Zimbabwe's SDG 4 and SDG 5 commitments (United Nations, 2015). This framework offers the analytical structure for the research questions in this study and will inform the design of the qualitative data collection instruments described in Chapter Three.

2.5 Research Gap

The study's literature review identified some important gaps in theoretical and empirical research related to the role of basic education in improving women's empowerment. The gaps altogether justify the need for the present study and outline the particular research questions, objectives and approaches of the study.

Geographical Gap: Under-representation of Peri-Urban Zimbabwean Contexts

One common theme for all the studies considered is the tendency for existing work to focus on urban centres or extreme rural areas, leaving little research focused in peri-urban and smaller urban communities like Chiwaridzo or Bindura. Although the works of Mupangwa (2023) and Muchabveyo et al. (2025) offer valuable evidence for Zimbabwe, they are few and do not focus specifically on the socio-cultural and economic dynamics of smaller provincial urban communities. Global/regional studies, such as those of Heath and Jayachandran (2017), Anfaara et al. (2024) and Williams et al. (2022) do offer important baseline evidence but lack adequate local context to shed light on the local mechanisms by which education impacts on empowerment outcomes like those in Chiwaridzo. This geographical divide results in a lack of evidence-based local data for policymakers and practitioners in Zimbabwe's provincial urban communities for them to draw on during policy and practice development.

Methodological Gap: Predominance of Quantitative and National-Level Studies

Empirical studies are overwhelmingly quantitative and large scale, offering valuable statistical relationships between education and empowerment, but with limited capacity to reflect on the complex processes, lived experiences and contextual dynamics that shape the link between education and empowerment at the community level (Scheiwiller et al, 2024; Unterhalter, 2019).

Qualitative studies which give richer insights into women's experiences in relation to their education and empowerment are comparatively scarce, especially in the Zimbabwean context. This methodological void has created a pool of knowledge which is statistically dense, but experientially sparse, with important and largely unanswered questions regarding mechanisms, processes and lived experiences of education-based empowerment. The qualitative method used in this study directly tackles this gap by giving voice and experience to women of Chiwaridzo.

Thematic Gap: Mechanisms Linking Education to Empowerment

The literature is clear of a link between education and empowerment, but little is proposed and documented on how that link works. The connection between education and empowerment outcomes is a complex one that is not automatic, as Frempong and Stadelmann (2024) and Urhibo and Orhero (2023) illustrate, and depends on a web of structural, normative and institutional forces. However, there is a lack of systematic and empirical research on how these intervening processes translate to empowerment in specific community settings, and few studies explain why some women who are educated are able to realise meaningful empowerment, while other women who have similar educational levels do not. This study is a specific study of these mechanisms in the context of Chiwaridzo, and contributes to increased understanding of the relationship between education and empowerment.

Policy-Practice Gap: Disconnect between National Frameworks and Community Realities

The fourth critical gap is between the relatively progressive national policy and gender equality in educational levels and lived experience of women in marginalised communities. As reported by Muchabveyo et al. (2025) and Dube (2015), national policies that call for gender parity in education, banning child marriages and adult education are poorly implemented at the community level, due to weak administrative capabilities, resistance to norms and weak monitoring. This policy-practice gap has not been systematically explored in the context of Chiwaridzo, Bindura, and leaves an important question unanswered why do many women continue to be disempowered in a community where the national educational provisions are available? This study addresses this question in an empirical way, and offers evidence that can be used for better implementation of policies at a community level and design of the programs.

Longitudinal Gap: Limited Evidence on Long-Term Empowerment Outcomes

A fifth gap is the absence of longitudinal evidence of the enduring effect of education on women's empowerment. The vast majority of the existing studies reviewed in this chapter are cross-sectional, providing moments in time of the education-empowerment relationship. This design is not able to measure the durability of empowerment gaps induced by schooling, whether they grow when girls' schooling grows or whether they resurface when structural obstacles persist (Evans & Yuan, 2019; Kaffenberger & Pritchett, 2021). This study is cross-sectional in nature but it is recognised that this is a limitation and is a call for future longitudinal studies on the empowerment trajectory for educated women in communities like Chiwaridzo over time.

2.6 Chapter Summary

The theoretical, empirical and conceptual bases of basic education and women empowerment study in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe established in this chapter. A theoretical review was conducted of three complementary frameworks: Kabeer's Resource Agency Achievement model, Zimmerman's multi-level Empowerment Theory and the Gender and Development approach for an integrated analysis of the study. A diagram was provided to illustrate each theory and it was explained in relation to the particular research context. Based on the funnel approach from the global to regional and local levels, the empirical review yielded evidence of women's access to education, the impact of education on women's social and economic engagement, and how to enhance the empowering role of education, thus highlighting both the resilience of the education empowerment relationship and the key factors that mediate it. The conceptual framework combined these theoretical and empirical findings and incorporated these into an original analytical model that provides direction for the data collection and analysis. Lastly, the research gap analysis yielded five gaps: geographical, methodological, thematic, policy-practice, and longitudinal, all of which justify this study and frame its contribution to knowledge. Chapter Three will explain the methodology for the research, namely the design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis that will address the aforementioned gaps.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research methodology used to analyse the role of basic education in improving women empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe is described in this chapter. It is presented in a systematic and coherent framework and guides the entire process of the inquiry from the research paradigm, to the research design, to the research approach, to the target population, to the sample size and sampling techniques, to the data collection instruments, data analysis procedures, validity, reliability, pilot testing, and ethical considerations. The methodology was carefully developed to meet the criteria of reliability, validity, and ethical soundness of the study, which would provide a holistic structure to the study to accomplish the research objectives and questions. Creswell and Creswell (2018) believe that a well-explained methodology is suitable for providing credible research results, transferable to other settings, and applicable to practice and policy.

The methodology adopted was determined by the nature of the problem that required a quantitative assessment of the problem to determine the pattern of the relationship between educational attainment and women's empowerment, and a qualitative exploration of the lived experiences and contexts of women in Chiwaridzo. The techniques employed in this research are fully described in this chapter so that the reader can appreciate the limitations of and the findings from the research.

3.2 Study Area Description

This study was carried out in a high density residential suburb of Chiwaridzo which is found in Bindura Town, the provincial capital of Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. Bindura is located some 89 km north-east of Harare with a developed and developing land area of 1,950 ha (Bindura Municipality, 2023). The town is strategically located in Region 2B with black and red soils, which has potential for extensive and intensive agriculture and its economy is based on mining, commerce and agriculture (Bindura Municipality, 2023).

The main high density suburb of Bindura, with a high concentration of low to medium income households is Chiwaridzo. The suburb has a wide range of working class families, small business owners and informal workers. Chiwaridzo is like many high-density suburbs of the provincial towns in Zimbabwe and faces socio-economic problems such as high unemployment rates, poor access to good quality social services, and the continued presence of gender inequalities. Women living in the suburb are under-represented in the formal sector and are also likely to be tasked with primary responsibility of caring for the household, thus restricting their access to schooling and employment opportunities (Mupangwa, 2023).

There are multiple primary and secondary schools in/around the Chiwaridzo suburb, and the Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), one of two universities in Bindura Town provides access to basic education. The suburb also has a polyclinic, offering the community with basic health services. In spite of these facilities, women's educational outcomes are still limited due to socio-cultural norms, early marriages, poverty, and gender-based discrimination (Muchabveyo, Chigona and Mutswanga, 2025; Tawana and Higgs, 2021). This study was conducted on women between the age of 18 years and 50 years who were dwellers of Chiwaridzo during the time of study.

Figure 3.1: Map of Zimbabwe Showing Location of Mashonaland Central Province

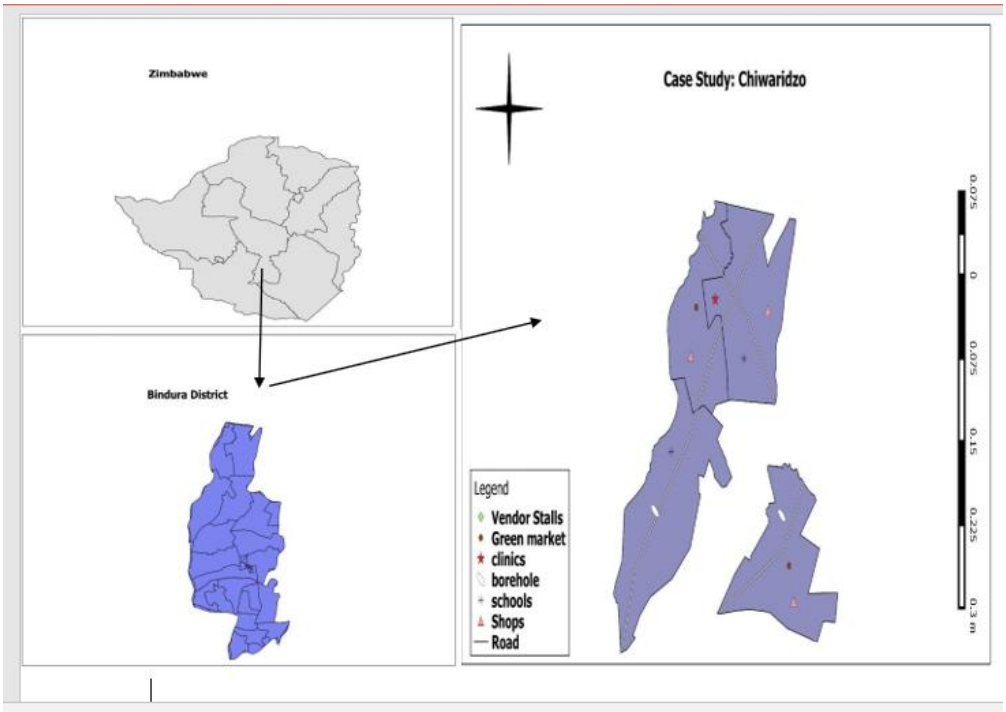


Figure 3.2: Map of Bindura Town Showing Chiwaridzo Study Area

Bindura Town as shown in figure 3.2 above showed the Chiwaridzo suburb as the main study site. The map is a spatial representation of Chiwaridzo in relation to the surrounding Bindura urban area, highlighting the location of major facilities like the Chiwaridzo Polyclinic, the shopping centre and nearby education facilities. Chiwaridzo is located about 4 kilometres from the town centre of Bindura and is served by main roads which link it with other parts of Mashonaland Central Province. Situated in a provincial capital, the suburb has a relative advantage over rural areas in terms of access to government services, access to education and employment opportunities for its residents (Gumbo, Chingombe and Makoni, 2021), however there are still significant socio-economic inequalities, especially for women.

3.3 Research Paradigm

Philosophically this study is based on the pragmatist paradigm, which acknowledges that both quantitative and qualitative methods can provide complementary information on complex social phenomena (Morgan, 2007). In this research, which seeks to provide practical knowledge, actionable policy recommendations, and a pragmatic approach is well-suited. Pragmatism can be considered as a way to avoid the epistemological conflict between positivism and interpretivism;

instead, the method chosen should be the most suitable one for the research questions involved (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010). As a methodology in the study of women empowerment, the pragmatist approach helps the researcher to document the statistical patterns of educational attainment and women's empowerment outcomes, as well as the subjective meaning given by women in Chiwaridzo to their education. It is of utmost importance that this dual focus is applied in a study area that is underpinned by gender, class and geographical inequalities (Hossain and Islam, 2024).

3.4 Research Design

The research design used in this study was a Cross Sectional research design that involves the collection of data from a population at one particular time. The cross sectional design was used due to the fact that the associations between variables (in this study, basic educational attainment and indicators of women's empowerment) can be examined within a specific community at a specific time point (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The cross sectional design has been used broadly in women empowerment and gender equality studies in social science field where huge data can be collected from a wide range of respondents to identify patterns, trends and relationships (Nahar and Mengo, 2022).

A cross sectional design was also selected due to the limitations of time and resources imposed on the study, which was being carried out as part of an undergraduate dissertation. Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that while cross-sectional designs can be useful in academic research where a finite amount of time is under investigation. The researcher is aware of the drawbacks of a cross-sectional design which cannot establish causality between variables and which also cannot provide a measure of change in educational attainment and empowerment results over time (Kumar, 2019). In order to overcome this constraint, the study has been triangulated with qualitative findings from the interviews and focus group discussions, and complemented with secondary data from longitudinal studies and literature.

Moreover, due to the cross-sectional design, the quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same time and then merged in the data analysis. This convergent approach, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018), has its benefits in the research study which aims to create a fuller and more holistic picture of a social phenomenon, such as this study.

3.5 Research Approach

A mixed-methods research approach was used in this study that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This is based on the complexity of the research problem – numerical evidence of patterns and trends is required to understand the role of basic education in enhancing women's empowerment, while rich, contextual narrative of women's lived experiences is required (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). However, as Teddlie and Tashakkori (2010) point out, the utility of mixed-methods research becomes especially rich in the research that examines multifaceted social questions, yielding depth and breadth of understanding.

The quantitative part of the study gave an overview of the trends associated with educational attainment, economic activities, household decision making and women's access to social resources in Chiwaridzo. Forty women were given structured questionnaires for numerical data, which were analysed descriptively and inferentially, and correlated and associated with the indicators of women's empowerment. The method used echoes that of large-scale studies on women empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa such as those of Anfaara et al. (2024) and Seidu, Ahinkorah and Ameyaw (2020).

The qualitative component which involved key informant interviews and focus group discussions gave a deeper and richer understanding of the contextual factors that mediate between education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo. This methodology allowed the researcher to capture the meanings, experiences and perspectives of women and key actors which could not be obtained using quantitative methods (Scheiwiller, Unterhalter and Heslop, 2024). The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to increase the validity and reliability of the study, as the results obtained were in accordance with the conclusions across the various types of data sources (Morgan, 2007).

3.6 Target Population

The study targeted women aged 18-50 years in the community of Chiwaridzo, Bindura. They were chosen due to the fact that they are a generation of women who have grown up through the educational reforms of the 2000s in Zimbabwe and are at a pivotal moment in their social and economic lives making choices on employment, marriage, reproduction and involvement in their communities. Key informants were also selected from the wider Chiwaridzo community who

included community leaders, non-governmental organisation representatives working on gender issues, school teachers and women's group leaders.

The quantitative component had a total population of seventy five (75) of various background, educational levels, marital status and employment status. The diverse participation was planned to reflect the broader aspects of basic education and empowerment issues in various socio-economic situations of the community. A clear target population increases the representativeness of the results of the study and increases the applicability of the results to policy and practice, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2016).

3.7 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Sampling involves the selection of a small group of individuals from a larger population to gain information on the entire population (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Choosing the right samples size and sampling method is a key to the successful implementation of the study and its ability to produce reliable and valid results that represent the target population's characteristics. The mixed methods research design was used for this study, which relied on purposive sampling and a convenience sampling. The sample size for the current study has been calculated with the help of the "rule of thumb" method which is also known as estimation technique and has been widely used in social science research as described by Cresswell and Poth (2018). The approach enables scientists to get a usable sample size from a population based on percentages, without performing complicated calculations.

The researcher has targeted 75 people, and the sampling percentage used is 98.7%, which results to 74 respondents. This is not a complete census of the population, but is quite acceptable and scientifically justifiable, given the research literature.

It is important to note that a 100% sample that is, studying the entire population is not always necessary for research to be valid. Researchers practically always face resource limitations, and many other reasons carrying out a study. (Lakens, 2022). This is a well-established reason in quantitative research design and the present research does not deviate from that.

Moreover, scholars agree that a representative sample does not have to be a comprehensive sample to have value. Using a representative sample size of less than 10,000 researchers have a choice of 10 to 90 percent to include in their sample (Mugenda and Mugenda 2013). In addition, Kothari

(2004) notes that at least 50% of the population needs to be represented. The percentage adopted in this study is much higher than these minimums, which further adds to the representativeness and credibility of the sample. The sample should be neither too small nor too large but it should be optimum in size as mentioned by Kothari (2004). Regarding this, 98.7% of 75 people is a compromise between inclusiveness and feasibility.

3.7.1 Quantitative Sample

A sample of forty (40) women was taken from the quantitative component. Convenience sampling was used to obtain seventy-four people in Chiwaridzo. This method was chosen due to the constraints of the study such as time and financial resources, and the fact that the sampling frame of all eligible women in the suburb was not possible to construct (Kumar, 2019). Convenience sampling may create selection bias, but the researcher minimized this by sampling participants from a variety of neighbourhoods in Chiwaridzo as well as a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The number of 40 samples was considered adequate for the descriptive and inferential statistical analysis conducted in this undergraduate dissertation, as in similar studies (Nahar and Mengo, 2022).

3.7.2 Qualitative Sample

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to choose the participants who have the knowledge and experience of the study topic. Purposive sampling, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), is a type of sampling that involves the intentional selection of information rich participants who are able to supply the most relevant and insightful data in terms of the research questions. Twelve (12) key informants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews, which included local representatives with first-hand knowledge of women's educational challenges in Chiwaridzo, women's group leaders, school teachers, and local business owners, representatives of the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research and Educational Trust (WALPE). The selection of these participants was based on their knowledge and experience in education, women empowerment and gender policy in the context of Chiwaridzo.

Three (3) focus group discussions were held, two each with eight (8) people, all with different levels of educational attainment, formally educated and non-formally educated, and another with seven (7) people. Being inclusive of both the educated and uneducated population for the focus

group allowed the researcher to gain more understanding of comparative experiences and better understand what the role of basic education in empowerment is. This purposive sampling strategy was effective in collecting the qualitative data to ensure the diversity and breadth of voices required to cover the research goals as much as possible, which aligns with good practice in qualitative research (Scheiwiller, Unterhalter and Heslop, 2024).

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were used to yield numerical data and in-depth narratives. The instruments used were determined based on the research objectives and the research design applied was mixed method approach. Structured questionnaires, semi-structured key informant interview guides, and guide questions for focus group discussions were used. All the instruments were designed after a review of the existing empirical literature on the issues of women empowerment and educational attainment in sub-Saharan Africa, and were subsequently modified to suit the socio-cultural context of Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

3.8.1 Structured Questionnaires

A total of forty (40) women were selected for the quantitative component of the study and were given structured questionnaires. The questionnaire has been drafted based on validated existing questionnaires from international institutions such as the time-use module of ILO (2018), gender-audit module (2020) of UN Women. The questionnaire was structured into five thematic areas: (i) demographic and socio-economic background (age, marital status, household size, educational level, employment status); (ii) a time-use diary focusing on how respondents spend their time within the home, at work and at school; (iii) economic participation (formal and informal employment, income level); (iv) educational engagement (highest level of education achieved, access to vocational education, perceived barriers to school attendance); and (v) access to support mechanisms (family support networks, community childcare, access to labour-saving technologies). Closed ended questions in structured questionnaire helped in collecting data efficiently and helped to conduct systematic quantitative analysis.

3.8.2 Key Informant Interviews

In order to gain expert viewpoints on the institutional, social and policy aspects of the link between basic education and women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo, 12 (twelve) purposively selected key informants were interviewed using semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs). Key informants included women's group leaders, school teachers, NGO members on gender equality, local business people and members of the local community who have first-hand knowledge of gender issues in education (including WALPE members). The semi-structured interview guide was developed to address respondents' perceptions of the existing education policies and how they are implemented, the support provided in schools for women's education, service gaps, and the social and economic consequences of education on women's empowerment. Key informant interviews are especially useful in women's empowerment research in order to gain insight into structural and institutional factors which influence women's access and outcomes of education, according to Scheiwiller et al. (2024).

3.8.3 Focus Group Discussions

Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, two of which included eight women, and the third included seven women who were engaged in both formal and informal employment and domestic duties and educational activities. The focus group discussion guide was adapted from the methodology used by Madziyire et al. (2020) which involved guiding structured yet flexible discussions to identify common norms, problems, and solutions within the community. The focus group discussions aimed to elicit participants' thoughts on their everyday experiences of balancing domestic responsibilities, economic activities and engagement in education, their views on the benefits and barriers of basic education for women and coping mechanisms they use, such as family support, neighbourhood networks and self-help groups.

The focus group approach was selected because it provides a group dynamic that allows the group to develop on each other's ideas, ideas that may not be obtained through individual interviews, and therefore, it allows for greater insight to be gained into the shared rules and norms of the culture, collective experiences, and a community-level perspective (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The discussions were held in Shona to ensure maximum comfort for the participants and quality of the responses, these were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. The results of the focus groups were that the community has a negative attitude towards the value of women's education,

as some people indicated that the attitude of the people in the community towards investing in women's education is full of a lot of doubts.

3.9 Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected were analysed systematically using both quantitative and qualitative approach as per mixed method design used in the study.

3.9.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The data obtained from the structured questionnaires were quantitatively analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Demographic characteristics of respondents and the general pattern of education level and empowerment of the respondents were summarized using descriptive statistics: frequency distribution, percentages, means and standard deviations. Inferential statistical analysis such as Pearson correlation analysis and simple regression analysis was used to explore the nature and strength of the association between the educational variables and empowerment outcomes of women's participation in formal job, household's income level and participation in the community's decision making. The statistical methods used are similar to those used in other related studies in the field of education, women empowerment, and sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, Anfaara et al. (2024) and Evans, Akmal and Jakiela (2023).

3.9.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis can be a flexible method that allows for the identification, analysis and interpretation of patterns of meaning themes found in qualitative data, and it can be theoretically adapted. The analysis process consisted of the following six stages: familiarisation with the data by repeated reading of transcripts, generation of initial codes from the data, collation of codes into potential themes, checking themes against the data, defining and naming themes and writing the final analysis report. The themes that were identified were analysed in relation to the theories used to guide the study of the empowerment framework proposed by Kabeer (1999) and the capabilities approach proposed by Sen (1999) to guarantee theoretical grounding in the interpretive analysis. Theoretically anchored thematic analysis is especially useful in empowerment research as it brings

individual experiences to the fore and places them within the context of structural and relational frameworks as Hossain and Islam (2024) explain.

3.9.3 Triangulation and Integration

The findings of the quantitative and qualitative methods were triangulated to improve the validity of the findings and to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Triangulation is a process that helps prevent methodological biases, through cross-checking the findings of different data sources and different methods, and thus increases the credibility of the conclusions (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010). When quantitative and qualitative results were overlapping, they reinforced the results of the study. Differences in opinions were seen as showing variable contextual nuances that are worthy of future study

3.10 Data Presentation, Interpretation, and Analysis Plan

The data collected were analyzed, processed and presented to provide meaningful information to show the role of basic education in improving women empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura. Tables, frequency distribution charts, bar graphs and pie charts are used to present the quantitative results in a way that is readily understood and visually communicated. All major variables are summarized using descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics are employed to detect and discuss any significant associations between the indicators of empowerment and the educational attainment variable.

The qualitative results are reported using a thematic discussion approach and presenting the themes found with direct quotes from the participants of the interviews and focus group. The utilization of participant quotations is to retain the voices and perspectives of respondents and key informants involved in the study, and to anchor the analysis of the results in the experiences of the participants in the study as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The quantitative (statistical) results are integrated into the qualitative (thematic) discussions, with coherence and relevance throughout the analysis, in order to meet the specific study objectives and research questions.

3.11 Data Validity

Validity is defined as the extent of measuring what they are meant to measure and the extent to which the results of the study reflect what is being studied (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Several efforts were made to increase the validity of this study. The instruments used in the research were first designed by reviewing the existing empirical literature related to women empowerment and educational attainment, validated frameworks from ILO (2018) and UN Women (2020). This type of content validity was used to ensure the instruments covered the essential aspects of the research problem. Secondly, a pilot test was carried out using a small sample from the community of Chiwaridzo to see how clear, relevant and understandable the questions were and modifications were done based on the responses received. Third, by incorporating multiple indicators for each key construct (educational attainment, economic participation, household decision-making, and community agency) as is common in comparable studies (Richardson, 2017; Donald et al., 2020), the construct's validity was improved. Fourthly, triangulation between quantitative and qualitative data and secondary data sources deepened the findings and made them more credible by verifying the results (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2010).

3.12 Data Reliability

Reliability is the consistency and reliability of research results when repeated in a similar way under similar conditions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The following strategies were used to ensure reliability. A pre-test of the structured questionnaire was administered with a small number of participants not part of the main sample and the instrument was revised in light of their feedback to insure that questions were interpreted similarly and responses were consistent across administrations. Second, the semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion guide were standardised, with a fixed set of core questions with flexible probes to ensure that comparable data was gathered from all participants. Thirdly, the research instruments were translated from English to Shona by a competent translator and back translated into English to ensure consistency and translation errors were minimised. Fourth, all interviews and the focus group discussions were audio-taped, transcribed and edited for accuracy prior to analysis.

3.13 Pilot Testing

Pilot testing is one of the important stages of ensuring the reliability, validity and applicability of research instruments before the main data collection process begins (Saunders, Lewis and

Thornhill, 2019). This study was preceded by a pilot test with a small representative sample of women living in Chiwaridzo. For the pilot test, the structured questionnaire was administered and a pilot discussion group and key informant interview conducted with the pilot participants.

To evaluate the clarity of the questions, logical flow of the instruments, and the time needed to complete the instruments, as well as to determine the appropriateness of the language used, the pilot test was used. Learning from the pilot participants, some technical terminology connected with empowerment and decision making had to be explained and contextualised to the community. For this reason, a few questions were answered in Shona, the local language, to make them accessible and comprehensible. Pilot tests also identified logistical issues such as carrying out Focus Group Discussions and interviews in community settings were where participants could feel comfortable and express themselves freely. The data obtained from the pilot test was not analyzed, but only served to improve and strengthen the research instruments.

3.14 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are essential to the integrity, credibility and social responsibility of the research process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This study adhered to the ethical principles that underpin a science research, which are respect for persons, beneficence and justice (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the respective institutional authorities of Bindura University of Science Education before data collection was started. All participants were informed and consented to take part in the study. Each participant received a clear written and verbal explanation of the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation and the right to withdraw and not be penalized or have to deal with any consequences if they chose to do so. No personally identifiable information was written into the data or reported in the findings of this study, in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Responses were recorded securely by the researcher and only accessible by the researcher and authorised supervisor. The data were only used for academic purposes and all reports and presentations of findings were designed to ensure anonymity of the participants.

The researcher was attuned to the community values, norms and traditions that influence the Chiwaridzo community, including those concerning gender and the role of women in the

community. The researcher ensured that all data collection activities were carried out in a culturally sensitive, respectful and dignifying manner. If the conversation of sensitive issues, such as gender-based discrimination or power imbalance came up, participants were reminded they had the right to avoid answering certain questions. These ethical protections are in line with Creswell and Creswell (2018) guidelines on conducting research with marginalised and vulnerable populations.

3.15 Limitations of the Study

This study did have some limitations, which are noted for transparency and scholarly integrity. First, the time and financial limitations forced a relatively small sample size which may restrict the generalisability of the results to the wider female population of Bindura and other Zimbabwean communities. This is an acknowledged drawback of a cross sectional study within the framework of an undergraduate dissertation (Kumar, 2019). Secondly, a convenience sampling technique was used for the quantitative part of the study, which could have led to selection bias because the people who participated might not have been representative of all women in Chiwaridzo.

Thirdly, the study was restricted to a single high-density suburb of Bindura which may not be representative of other urban and rural settings in Zimbabwe. Fourth, recall bias may have influenced the responses to the retrospective questions about the educational experiences and empowerment outcomes as it is possible that it is difficult for participants to accurately recall past events and experiences (Kumar, 2019). Fifthly, due to its cross-sectional design, it is not possible to make causal inferences about the relationship between educational attainment and women's empowerment, it can only make associations at a particular time.

The researcher was able to take a number of mitigating measures to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, which are the following: Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data and use of validated measurement instruments, inclusion of secondary data from longitudinal studies and use of snowball sampling to reach more difficult to access groups helped strengthen the conclusions of the study. Furthermore, the primary data findings from the work was complemented by existing empirical literature, such as the work of Makate and Nyamuranga (2024) on education and gender relations in Zimbabwe, which provided a more comprehensive body of evidence that contextualized and supported the findings of the present study.

3.16 Summary of the Chapter

The chapter has discussed in detail the research methodology adopted in this study on the role of basic education in improving women empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura. The chapter started with the description study area whereby Chiwaridzo was situated in the broader context of Bindura Town and Mashonaland Central Province and context was set geographically and socio-economically for the study. The research paradigm was explained and justified as the best philosophical basis for a study that aims at empirical and contextual knowledge.

The cross-sectional research design, as well as the mixed methods were explained in detail, along with their advantages and disadvantages in the context of this study. The target population, sample size, and sampling techniques purposive and convenience sampling were described and justified. The three major data collection tools, namely structured questionnaires, interview guides for key informants, and focus group discussion guides were described, as were the procedures for their development, pre-testing, and application. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics for quantitative data were explained as well as the thematic analysis for qualitative data and triangulation strategy for integration of the findings obtained were explained.

The chapter also discussed strategies used to guarantee the validity and reliability of the research, the goals and results of the pilot testing procedure and the ethical concerns that were noted during the research. The study's limitations were identified and the mitigation measures used were recognized. As a whole, this chapter provides a clear methodological approach that supports the empirical investigation and results of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION, AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The findings of the research with respect to the role of basic education in improving women's empowerment is presented, interpreted and discussed in chapter 4. The chapter is organised in a systematic manner, beginning with the response rate and demographic characteristics, and then continuing with the results of the responses to each research objective, followed by a detailed discussion and summary of the chapter.

4.2 Response Rate

An overall sample size of 75 participants for all the research instruments was originally targeted. In total, 74 participants (98.7% of everyone who could be involved) completed the actual fieldwork. To give a clear picture, the response rate is detailed by each research tool listed in the table below.

Table 4.1: Response Rate of Participants

Research Instrument	**Targeted Number**	**Actual Achieved Number**	**Response Rate (%)**
Structured Questionnaires	40	40	100
Key Informant Interviews	12	12	100
Focus Group Discussions	23	22	95.7
Total	75	74	98.7

[Source: Primary Data]

As seen in Table 4.1, response rate for all three instruments was very high. For the quantitative part of the study, all 40 distributed questionnaires were successfully filled in and returned. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and waited for them to be returned, which is why 100% return was achieved. The qualitative component achieved a 100% response rate with

all 12 key informants targeted. These informants ranged from the school heads to the religious, community and non-governmental organisation (NGO) and government representatives.

The researcher aimed to have 23 participants in total with 3 groups for Focus Group Discussions. Of these, 2 groups were able to cover the 8 participants they desired. One person in the third group was unable to participate due to family commitments, but 6 were able to attend. This resulted in a total of 22 focus group participants, a 95.7% response rate for the discussion. The overall response rate of 98.7% in the study, confirms that the data obtained is substantial to represent the Chiwaridzo community well. Data is not subject to non-response bias and it can serve as a sound basis for analysis.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents and Participants

This section provides personal background information for all 74 participants in this study. This is community women, with a total of 40, who answered the structured questionnaires, 12 key informants participated in individual interviews, and 22 women participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The background information on age and highest level of education completed has been merged into one master table to give a full description of the research sample.

Table 4.2: Demographic Profile of all Research Participants (n=74)

Demographic Variable	**Category**	**Survey Respondents (f=40)**	**Key Informants (n=12)**	**Focus Group Members (n=22)**	**Total Sample (n=75)**	**Percentage of Total Sample (%)**
Age	18-25 years	8	0	5	13	17.6
	26-35 years	18	2	10	30	40.5
	36-45 years	10	6	5	21	28.4
	Over 45 years	4	4	2	10	13.5

Education Level	No formal education	10	0	4	14	18.9
	Primary	12	0	9	21	28.4
	Secondary	18	3	9	30	40.5
	Tertiary	0	9	0	9	12.2

[Source: Primary Data]

The age group of the participants (26 - 45 years) allows for the study to be able to draw the experiences of the most economically active and burdened segment of the Chiwaridzo population. This generation is the most immediate victims of the socio-economic shocks, the high cost of living in Zimbabwe and the unemployment in the formal sector. Their views offer a realistic view of the effectiveness of women's limited basic education and their entrapment in the informal survival economy in their households. On the other hand, low participation of youth women aged 18-25 indicates a vulnerability in a localised context, as many of these youth drop out of formal platforms early and are structurally pushed into early marriage and child rearing.

The significant difference between the key informants who are tertiary educated and the ordinary community members reveals a profound institutional class divide. The lack of tertiary education among the ordinary women clearly indicates that there are no tertiary opportunities for the ordinary women, and that the secondary level is an economic barrier to girls going to school in this peri-urban area.

This will be a significant implementation failure of national initiatives such as the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS II). These policies are designed and practiced by highly educated people (such as the key informants), but the people who are targeted by these policies in Chiwaridzo do not have the advanced literacy skills and civic confidence to maneuver through the bureaucracy necessary to access these loans, training, or legal protections. This means that the national empowerment policies towards the greater powers have always failed to achieve any country-wide progress, and it is because of this that they fail to get to the local level.

4.4 Current State of Women's Access to Education and Perceived Empowerment

This section summarises the results of the first research question which examined the current situation of women's access to basic education as well as their self-empowerment versus men in Chiwaridzo, Bindura. In order to determine the baseline education situation in the community, the survey included data on educational attainment levels of the respondents. Table 4.3 below presents the results that include the respondents who answered the questionnaire who reported the highest level of basic education completed.

Table 4.3: School Completion Rates Among Survey Respondents (N=40)

Educational Level Attained	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Completed Both Primary and Secondary School	18	45
Completed Primary School Only	12	30
Did Not Complete Primary School	10	25
Total	40	100

[Source: Primary Data]

The structural retention problem in Chiwaridzo is, in response to the first research objective, evident in the baseline data contained in the table above (Table 4.3) which clearly indicates that the critical challenge for the district is not getting girls into schools, but keeping them in school until the end of adolescence. The low completion rate of the basic secondary education, by most of the women that were interviewed, is an important gap in the Zimbabwean development plans. The national development frameworks such as National Development Framework 1 (NDS1) emphasise the enrolment of initial primary school, but they do not have localised protective safety nets. Girls, therefore, are pushed out of the formal system increasingly as they go through the academic cycle. The large proportion of early dropouts shows that monitoring from the primary to secondary level of education is significantly undermined by socio-economic shocks, which push vulnerable girls into a permanent cycle of under-achievement in education without providing a solid educational starting point for them to build literacy.

During the interviewing process key informants described this trend as being very prevalent in the community. The Secondary School Headmaster mentioned that:

"*Enrolment of girls is relatively strong up to the start of secondary school but maintaining regular attendance throughout adolescence is a huge challenge*."
Additionally, the Primary School Teacher mentioned that:
"*...Many girls drop out of school at the end of the Grade 7 examinations due to the idea that there is no immediate benefit in spending money on secondary school for an unmarried girl*."
The local Ward Councillor added that:
"Economic pressures and shifting family priorities mean that young women in this ward are not being sufficiently educated with completion rates remaining dangerously low."
This pattern was also heavily emphasised during the focus groups. One of the participants of Focus Group Discussion 1 said that:
"...Most of these women in the area expressed a desire to complete school but were compelled to drop out due to lack of support from family/friends."
Another participant in the same group (FGD 1) shared that:
"*It is normal for children to leave school here, many families just expect girls to mature and fend for themselves*."
Another member of the Focus Group Discussion 2 indicated that:
"*The environment is such that we see a lot of our peers leaving school at Form 3 or 4, because it is easy to lose focus of school*."

The survey, which was aimed at gathering data on why these completion rates were low, asked the 22 women who dropped out of school to name the main reason for leaving school. The following factors are specific drop out factors and are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

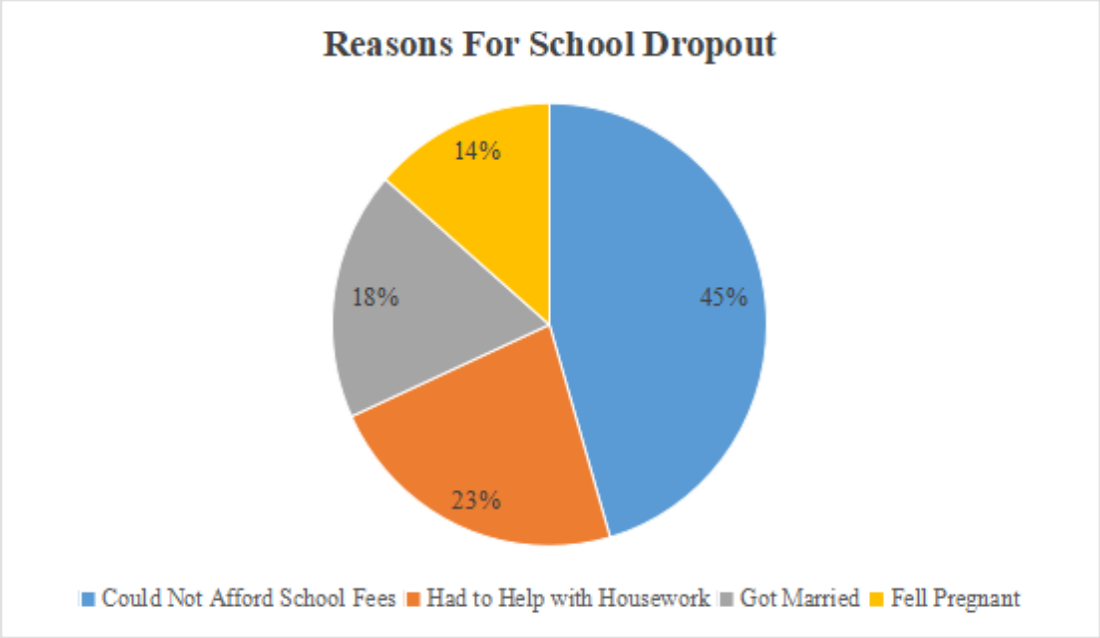


Figure 4.1: Primary Reasons for School Dropout (n=22) [Source: Primary Data]

Figure 4.1 shows the concentration of dropout factors, which directly addresses the first research objective, by revealing the economic and structural vulnerabilities which end girls' education in the adolescent period. The overwhelming findings indicate that financial constraints remain the main driver, thus demonstrating the absence of state-sponsored safety nets like the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) to shield vulnerable households from short-term impoverishment shocks. A sudden reduction of household income in a peri-urban context such as Chiwaridzo where informal trade is a very important livelihood puts households into traditional patriarchal survival mechanisms. Families put boys' long term education first, so girls are systematically kept out of school. Domestic care responsibilities, the secondary pressure of this, further underscores this gendered vulnerability, as when state safety nets fail, so does the consequence of the burden of household survival fall straight onto the shoulders of adolescent girls, and they must choose to give up their formal education to undertake unpaid domestic work.

The key informants described during the interviews how these reasons are driven by poverty and local economy. The Ministry of Women's Affairs Official mentioned that

"*Poverty is the ultimate cause since money is limited, then families still tend to focus on boys and leave girls to undertake domestic responsibilities*."

The NGO Representative from WALPE also highlighted that:

"*Economic shocks have the greatest impact on women, as seen by the high drop out rate because of fees, forcing young girls to take up early survival methods*,"

Moreover, the Traditional leader said that:

"*Parents frequently request their daughters to leave school to help manage vending and with younger siblings due to financial strain on households*."

The members of the focus group added a great deal of personal background to these economic pressures. One of the Focus Group Discussion 1 participants said:

"*Many of us were unable to attend school due to family responsibility and poverty and had to stay home, as there was really no other option.*"

Another woman in a Focus Group Discussion said that:

"*We were obliged to drop out of school because our parents were unable to pay the tuition fees, and we began to sell goods as early as we could, to help pay for food.*"

Also, one of the participants in the 2nd Focus Group Discussion reported that:

"*When fees are not paid, you remain in the home and that's when you fall victim to the early relationships in order to avoid poverty*."

All 40 respondents rated the following barriers to completion of school on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), to give a wider community perspective on the specific barriers girls face to completing school. Table 4.4 below contains the mean scores (X) that were calculated for each factor.

Table 4.4: Community Ratings of Barriers to Girls' Education (N=40)

Educational Barrier Factor	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Mean Score (X)**
High school fees and uniform costs	22	12	4	2	0	4.35
Early or forced marriage customs	15	14	6	4	1	3.95
Teenage pregnancy challenges	14	13	8	3	2	3.85

Domestic work and household duties	11	15	7	5	2	3.70
Distance to the nearest school building	2	4	5	18	11	2.20

[Source: Primary Data]

The results of the community agreement scores in Table 4.4 address Research Objective 1 by outlining the strongly entrenched structural, cultural and institutional barriers that actively impede female education in Chiwaridzo. The fact that 62% of the community agrees that school fees and uniform are a burden shows that there is a massive disconnect between the legislative intentions from the central state and the actual grassroot situations. The mean score may appear low, however, because tuition and school fees are inflationary, the reality is that vulnerable girls are immediately pushed out of school because of the cost of schooling.

Early marriages and teenage pregnancies have been highly rated, making this economic vulnerability even worse. In this peri-urban context these factors are not isolated, but instead are urgent, desperate choices made by adolescent girls to respond to the household poverty they face, often resulting in their attraction to the immediate cash economy of the nearby Bindura artisanal gold mines. Hence, early marriage becomes the informal economic coping mechanism for households living in poverty. Moreover, the consensus around the topic of domestic work highlights the reemergence of traditional gender roles in economic downturns which puts girls under pressure to take on the burden of domestic work, thereby missing out on schooling. On the other hand, the low rating of school distance indicates that key obstacles in this peri-urban setting do not lie in spatial or infrastructure barriers, but in the underlying socioeconomic issues that affect the households and the lack of a safety net at the top level to shield families from localised financial shocks.

In the interviews, key informants discussed the nature of these barriers in Bindura. The Primary School Teacher) mentioned that:

"*Artisanal operations around Bindura are an economic diversion, with older men often offering young girls short-term money in exchange for dropping out of school*."

The NGO Field Officer from CAMFED also said that:

"*High school fees create an obstacle that pushes girls into risky behaviours, and directly contributes to the high rates of teenage pregnancies and early marriage that are illustrated in the charts*."

In addition, the local Church Leader (KII 10) noted that:

"*In the community, traditional attributes prevail view girls as temporary members of the family who are to be married, and parents are hesitant to invest in their school fees*."

These results were substantiated by the focus group discussions. One of the participants in Focus Group Discussion 1 stated that:

"*Several participants were coerced into early marriage and unwanted pregnancies due to influence from older men providing gifts and financial remuneration*."

Another one who participated in the Focus Group Discussion 2 said that:

"*The high cost of uniforms and books means that even if a school is close at hand, you can not attend without being sent away regularly*."

One of the members of Focus Group Discussion 3 also commented that:

"*Girls are tired every morning after doing housework before going to school and they ultimately fail in the exam and simply leave the school altogether*."

The survey was based on six key areas of life, assessing women's self-perception of their empowerment in relation to men. Participants indicated how much more or less empowered they felt as a result of the experience on a scale from 1 to 5 (Much less empowered to Equally or more empowered). The comparative results for these areas are given below in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Perceived Level of Women's Empowerment Compared to Men (N=40)

Area of Life / Domain	Mean Score (X)	Overall Perceived Status
Access to and completion of basic education	4.10	Highly Empowered / Nearing Equality
Access to healthcare and social services	3.68	Moderately Empowered
Economic participation and	3.35	Moderately Empowered

income generation		
Household decision-making involvement	3.15	Low-to-Moderately Empowered
Control over valuable personal assets (land/property)	2.53	Systematically Disempowered
Political and civic participation	2.50	Systematically Disempowered

[Source: Primary Data]

The data of Table 4.5 present a striking "empowerment paradox," directly providing the answer to the research objective. The fact that there is an overwhelming sense of equality in access to education in the community is evidence of the success of tracking gender equality progressively over time and bringing girls into primary and secondary classrooms. Yet the declines in the scores for asset control and for political voice suggest that the institutional walls are very firm and that once women attempt to translate their assets human capital into real-world power, classroom literacy is impacted. This systematic disempowerment in terms of land and property ownership reflects the significant shortcomings in the country's financial policies.

The formal commercial banking rules are so strict that they require physical ownership of deeds as security for loans, and customary practice means that the home is primarily owned by men in peri-urban areas as their brothers, fathers or sons, making women's basic business skills neutralised. They have limited access to capital in the formal sector because they are structurally excluded. Likewise, low scores for political and civic involvement indicate that the local government sphere is still an atmosphere unfriendly to women. There are systemic hurdles that make it hard for women to access education, such as restricted political capital, increased time poverty due to the burden of household work and informal street stalls on a woman's time. This trend reveals that mere access to basic education is not enough and that there is a need for structural changes in banking policies, asset allocation and civic protection to create a trickle-down effect that can lead to a reduction in the socio-economic gap.

This disconnect between education and power was highlighted during the interviews by the key informants. The Ministry of Women's Affairs Official mentioned that:

"*While education is raising awareness of women, deep cultural laws still prevent women from having a voice in their high-level financial decisions at home*."

The Representative from WALPE also stressed that:

"*Even women who have finished school end up with significant obstacles to land ownership without the involvement of male relatives due to entrenched norms and legal shortcomings*."

The Community Development Committee Chair also added that:

"*Women are deeply engaged in community work but don't have much influence when it comes to community leadership or politics – it is all male dominated*."

These issues about lacking real authority were echoed by the members of the focus group. One of the participants in Focus Group Discussion 3 commented that:

"*We can make our own little money with vending, but our husbands are still going to be the ones to determine the use of that money at home*."

During the second Focus Group Discussion, another female participant noted that:

"*When you go to school you use your voice and your voice is respected, but if you use your voice in the community, you are not going to be able to stand up and run for political office or be able to buy a house*."

Another participant in Focus Group Discussion 2 also said that:

"*. . . young women feel equal in class, but as soon as you are in the marriage, you find the power is fully with the man*."

Objective 1 results point to a huge structural contradiction in Chiwaridzo. There is a very high level of community perceived empowerment on basic school access. However, real rates of completion are low, most of the women not completing secondary education. This gap helps address the first research question--why is the retention of adolescent girls in school so difficult? by showing that structural pressures underlie the difficulty of retaining adolescent girls in school and that there is not a lack of community appreciation for education. The contradiction suggests an operational shortfall of local safety nets as, although the country is targeting gender parity in

primary schools, as per the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), it is not clear how this level of parity is going to be sustained once girls reach adolescence in low-income, peri-urban areas. The data shows that financial hardship in this case high school fees is the main reason for dropping out of school. Chiwaridzo is a peri-urban location with low formal employment and high cost of living, leading families to experience often significant economic shocks. State support programmes such as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) are not sufficiently protected from these shocks because of significant delays in disbursement to local school accounts and the large volume of complex rules and regulations. In times of stress when families are left to their own devices in order to make difficult decisions about their finances, traditional male roles tend to re-emerge. This results in households giving a higher priority to boys' schooling as a long-term financial investment, and pulling girls out to contribute to short-term household needs.

In addition, the qualitative results show that the artisanal gold mines near the communities further contribute to this financial vulnerability. The prospect of money generating activities entices young girls to take up mining activities at once in a setting of family poverty. Girls' economic vulnerability directly correlates to the issue of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy, because girls are looking to immediate financial relief outside of the classroom. This localised reality reveals an enforcement gap in the state's laws, which in spite of being progressive, now allow for child marriage, while the bottom up enforcement of the formal economy of mining is completely eclipsed by the alternative cash economy of informal mining.

Last but not least, the empowerment domain scores reveal an "empowerment paradox. Although women are making good progress in closing the gap with men within the classroom, there is no effort being made to close the gender gap in the control of property and in participation in local politics. This suggests that a simple education remedy will not work. A new goal of full socio-economic equality cannot be achieved by simply having access to school without structural policies that take an active role in bridging the gap between classroom literacy and actual access to and use of formal credit and socio-economic equality. It shows that the national top-heavy structure of systems is still fragile as it remains detached from the overall grass-roots approach to creating wealth and providing legal protection to marginalised women.

4.5 Contribution of Basic Education to Social, Economic, and Political Participation

This is the result of the second research objective that assessed the role played by basic education in the empowerment of women in social, economic and political participation in Chiwaridzo, Bindura. The survey quantified the nature of the activities women engage in according to their level of education to understand how education affects their general community and public life. This distribution is represented in the following results across social, economic and political spaces as shown in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: Education Level vs. Primary Form of Public Participation (N=40)

Highest Education Level	**Economic Participation (Informal Trading / Vending)**	**Social Participation (Church / Community Health Committees)**	**Political Participation (Local Council / Party Activism)**	**Total (f)**
No formal education	9	1	0	10
Primary school level	8	4	0	12
Secondary school level	4	11	3	18
Total (f)	21	16	3	40

[SourcePrimary Data]

The participation categories in Table 4.6 are directly related to the research objective as they graphically illustrate the exact contours of the relationship between a woman's education and her multi-dimensional involvement in public life. The dominant status of women who never or only completed primary education in the economy underscores the fact that basic education serves mainly as a means of protecting women's economy, and is not necessarily related to their upward mobility. In absence of secondary schooling women are driven into the low level informal trading and street vending by sheer necessity because of the fear of facing absolute destitution in their households.

The dramatic increase in social engagement amongst women who had received secondary education, on the other hand, underscores the importance of more extended schooling for developing women's communicative and cognitive confidence. Women's psychological self-censorship is overcome at secondary school, and the advanced literacy and social status that enable women to participate in the community development and health committees without embarrassment by educated elites. But even profound disenfranchisement in formal political participation at all levels of education suggests that deeper political structures of patriarchy will not be easily broken with the help of secondary education alone. The spaces of local governance and municipal councils are still male dominated and hostile spaces. But a lack of political capital, the possibility of public victimisation and the time poverty that accompanies women's household responsibilities as well as informal market trading can render a woman's qualifications as completely null and void. This pattern demonstrates that women in the basic education system can be effective in doing business with a street stall or a local health group, but not without institutional countermeasures to break the structural glass ceiling of formal political leadership.

In the interviews, the key informants described how basic schooling will open up the door to a more open public life. The Minister for Youth and Sports' Representative said that:

"*Young women without basic secondary school education are often too shy to participate in public development platforms and remain trapped in small survivalist trading*."

The NGO Field Officer from CAMFED also noted that:

"A woman's sense of self-worth in society is enhanced with basic literacy to enable her to step out from household chores and become an active member in community health and welfare committees."

Also, the local Ward Councillor said that:

"*Political activity in this ward is very fragmented and basic education is an important instrument to empower any female citizen to understand the basic political institutions and to express her views*."

The members of the focus group indicated these structural differences from their own experiences. One of the members of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 3 said:

"*Those who haven't gone to school are left on the street; not confident enough to speak at large social or political gatherings*."

During another woman's presentation in Focus Group Discussion 1, she shared that:
"*When local development groups talk about projects you feel out-of-place without the knowledge of secondary school and you just tend to your own small business*."
Another participant from Focus Group Discussion 2 also commented that:
"*After secondary school, you have a foundation of awareness to be concerned about the politics of your community and how what happens at the council level impacts your life*."

In order to determine the greatest impact of basic education in finding out which domain it has helped most in their lives, the researcher posed a question asking which domain the basic education had the most impact on the respondents. These are the five main areas of contribution which are depicted in Figure 4.2.

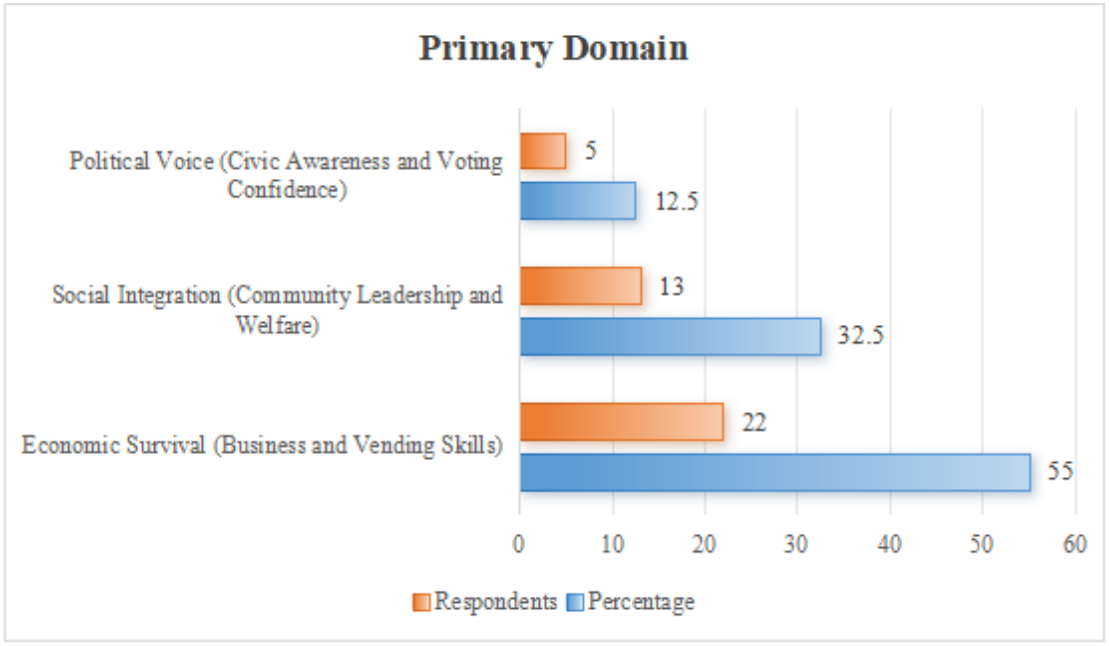


Figure 4.2: Primary Domain Facilitated by Basic Education [Source: Primary Data]

The results presented in Figure 4.2 confirm the research objective, since economic survival skills was overwhelmingly dominant as the most important benefit women derive from basic education in the context of their lives in Chiwaridzo, highlighting the very practical and protective nature of basic education. The community perceives knowledge in the classroom as a first line of defense against financial precariousness in a context where there is little formal work. The trend demonstrates the great effectiveness of basic primary and secondary education in imparting the skills required for functional literacy and numeracy for navigating the local informal economy,

which allows women to safeguard their households against extreme poverty. The secondary theme was social integration, which demonstrates that education can help create a certain amount of social capital and provide women with increased confidence to engage more fully with local community and religious networks. The high numbers of women who are not recognised as having a political voice, however, do not diverge significantly from formal political participation as being unreachable, as they are the ones who might be able to exercise it. It is a pattern that, while the local education system can equip women with the skills and resilience to become economic actors and work small businesses, it cannot give them the structural leverage, advanced resources, or political power to contest the male-dominated local governance system. For the community simple education is therefore regarded as an important buffer against everyday survival and not as a tool for institutional political change.

In the interviews, key informants highlighted how skills taught in school contribute to the development of capacity in these areas. The Primary School teacher said that:
"*These women's economic survival depends on the basic arithmetic that is taught at primary school, so they can compute their profit margins without getting ripped off by the suppliers*."
The Community Development Committee Chair also added that:
"*Women's basic communication skills acquired in the classroom enable them to communicate professionally in social groups and express their needs to local authorities."*
In addition, the NGO Representative from WALPE highlighted that:
"*Literacy is a powerful instrument for civic empowerment as a woman with the power of writing and reading can follow political matters by herself without any hesitation and can cast a vote confidently*."

This focus group discussion included practical examples of the application of these classroom skills in the day to day social, economic and psychological activities of the focus group members. One of the participants in the Focus Group Discussion 3 had said that:
"*If I know how to count, I will be able to keep a small book to record sales I make daily and keep my business alive*."
In the second Focus Group Discussion, another woman shared that:

"*Properly educated women can coordinate social welfare projects in the community with ease because they can record the details accurately*."

One of the participants from Focus Group 2 also said that:

"*Going to school helps you to be able to communicate ideas clearly which is very helpful when leading other youths in community or church activities*."

Finally for Objective 2, all 40 respondents rated their level of agreement that basic education improves a woman's overall participation in society. The 5-point Likert scale was used to measure this and the mean scores (X) obtained are shown below in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Community Perceptions on Education and Public Participation (N=40)

Participation Indicator Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score (X)
Schooling reduces a woman's financial dependence on men	20	14	4	2	0	4.30
Education gives women the confidence to lead social groups	18	15	5	2	0	4.23
Education increases awareness of basic legal and human rights	15	16	6	2	1	4.05
Basic education encourages women to run for political positions	3	5	12	14	6	2.62

[Source: Primary Data]

The community perception scores listed in Table 4.7 offer a clear answer to the second research objective, and give a detailed picture of the specific structural aspects of the impact of basic education on women's social and economic agency. The unanimous agreement about the need to decrease financial dependency on men is an extraordinary level of agreement that shows the community sees basic education as a key tool of economic emancipation at the household level.

Functional literacy and numeracy enable women to create alternative livelihoods and income-generating activities in the informal sector, thereby altering the traditional reliance pattern in the private domestic sphere. Strong backing for internal empowerment comes from the high scores for social group leadership and legal rights awareness, reflecting the fact that knowledge acquired at school is effective in fostering psychological empowerment and civic literacy to engage in local community institutions and assert their immediate human rights. But the stark disintegration of consensus about women's political office running as candidates highlights the ultimate limitations of education in the face of long-standing public power structures.

This low mean score reiterates the fact that basic education can change power configurations within the home and in local social networks, but is actively derailed at the threshold of formal municipal and national politics. There are serious structural obstacles to becoming a citizen in the classroom, and also to becoming a political candidate, in the peri-urban setting of Chiwaridzo; these are not easily removed by mere educational experiences and include the absence of campaign money, entrenched patriarchal gatekeeping in political parties and the potential for public victimisation. This last trend underscores the fact that the most basic education is a prerequisite for every individual and social level of resilience, but it fails to remove the formal governance ceiling unless it is accompanied by specific institutional quotas and by legal safeguards for women candidates.

In the interviews, the key informants talked about changing roles of women in public life in terms of education. The Ministry of Women's Affairs Official mentioned that:

"*Even if she does not have an official employment, an educated woman can support herself and her family, and the vicious circle of absolute dependency of a man upon a woman can be broken*."

The Secondary School Headmaster also added that:

"*With basic education a woman's mind change from being a passive onlooker to an active social agent, who can participate in community meetings*."

Aside from that, the local Church Leader noted that:

"*There is a marked difference in our congregation regarding women who have received elementary education, who are much more apt to rise and become leaders in social and welfare activities, we see this difference*."

The findings from the focus group discussions were overwhelmingly in support of these. One of the participants in Focus Group Discussion 1 said that:

"*A sense of one's own school knowledge helps to understand basic rights and to voice one's opinion during community development meetings*."

One participant in Focus Group Discussion 3 told us that:

"*When you can compute your own profits you get social power, and you are listened to more in family and community forums*."

Another one of the participants in Focus Group Discussion (FGD) 2 also commented on that, saying:

"*Without basic education, I would have no confidence to join local women's round table savings groups where we are able to develop our own social networks*."

The results obtained for Objective 2 indicate that basic education is a very powerful and transformative instrument that promotes women's multi-dimensional participation in Chiwaridzo, mainly as a means for economic survival and social inclusion. The Cross Tabulation data shows clearly that there is a structural trend: Low education levels disproportionately restrict women to low-level survivalist informal trading, while the whole of secondary education opens up the cognitive space and social confidence needed to move into local welfare committees and formal community leadership. The trend demonstrates that each year a girl remains successfully in school positively contributes to her increased public presence, visibility and agency in life.

The empirical evidence is clear of the main way that basic education can empower women is acquisition of functional literacy and arithmetic skills. A peri-urban setting as challenging as Bindura is a hyper-inflationary setting and everyday skills used in the classroom are very important, including public speaking, budgeting and book keeping. These basic skills provide an economic cushion for women, empowering them to avoid exploitation by predatory wholesale suppliers; they give women the legal literacy essential for understanding basic municipal permits; and the basis of confidence needed to manage community savings and lending projects.

Moreover, basic education has the potential to produce a significant social change by making women less financially and socially dependent on their male relatives. Formal education provides women with means of earning livelihoods and local empowerment, directly challenging the

traditional patriarchal concept of women. The changes that occur when the woman moves from the role of an isolated household worker to an active member of the community, earning an income are significant and transformational, as she now has institutional respect and personal autonomy. The results do reveal, however, an important structural fault line in the political sphere. Basic education has proven to have a strong impact on the success of informal business activities and the participation of social groups, but its potential to promote the involvement of women in formal political positions or in municipal governance is very limited. This reflects a longstanding glass ceiling within Chiwaridzo: primary and secondary education provide valuable resources for socio-economic survival and integration into the local community, but politically entrenched structures and negative cultural attitudes sit outside of classrooms and make it challenging for everyone to have a voice at the table without having been equipped with advanced civic knowledge, economic resources, and institutional backing.

4.6 Proposed Strategies for Strengthening the Role of Basic Education in Promoting Women's Empowerment

This section gives the findings of the third research objective, which aimed at proposing practical steps to be taken in strengthening the role of basic education to enhance women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura. The survey targeted the question of what is the most important intervention that the government and community needs to take first, to determine what is the most pressing need. Table 4.8 below shows the distribution of these proposed strategies.

Table 4.8: Primary Strategies Proposed by Survey Respondents (N=40)

Category of Proposed Strategy	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Introduction of Government Free-Education Subsidies (BEAM Expansion)	18	45
Provision of Flexible Evening Adult Education Classes	11	27.5
Community Awareness Campaigns to Stop Early Marriages	7	17.5
Establishment of Women-Only Micro-Finance	4	10

and Credit Schemes		
Total	40	100

[Source: Primary Data]

The strategic priorities in Table 4.8 directly address the third research objective and offer a clear and community-based pathway for reform, moving past general grievances toward specific policy changes. There is an urgent need to address a major implementation gap in the existing national macro policies, due to the importance given to the government's free-education subsidy policy and the extension of the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM). The state makes clear pledges for educational equity under the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1). But the figures indicate that such top, down strategies have a serious ground level problem of bureaucratic delays in funding, with the result that teachers in Bindura are compelled to drop out vulnerable girls from their daily school curricula in order to maintain normal functioning of their schools. This is a strategy that is in high demand, with the community demanding a structural overhaul and the funding mechanisms need to be legally decentralised from the central government ministries to local district matching funds to support an immediate drop-out protection through tuition relief, to prevent girls from dropping out. Likewise, the need for flexible evening adult literacy classes indicates a gap in the current policy framework of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

The rhetoric of 'lifelong learning' is being used at a national level, but the rigid daytime nature of public schools continues to overlook the high 'time poverty' faced by peri-urban marginalised women. A woman who sells on the street cannot leave her booth just when it is busiest or she may lose her family's livelihood. This strategic need is an indication that the community is keen to have an institutional change that formally requires and provides the use of existing public school facilities for evening subsidised literacy programs delivered through the ward. Moreover, the backing of community campaigns and specific financial access indicates that the local population understands that education is not the answer just within the classroom walls. Educational empowerment must be achieved at multiple levels: at the legal level by the enactment of the law, at the financial level by the creation of assets, and at the local level by embedding legal and financial protection within their local peri-urban economies.

When discussing financial relief with the key informants, they discussed the fact that financial relief is the base of any educational plan. The Ministry of Women's Affairs Official mentioned that:

"*During economic shocks, the government needs to make a concerted effort to raise funds for social safety nets such as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) to ensure that girls do not drop out of school*."

The NGO Field Officer from CAMFED also noted that:

"*Targeted school fee sponsorships for adolescent girls in vulnerable groups in peri-urban areas should be introduced in order to shield them from engaging in transactional relationships*."

Also, the local Ward Councillor noted that:

"*Subsidised adult literacy centres should be established in existing school infrastructure here in the ward, after school hours, with the assistance of local government and civil society*."

The majority of the members of the focus group felt very strongly about this as they highlighted the impact it would have on their lives as learners. One of the Focus Group Discussion 3 participants commented that:

"*If they come with flexible evening classes to Chiwaridzo, many of us market women would be willing to go back to retake our exams, not because we don't want to go to the market, but because we don't want to miss our daily vending profits*."

Another woman in Focus Group Discussion 1 shared that:

"*The best approach is for schools to provide skills training in addition to basic reading and writing classes to enable mothers to acquire a skill that can be used in the real world, such as tailoring, for which they are offered free tuition*."

One of the participants of the Follow-up Focus Group Discussion 2 also commented that:

"*Parents should attend serious community workshops to learn to stop discriminating against girls in favour of boys and to fund secondary education for girls on par with boys*."

The researcher then asked respondents to select the most effective community-based strategy if they wanted to examine further what would be necessary to overcome the cultural barriers which hinder learning. Figure 4.3 shows examples of these cultural intervention strategies.

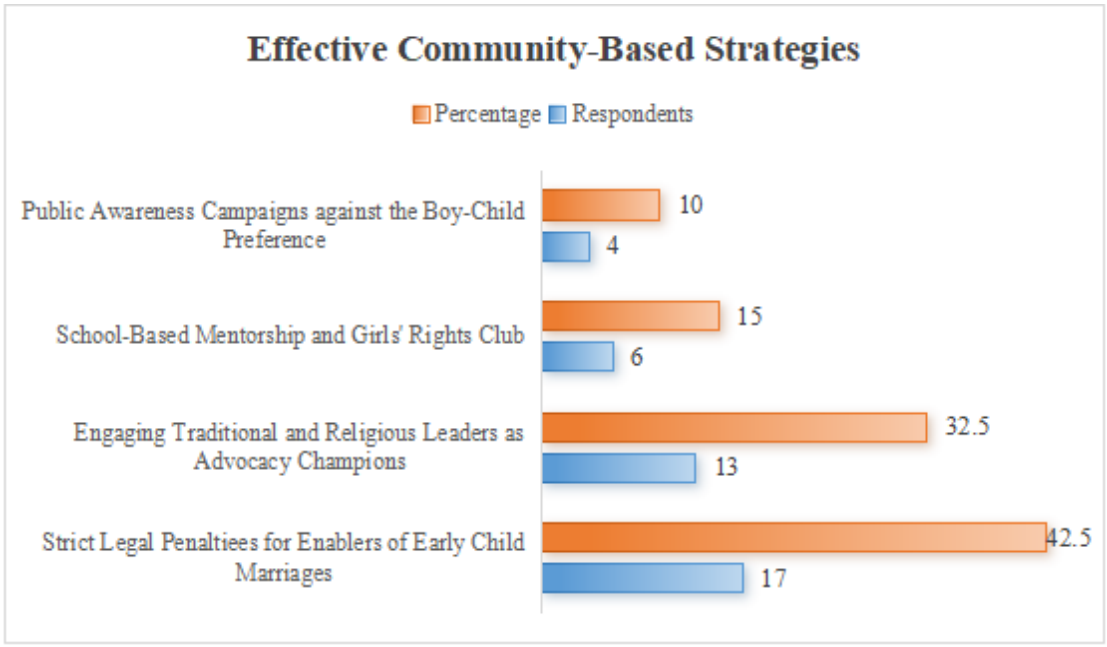


Figure 4.3: Proposed Community-Based Cultural Strategies (N = 40) [Source: Primary Data]

The strong support for strict legal measures and localised enforcement (as seen in Figure 4.3) addresses the final research objective and spells out the specific socio-legal interventions to break deep-rooted cultural barriers. The high rate of community demand to see child marriage enablers prosecuted reveals a key implementation and policing gap in Zimbabwe's child protection laws. The state has a progressive constitutional framework which has banned child marriages, however, the figures show that there is an enforcement gap in the peri-urban fringes of Bindura. Top-down statutory bans are always being superseded by the underground and unregulated cash economy of the nearby artisanal gold mining operations in which cash-poor miners capitalise on household poverty in order to generate early marriage transactions that are covert and private.

The community's emphasis on punishment of enablers signifies that there is a need for an active public awareness campaign to shift to a focus of punishment and break local financial incentives for such practices, as passive public awareness campaigns have proven ineffective. The traditional and religious leaders are highly prioritised as community advocates, which is a strong reinforcement of this structural demand. The data describes an important approach to decentralisation: informal peri-urban regions rarely have formal police presence and the community understands that maps and legal text is not enough to prevent exploitation if traditional community structures are not empowered to ensure that laws are upheld. The approach combines

formal state law with local traditional leadership, to remove geographical and cultural barriers for economic predators, and thus empower community leaders as active defenders of women's education rights.

In the interviews, key informants talked about the role of traditional structures in promoting positive change. The traditionaI leader mentioned that:

"*To train village heads and elders to take lead and enact local laws to punish any parent who marries away a child from school*."

Additionally, the local Church Leader added that:

"*Pastors need to stand up in the pulpit and speak out against the boy-child preference and ask the congregations to see the education of girls as a holy duty*."

Moreover, a Secondary School Headmaster reported that:

"*Well funded girls mentoring clubs in schools have the potential to help girls build self-esteem and to enable them to stand firm against the temptation of the nearby mines*."

The members of the focus group shared their thoughts on the social strategies that would help them protect young girls. One of the participants in the Focus Group Discussion 1 said that:

"*When local chiefs and church leaders raise their voice against early marriages, it takes away the cultural hiding places which take advantage of young girls*."

Another woman, who participated in Focus Group Discussion 2, told me that:

"*Young girls need successful women in Bindura to come in the community and make them realize that they can pursue a career other than vending if they are educated*."

Another member of the Focus Group Discussion 3 commented that:

"*The police need to cooperate with market committees to catch older men that use "mining" cash to entice young schoolgirls out of classes*."

To end the analysis on Objective 3, all 40 respondents evaluated the effectiveness of the different institutional and structural measures aimed at ensuring the long-term economic empowerment of women. This was done on a 5 point likert type scale with mean scores (X) as shown below in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Community Ratings of Proposed Institutional Strategies (N=40)

Proposed Institutional / Structural Strategy	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean Score (X)
Amending banking laws to allow informal traders to get loans without deeds	24	11	4	1	0	4.45
Setting up a localised community women's cooperative bank	20	12	5	2	1	4.20
Introducing mandatory business and financial literacy in school curricula	13	16	7	3	1	3.93
Decentralising women's ministry empowerment funds directly to ward level	11	14	9	5	1	3.73

[Source:Primary Data]

The community rating scores in Table 4.9 answer the third research objective by making a clear determination about the institutional and regulatory changes that need to be put in place to ensure women's long-term economic empowerment. The nearly-universal agreement on the need to reform banking regulations and laws to do away with the requirement of immovable asset as collateral for banking products has pointed to a gap between the operational and socio-economic realities at grassroots and the national policies supporting financial inclusion. The National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS II) purports to achieve financial inclusion for all, using a route of making financial services more democratic, such as through the Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank (ZWLB). These institutions, however, do not represent a lack of interest in establishing a conservative commercial banking system; they rigidly adhere to a commercial banking approach and require formal property deeds which ordinary street vendors encounter when they try to establish themselves in these institutions. The deeply rooted nature of customary practices makes it difficult to register residential properties under women's names because they

are registered almost 100% by male relatives, thereby neutralising their acquired school knowledge.

This institutional constraint is one of the reasons for the desire for localised, community bank which is community owned, as seen from the high demand in the community. The data describes a path forward in which central banks must mandate that financial institutions use other credit metrics, such as social guarantees based on groups, and mobile money cash-flow histories, in order to recognize the informal economy. Moreover, the evidence of the high level of support for a modern curriculum for schools and also for decentralising state empowerment funds directly to the ward level is clear evidence that the top down, bureaucratic management has not filtered down to the peri-urban fringes. The community is demanding structural changes, remove the funding allocation from the centralised and politically exposed offices of Ministers and give it to the local level in transparent community trusts. Finally, this last trend shows that no formal basic education can be the true ladder to socio-economic equality if the state does not undertake corresponding structural transformations which legally ensure and support a woman's right to socio-economic autonomy in the form of independent wealth creation.

For the key informants, during the interviews, they confirmed that there is a need for financial adjustments in institutions to make education useful. The Representative from WALPE mentioned that:

"*But we need to legislatively revamp our banking rules to allow for a woman's education certificate and business plan to serve as reputational security instead of title deeds*."

The School Head - Primary School also added that:

"*Practical financial literacy and entrepreneurship should be in the formal curriculum of secondary schools thus equipping every girl with some real business knowledge before her graduation from school*".

In addition, the Community Development Committee Chair observed that:

"*A decentralisation approach should be taken by the government, where funds for women empowerment are taken directly from the central office to the ward level committees where ordinary market vendors can easily access these funds*."

The institutional recommendations were well received by the focus group discussions. One of the persons who participated in the Focus Group Discussion 3 said that:

"*Eliminating the necessity to register house title deeds is best achieved by establishing a community savings cooperative to provide us with small business loans, and run by only women*."

One of the participants in Focus Group Discussion 1 said that:

"*Schools should be community centers providing weekend computer and business management courses for busy mothers*."

One person during Focus Group Discussion 2 also commented that:

"*Information needs to be spread very transparently in community halls, otherwise empowerment strategies will not work*"

The results presented in Objective 3 depict a multi-layered strategic path forward to reinforce the role of basic education in women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo. These figures suggest that the solution for tackling educational disparities must go beyond the confines of the classroom. If Zimbabwe is going to make real progress it must go beyond the concerns expressed in the community and focus on structural issues in Zimbabwe's macro policy frameworks by providing localised financial support, community cultural changes and extensive institutional reforms.

At the structural level, the high demand from the community to pay tuition fees and provide greater flexibility with learning space takes the focus from academia to gaps in national policy implementation. Zimbabwe has macro level structural frameworks, with commitments to educational equity in National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) programme, which directly backs education equity. Field data, however, reveals that these macro sets of frameworks suffer from huge implementation delays and administrative bottlenecks in the field. The state does not promptly pay back to schools, and it is often delayed for the entire term; thus in Bindura, school authorities are obliged to push away vulnerable girls to finance their daily operations as a result of hyper-inflationary erosion. However, to strengthen this system, the funding arrangement should be structurally reformed – BEAM disbursements should be legally separated from central government ministries and be directly made available to matching funds at the district level with the aim of making timely tuition payments at the point of service and preventing girls from dropping out immediately upon arrival.

At the same time, the need for evening adult classes that are flexible places a big gap in the current policy environment of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

The school model of the formal public school is being perpetuated, while NDS1 still promotes the concept of lifelong learning, yet no consideration is given to the extreme "time poverty" of women who are marginalised from the formal school. It is impossible for one mother or a market woman to leave her informal street stall in the hectic market during the peak hours to attend a regular school, and still ensure her family's survival. The current policy structure is not well designed as it requires women to decide between immediate income and long-term education in the form of literacy. To address this, the Ministry needs to make a policy adjustment in the structure of the school so that the use of existing school facilities for subsidised and ward led evening adult and vocational technical training blocks becomes mandatory and funded.

On the socio-cultural front, the strategies emphasise a strong mix of statutory law enforcement and the mobilisation of traditional structures. This points to the fact that the public awareness campaign has become redundant as it is passive and top down. Although Zimbabwe's constitution prohibits child marriage, the qualitative evidence reveals that this is not the case in the community. The implementation of the law is a serious problem in the peri-urban areas of Bindura due to the alternative economy of the informal gold mining. Artisanal miners who have a lot of cash exploit household poverty by arranging for immediate commodity cash, thereby making early child marriages a form of "survival transaction" that is hidden and conducted in private, outside the purview of formal state policing.

Enforcement structures need to be structurally decentralised in order to enhance and consolidate this weak legal framework. State judicial policies need to be changed to put into effect the legal powers of traditional leaders and localised market monitoring committees to publicly fine and report child abuse enablers. The legal architecture can now do the job of combing the formal state law with the native community architecture, thereby finally removing the cultural and geographical "bubbles" that currently surround economic predators in peri-urban areas.

On the institutional level, the results reveal that the power of education to create economic power can only be achieved through modernisation of national banking laws. The government has

introduced the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS II), which aims to make it easier for women to access capital, by establishing the Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank (ZWMB). The empirical findings, however, indicate that this macro approach is still very difficult for the ordinary street vendors in Chiwaridzo.

The ZWMB was set up with a conservative commercial banking approach, which still allows for a very rigid operational approach requiring formal registration, pay slips and immovable assets which excludes some marginalised women. The institutionalized patriarchal norms and practices create an institutional barrier for women in peri-urban Chiwaridzo as the vast majority of residential houses are registered to male relatives only. The skills they pick up in school are of little use to them in terms of growing their economies, given the obstacles the state has placed in the way of banks.

The banking regulations need to be written afresh by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to lawfully require the use of alternative credit scoring systems in the ZWMB and the general commercial banking sector to correct and enhance this national infrastructure. Financial institutions should accept women's representations of their business plans, community-provided guarantees, or history of transactions as mobile money assets as a form of reputational collateral. Moreover, national empowerment funds need to be separated from the politically captured centralised ministerial offices, and moved straight to the community based trusts at a ward level. If the formal banking and allocation system are not reformed at the local level, through a structural change in the system, the national education and financial inclusion policies will not affect at all the survival strategies of the marginalised women.

4.7 Discussion of Findings

The results of this study were discussed in detail in this section. The field results were systematically compared with the empirical literature compiled in Chapter 2. In comparing these results, this section emphasises the commonalities and differences with other studies conducted. Moreover, the reasons for specific results being different from general literature are given in terms of context, culture and geography. The discussion will be centred on the three focal research questions of the study.

4.7.1 The Current State of Women's Access to Education and Perceived Empowerment

The first major findings of this study was that the rate of entry into the primary school was high but the rate of completion of secondary school was low, with 55% of the sampled women in Chiwaridzo not completing basic secondary school (Table 4.3). Thisfinding is very convincing, as it has been found in regional and local literature in the review. It aligns with the insights by Radiowala and Molwane (2021), who reported that girls in the SADC region are more likely to dropout from secondary schools because of socio-economic issues, early pregnancy and unpaid domestic work. At the local level, it resonates with the claims of Mupangwa (2023) that there are significant gender inequalities in peri-urban settings, despite overall national statistics suggesting equal access to education.

High school fees (X=4.35) is the major factor identified in the field and it aligns fully with the findings of UNICEF (2023) that poverty greatly influences the decision of the low income families to send boys to school rather than girls to school. Moreover, early marriage (X=3.95) and teenage pregnancy (X=3.85) as main drivers of dropping out of secondary school (Figure 4.1) align with Zimbabwe's provincial town results from the Muchabveyo et al. (2025) study. These findings, however, clash with globally more positive indicators of progress given by the World Bank (2021) which show a substantial global reduction in gender gaps in basic school enrolment and achievement. It also contrasts with a baseline national context of Nhuta and Mukuma (2017), who draw on Zimbabwe's inherited high rates of literacy as an enabler in the post-independence era.

The potential explanations for Chiwaridzo's deviation from these positive global and national benchmarks lie in its unique geographical and micro-economic context. Chiwaridzo is directly affected by the illegal, artisanal gold mining activities in Bindura as mentioned by the Key Informants. This generates a very localised "economic distraction" which is not represented in national statistics. Macro-economic shocks affect these peri-urban households, and they cannot afford the indirect costs of schooling highlighted Anfaara et al. (2024). This economic precarity leads families to follow the traditional gender norms mentioned by Dube (2015) which direct parental investment towards boys, as they see it as more economically rewarding.

At the same time, cash-rich artisanal miners lure weak adolescent girls with cash or gifts, leading to high levels of adolescent pregnancy and early marriage in the local community. So, the local economy can sustain itself regardless of the national education system. This is also an "empowerment paradox" (Table 4.5) that these women feel quite highly educated in terms of classroom access (X=4.10), but systemically disempowered in terms of control of assets (X=2.53). This lends validity to Kaffenberger and Pritchett (2021) who contend that the concept of inclusion in education is hollow if it does not produce skills that are relevant to women's daily lives and Frempong and Stadelmann (2024) who claim that in highly patriarchal settings, empowerment is highly mediated and constrained by the power dynamics of the household.

4.7.2 Contribution of Basic Education to Social, Economic, and Political Participation

The results of the second objective reveal that basic education is important as a means of survival and 50% of the women were taught basic financial skill and know arithmetic which enables them to run their informal businesses profitably (X=4.50). But the data also reveals that basic education is not followed by formal employment (X=3.25) or formal political office seeking (X=2.62).

The positive impact of basic education on informal business management and household decisions replicates the results of Nhuta and Mukuma (2017) who found secondary school-educated urban women in Zimbabwe more likely to undertake informal small-scale trading and be members of a community savings club. It is also consistent with the findings of Williams et al. (2022) and Seidu et al. (2020) that basic literacy increases women's involvement in household financial decision-making by 30% to 45% and in community governance structures, respectively. The field data supports the theoretical predictions of the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2005) that education increases women's basic freedoms and agency.

In contrast, the field findings undermine the mainstream macro-economic findings of the World Bank (2021) that a year of secondary education would automatically raise a woman's formal income by 25 per cent. It also contrasts with the positive outlook of the models of Unterhalter (2019) and Fredman (2016) that assume that women's access to basic education gives them a coherent political voice and the ability to contest discriminatory practices.

The obvious, macro-economic, and structural explanations behind this divide are all very different. The literature from the World Bank is international and there is an assumption of a stable, formal economic environment. However, in the geographical context of Chiwaridzo, formal employment opportunities are very low, in line with the regional warnings of Urhibo and Orhero (2023) on the fact that basic education alone is not sufficient to ensure formal economic participation in discriminatory and broken labour markets. Thus women who learned basic literacy as a means of surviving in the informal sector are rewritten as educated women who can handle their accounts at their vending stalls and work out simple profit margins to ward off being cheated in the informal sector by the Chiwadzo they sell.

The difference for the very low index score of political participation (X=2.62) is due to local political and cultural conversion factors. Muhanguzi (2019) argues that education provides women with the communicative skills needed to be part of local governance but in Chiwaridzo, the field data indicates that this extends only to the social sphere such as church (X=4.23) and community health committees (X=4.20, Nyaberi, 2020). The political formal boardroom continues to be barred. Even when an educated woman is in Zimbabwe, she still bears the primary unequal burden of domestic labour, and when she does not have her own capital or support from her family, classroom literacy cannot automatically be translated to formal political power as argued by Mupangwa (2023) and Muchabveyo et al. (2025).

4.7.3 Strategies for Strengthening the Role of Basic Education

Analysis of the findings for the third objective reveals that the community is highly supportive of the proposed measures of free-education subsidies (45%), flexible adult evening classes (27.5%) and strict legal enforcement against early marriages (42.5%), while the proposed measure of amending banking collateral laws to favour informal traders (X=4.45) is on a par with the least supported measure of introducing an adult literacy class or programme (X=4.56). The community's over-riding demand for free-education subsidies and safety nets yields the same results as global and regional reviews. This is aligned with Arif et al. (2025), who found that financial incentive programmes bring down gender gaps in enrolment by 12 to 18 per cent, and with Hahn et al. (2017) who argued that school fee abolition policies must be well-resourced.

Moreover, the demand for flexible evening adult literacy classes (27.5%) aligns with Evans and Yuan (2019), and Evans et al. (2023), who found that alternative education pathways and evening schools are very effective for reaching married women and mothers who have high time poverty due to their daytime household activities. In the cultural arena, the strategy of engaging traditional & religious leaders as advocacy champions (32.5%) yields similar outcomes to that of Arif et al. (2025) and Tawana and Higgs (2021) who demonstrated that engaging male community leaders is most effective in changing the socio-cultural norms that contribute to early marriage and educational withdrawal.

But the community's strategic thrust on localised informal financial credit reforms and women's cooperative banks (X=4.20) is not consistent with the dominant national policy framework as stated by UNICEF (2024) or FAWEZI (2025). Such national programmes are usually more centered on long-term formal macro-level school integration, formal vocational skills frameworks and top-down policy alignments. The main difference between the community's proposed actions and national development plans is that Muchabveyo et al. (2025) noted a persisting disconnect between national policy aspirations and community-level implementation.

Theoretically there are policies that give legislative equity, such as the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), and the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), but there is no visibility or efficient implementation of these policies in peri-urban Chiwaridzo. As a result of bureaucratic delays and inflationary constraints, state-level relief programmes are unable to provide immediate protection to vulnerable girls from economic shocks.

Within the financial space the community wants decentralisation of government funds directly to the ward level (X=3.73), the most severe disconnect. The absence of a legal framework that acknowledges women's rights to property, combined with the fact that it takes a property title deed to secure a loan in a commercial bank, and the fact that over 90% of local houses are registered under the name of the male, puts women at a structural disadvantage, even if they are qualified to go to school. This operational rigidity makes it difficult for the NFIS II and ZWLB to be easily available to the small artisan street vendors in Bindura.

Thus, the community's solution of providing informal traders legal access to bank credit through business plans or group tracking rather than the title deeds (X=4.45) is a very localized solution that is needed. If there are no policy-specific local strategies that are born in the community to

mediate between the policy and the lived experience, as Mupangwa (2023) suggested, then national education policies do not make a difference to the lives of ordinary women. Responses to the strategies sought were practical tools that would enable them to put their basic education skills into practice to access credit, increase their informal trade and evade the rigid patriarchal systems that keep them excluded from formal capital.

4.8 Chapter Summary

The findings of the study were presented, interpreted and discussed in this chapter. The results indicated that the rate of entry to primary school is high, but the rate of secondary school completion is lower (55%) because fees are high, public transport is scarce and there is economic diversion from nearby artisanal gold mining that is a source of income for the residents. Moreover, the study showed that while basic education serves as an important instrument to acquire core functional literacy and mathematical skills, which directly contribute to improving the profitability of informal businesses and social participation of residents in the local community, macro-economic constraints and patriarchal structures impede it from leading to employment in the formal sector or political positions. As a solution to these inadequacies, the community suggested an area-specific roadmap, which called for expansion of free-education subsidies (BEAM), flexible evening adult literacy classes, an active role for traditional and religious leaders to prevent early marriage and introducing institutional banking reforms that enable informal traders to obtain credit without property title deeds. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrated that access to classrooms is very constrained by local precarity and cultural factors. Empowerment translates to full empowerment, which offers a direct empirical basis for the conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 5

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the major findings, conclusions, recommendations, and limitations, of the study. The discussion is in line with the research purpose and research questions listed in chapter one. The chapter assesses how far basic education can play a role in empowering women in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe and suggests ways of enhancing education to be a transformative tool for women's empowerment.

5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The study concluded that basic education does contribute to improve the empowerment of women in the community of Chiwaridzo, Bindura. The more educated women were the more confidence in, better decision making abilities, and more active in economic and community activities. Women's education now gave them greater awareness of their rights, and increased their capacity to participate in the household and social dynamics. Basic literacy is considered the most fundamental tool to achieve self-efficacy and increase women's agency in the traditional household system, both globally and regionally (Kabeer,2005; Stromquist2015).The findings indicated that the situation of women in Chiwaridzo with regard to access to education has improved over time, as a result of various educational policies introduced and the growing awareness of girls' education in the country. But there are still inequalities in access and completion due to poverty, early marriage, financial constraints and domestic duties. These obstacles persist in the educational journey of women and the opportunities they have for empowerment.

The study also confirmed that education had a positive impact on women's economic participation. Females with higher educational attainment were more likely to be in informal trading, small business activities and savings groups, and income generating projects. However, there were still many women who were economically vulnerable due to lack of jobs, capital and institutional support. This was proof that education cannot just lead to economic empowerment. The results also confirmed that education played an important role in the empowerment of women in the social sphere. Basic education was associated with greater confidence, communication, and decision

making involvement of women. It improved women's ability to participate in community discussion, health decision and leadership activities.

The impact of these positive results was found to be that, patriarchy and gender inequalities continue to affect women's empowerment. Unpaid domestic work continued to be a burden for women, and their cultural stereotypes limited their access to higher education, jobs and leadership roles. The study also found a disconnect between the national gender policies and community level implementation. Despite the progressive education policies and gender policies in Zimbabwe, women in Chiwaridzo still have limited access to empowerment programmes, vocational training and access to financial support. The study overall concluded that basic education is an essential base for women empowerment, however, it is not effective in the absence of the supportive social, economic and institutional environments.

5.3 Conclusion

The study establishes that basic education plays a significant contribution towards women empowerment in Chiwaridzo area of Bindura. Education gives women greater self-confidence, social engagement, decision making, and economic participation. The more educated women were the more capable of community engagement in a range of activities and income-generating opportunities. But the research also suggests that education is not enough to achieve empowerment outcomes in the face of poor institutional support, patriarchy and unemployment and poverty. While women have greater capability and aspirations through education, many women continue to experience structural barriers to reap the full benefits of education.

The results also show that patriarchal gender norms are still a significant barrier to women empowerment. Women's cultural role in lesser positions still remains even after education. This restricts women's participation in leadership, income-earning activities and public participation. The study also found that there is a huge difference between the policy making and policy implementation. National policies are in place that support gender equality and access to education, but there is a lack of practical support at community level.

Therefore, the study gives a conclusion that there is a need to combine the various aspects of women empowerment namely, education, economic empowerment, institutional empowerment and community based gender transformation initiatives for sustainable empowerment of women.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Government and NGOs should design women empowerment programmes such as entrepreneurship training, saving groups and microfinance schemes which are women-centred.
- The awareness creation activities in the communities should be strengthened to break gender stereotypical norms and discriminatory attitudes which continue to constrain women empowerment.
- Incorporate literacy into the curriculum of schools to enhance the empowerment outcomes for women in practice.
- There is a need to strengthen support of women to their leadership and involvement in community decision-making mechanisms by local authorities and development organisations.
- Financial institutions like ZWMB to provide women in small businesses and informal economy with access to financing.
- Increased cooperation among various government departments, NGOs, schools and community based organisations in the implementation of women empowerment programmes is required.
- To alleviate domestic responsibilities of women, community support systems like child care programmes and flexible learning opportunities should be established.

5.5. Limitations and Implications for Future Studies

The duration of time to collect the data and analyse the data was one of the limitations of the study. Furthermore, as the study was cross-sectional, it also hampered the evaluation of long-term empowerment outcomes for women. Some participants were reluctant to speak about issues of gender inequality, household power and economic dependency. To overcome this difficulty, the

researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity of participants. The study was conducted in Chiwaridzo, Bindura and hence the results might not necessarily be representative of all communities in Zimbabwe. Further research should focus on longitudinal studies of long-term effects of education on women's empowerment. Comparative studies between rural and urban communities are also advised. Additional studies could also look at the influence of digital literacy, tertiary education, technology on women empowerment.

5.6 Chapter Summary

The summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations and limitations were presented in this chapter. The results have confirmed that basic education has a vital role in improving the economic participation, confidence, decision making power and community involvement of women in Chiwaridzo, Bindura. The study also showed that poverty, lack of employment, patriarchal norms and weak institutional support remain barriers to the empowering capacity of education. To conclude, recommendations were given to the policy makers, educational institutions, NGOs and community organisations to enhance the significance of education for women empowerment and sustainable development

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RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

An Examination of The Role of Basic Education in Enhancing Women's Empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe

Undergraduate Research Study Faculty of Science

INTRODUCTION & CONSENT

Dear Respondent,

You are kindly invited to participate in this academic research study. This questionnaire is aimed at collecting data on the role of basic education in women empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe.

This study is undertaken for an undergraduate Development Studies degree. Responses will be held in strict confidence and only for educational purposes. No one is forced to participate and you can drop out at any time without penalty.

Answer all questions in an honest manner. No right or wrong answers! The questionnaire has five sections.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please provide your personal background information by ticking (☐) the appropriate box or filling in the blank.

1. What is your age? *[Open-ended]*

_____

2. What is your marital status? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced / Separated
- ☐ Widowed

3. How many dependants do you currently have? *[Open-ended]*

_____

4. What is your current occupation or main source of livelihood? *[Open-ended]*

_____

5. How long have you resided in Chiwaridzo? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1–5 years
- ☐ 6–10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

SECTION B: ACCESS TO BASIC EDUCATION

This section assesses the current state of women's access to education. (Research Objective I)

6. What is the highest level of education you have attained? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ No formal education
- ☐ Primary (Grade 1–7)
- ☐ Secondary (Form 1–4 / O-Level)

7. Were you able to complete your basic education (primary and secondary)? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Yes, I completed both primary and secondary
- ☐ I completed primary only
- ☐ I did not complete primary education
- ☐ I am currently still in school

8. If you did not complete your education, what were the main reasons? (Tick all that apply) *[Multi-choice]*

- ☐ Could not afford school fees
- ☐ Got married / family pressure to marry
- ☐ Fell pregnant
- ☐ Had to assist with household chores / childcare
- ☐ School was too far away
- ☐ Parents did not value girls' education
- ☐ Discriminated against at school
- ☐ Other (please specify below)

Other: _____

9. How far is the nearest school from your home? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Less than 1 km
- ☐ 1–3 km
- ☐ 4–6 km
- ☐ More than 6 km

10. Are there adult literacy or continuing education programmes available in Chiwaridzo? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am not sure

11. Have you or any woman in your household participated in adult literacy or continuing education programmes? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not applicable

12. To what extent do the following factors affect women's access to education in Chiwaridzo? Please rate each factor from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Very greatly). *[Likert scale 1–5]*

Statement / Factor	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
School fees and other costs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Distance to the nearest school	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Early / forced marriage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teenage pregnancy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Gender-based discrimination	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Domestic workload / household responsibilities	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of parental support for girls' education	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lack of government support / bursaries	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION C: WOMEN'S SOCIAL, ECONOMIC & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This section evaluates how basic education contributes to women's participation across key domains. (Research Objective II)

13. Do you feel you are able to make independent decisions about your own life (e.g., health, finances, marriage)? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Yes, always
- ☐ Sometimes / it depends
- ☐ No, rarely
- ☐ No, never

14. Do you currently participate in community meetings or civic/political activities? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Yes, occasionally
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ No

15. Do you have access to and control over any of the following? (Tick all that apply) *[Multi-choice]*

- ☐ Personal income or savings
- ☐ Land or property
- ☐ Bank or savings account
- ☐ Mobile money or financial services
- ☐ Small business / self-employment
- ☐ None of the above

16. In your view, how empowered are women in Chiwaridzo compared to men in the following areas? Rate from 1 (Much less empowered) to 5 (Equally / more empowered). *[Likert scale 1–5]*

Statement / Factor	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree

Economic participation and income generation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Political and civic participation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Access to and completion of education	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Household decision-making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Access to healthcare and social services	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Control over personal assets (land, property)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. Do you believe that educated women in Chiwaridzo are more economically independent than those with no education? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

18. Please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements. *[Likert scale 1–5]*

Statement / Factor	1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
Basic education gives women the confidence to participate in civic life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Educated women are better placed to advocate for their own rights	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Education has helped me / women I know earn a better income	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Women with basic education are more respected in the community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Basic education helps women negotiate better in relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. What cultural or social norms in Chiwaridzo do you feel limit women's participation in social, economic, or political life? *[Open-ended]*

_____

_____

_____

SECTION D: LINKAGE BETWEEN EDUCATION & EMPOWERMENT

This section explores the direct relationship between basic education and women's empowerment. (Research Objectives I & II)

20. Do you believe that a woman's level of basic education influences her ability to make decisions within the household? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Yes, strongly
- ☐ Yes, to some extent
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ No

Please briefly explain your answer:

_____

_____

21. Has your own education (or lack thereof) affected your personal empowerment? Describe how. *[Open-ended]*

_____

_____

_____

22. Do you think improving access to basic education for women would lead to greater women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo? *[Single choice]*

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

23. Which of the following outcomes do you think basic education most contributes to for women? (Rank the top 3, with 1 being the most important) *[Ranking]*

Rank	Outcome
	Financial independence and employment
	Improved health knowledge and decision-making
	Increased participation in civic and political life
	Improved self-confidence and self-esteem
	Ability to educate and support children
	Reduced vulnerability to gender-based violence

SECTION E: STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

This section seeks your views on strategies to strengthen the role of basic education in promoting women's empowerment. (Research Objective III)

24. In your opinion, what are the most effective strategies to improve women's access to basic education in Chiwaridzo? (Tick all that apply) *[Multi-choice]*

- ☐ Government bursaries and fee subsidies for girls
- ☐ Awareness campaigns targeting parents and community leaders
- ☐ Enforcement of laws against child marriage
- ☐ Building more schools closer to communities
- ☐ Provision of sanitation facilities and safe schools
- ☐ Involving women in community leadership and school boards
- ☐ Other (please specify below)

Other: _____

25. Are there any organisations (NGOs, government bodies, or community groups) supporting women's education or empowerment in Chiwaridzo? If yes, please name them and describe their work. *[Open-ended]*

_____

_____

_____

26. What policy or programme changes do you think the government should introduce to better support women's education in Chiwaridzo? *[Open-ended]*

_____

_____

_____

27. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding women's access to basic education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo? *[Open-ended]*

_____

_____

_____

Thank you sincerely for your time and participation.

Your responses are greatly valued and will contribute to the understanding of women's empowerment in Zimbabwe.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

An Examination of The Role of Basic Education in Enhancing Women's Empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe

Undergraduate Research Study Faculty of Science

Target respondents	Key informants: women in Chiwaridzo, school heads, community leaders, NGO/government representatives
Interview method	Face-to-face, semi-structured in-depth interview
Estimated duration	45–60 minutes per interview
Language	English or Shona (as preferred by the respondent)
Recording	Audio recording (with written consent) and field notes
Confidentiality	All responses are anonymous and used for academic purposes only

⚠ Do not start without prior signed or verbal consent. Remind respondent that they are not obligated to participate, and that they can either refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any time during the process.

OPENING — INTRODUCTION & RAPPORT BUILDING

Interviewer script (read or paraphrase to respondent)

> Good [morning/afternoon]. I am Kuzivakwashe Zvenhamo, a student of Development Studies at Bindura University. I'm doing a study on the role of basic education to improve the empowerment of women in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.
>
> The interview will last around 45-60 minutes. There is no right or wrong answer... I am interested in your experiences, opinions and observations. I would like to get your permission to audio-record our conversation, so I can be sure that I get it right. The recording will be confidential and only for this study.
>
> **Do you have any questions before we begin? May I proceed?**

SECTION A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Purpose: To understand the respondent's profile and situate their responses within their lived experience.

Q1. Could you please tell me a little about yourself where you grew up, your family situation, and what you currently do?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*How long have you lived in Chiwaridzo?*
2.	*What does your typical day look like?*
3.	*How many people are in your household?*

Q2. Can you describe your educational background? How far did you go in school?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Did you attend school in Chiwaridzo or elsewhere?*
2.	*Did you complete primary and secondary education?*
3.	*If not, at what level did you stop and why?*

SECTION B: ACCESS TO BASIC EDUCATION (Research Objective I)

Purpose: To assess the current state of women's access to education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

Q3. In your experience and observation, how accessible is basic education for women and girls in Chiwaridzo?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Are schools close enough for girls to attend safely?*
2.	*Are school fees a barrier for most families?*
3.	*Do girls and boys have equal access to education in this community?*

Q4. What are the main reasons girls or women in Chiwaridzo do not complete their basic education?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*How common is early or forced marriage in this community?*
2.	*How does teenage pregnancy affect girls' schooling here?*

3.	*Do household chores and caregiving responsibilities prevent girls from attending school?*
4.	*Are there community or cultural attitudes that discourage educating girls?*

Q5. How do parents and community members generally view the importance of educating girls versus boys?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Have attitudes changed over recent years? In what way?*
2.	*Are there community leaders or role models who advocate for girls' education?*
3.	*What would make parents more willing to keep girls in school?*

Q6. Are there any adult literacy, vocational, programmes available for women in Chiwaridzo?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Who runs these programmes government, NGOs, or churches?*
2.	*How many women participate, and what are the barriers to participation?*
3.	*Have these programmes made a visible difference in women's lives?*

⚠ **Interviewer note: If speaking with a school head or government official, also ask about enrolment data, dropout rates for girls, and any school-level interventions targeting gender equity.**

SECTION C: SOCIAL, ECONOMIC & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (Research Objective II)

Purpose: To evaluate the extent to which basic education contributes to women's participation in social, economic, and political life.

C1 — Social Participation

Q7. In what ways do women in Chiwaridzo participate in community life for example, in community meetings, churches, or social groups?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Are women included in community decision-making or leadership structures?*
2.	*Do you feel women's voices are listened to and taken seriously?*
3.	*Do you think educated women participate more actively than those with no education? Why?*

Q8. How does a woman's level of education affect how she is treated and respected within the community?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Can you give an example of an educated woman in this community who has been able to make a difference?*
2.	*Does education change a woman's confidence to speak up for herself?*

C2 Economic Participation

Q9. How would you describe women's economic situation in Chiwaridzo? Are women able to earn their own income?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*What kinds of work or income-generating activities are available to women here?*
2.	*Do educated women have better access to employment or business opportunities?*
3.	*Do women have control over their own income, or does it go to the household / husband?*

Q10. Do women in Chiwaridzo have access to land, property, or financial services such as bank accounts or mobile money?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Are there cultural or legal barriers preventing women from owning assets?*
2.	*How does education affect a woman's ability to access and manage financial resources?*
3.	*Have you seen microfinance or savings groups (e.g., ROSCA / savings clubs) operating for women?*

C3 Political Participation

Q11. To what extent do women in Chiwaridzo participate in political processes such as voting, standing for elections, or participating in local governance?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Are there any women in leadership positions in this community (e.g., village head, councillor, school committee)?*
2.	*What barriers prevent women from taking on political or leadership roles?*
3.	*Do you think education increases women's likelihood of participating in politics? How so?*

Q12. In your view, what is the relationship between a woman's level of education and her empowerment socially, economically, and politically?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Can you share a specific example where education made a difference in a woman's life here?*
2.	*Are there cases where even educated women remain disempowered? Why might that be?*
3.	*Is education alone sufficient for women's empowerment, or are other factors needed?*

> ⚠ **Interviewer note: Encourage the respondent to draw on specific examples from within Chiwaridzo wherever possible, to ground responses in local reality.**

SECTION D: HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS & GENDER NORMS

Purpose: To explore how gender norms within households shape the relationship between education and women's empowerment.

Q13. Who typically makes decisions in households in Chiwaridzo about finances, children's education, healthcare, and major purchases?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Does a woman's education level change her role in household decision-making?*
2.	*Are there tensions when an educated woman tries to assert more decision-making power?*
3.	*How do men generally respond to women who are more educated than them?*

Q14. What cultural or social expectations place limits on what women can do, say, or aspire to in Chiwaridzo?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Are there specific customs or traditions that affect women's opportunities?*
2.	*Do religious beliefs play a role in shaping women's access to education or empowerment?*
3.	*Has education helped women challenge or navigate these norms?*

Q15. How does gender-based violence (GBV) intersect with women's access to education and empowerment in this community?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Is GBV a significant issue in Chiwaridzo? (Handle sensitively)*

2.	*Does education reduce women's vulnerability to GBV?*
3.	*Are there support services available for women experiencing GBV?*

⚠ **Interviewer note: Approach this question with sensitivity. Do not press if the respondent is uncomfortable. Ensure they know support services exist if needed.**

SECTION E: STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS (Research Objective III)

Purpose: To gather informed recommendations for strengthening the role of basic education in promoting women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo.

Q16. What do you think are the most important changes needed to improve girls' and women's access to and completion of basic education in Chiwaridzo?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Should these changes come from the government, community, schools, or families?*
2.	*What role should men and boys play in supporting girls' education?*
3.	*Are there successful examples from other communities that could be adopted here?*

Q17. What government policies or programmes do you think would most effectively support women's education and empowerment in this area?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Are current government interventions (e.g., BEAM, female quotas) reaching women in Chiwaridzo?*
2.	*What gaps exist in current policy that need to be addressed?*
3.	*What role should local government and traditional leaders play?*

Q18. What can NGOs, churches, or development organisations do to strengthen the link between education and women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Are there organisations already doing this work effectively? What makes them successful?*
2.	*What kind of community-based programmes would work best in this context?*
3.	*How can these organisations better engage men and community elders?*

Q19. If you could recommend three concrete strategies to strengthen the role of basic education in empowering women in Chiwaridzo, what would they be and why?

Probing questions / follow-ups	
1.	*Who should be responsible for implementing each strategy?*
2.	*What resources would be needed?*
3.	*What obstacles might stand in the way and how could they be overcome?*

CLOSING FINAL REFLECTIONS

Q20. Is there anything else you would like to add about women's access to education or empowerment in Chiwaridzo that we have not yet discussed?

Interviewer closing script:

> Thank you very much for your time and for sharing your experiences and insights with me. Your contribution is greatly valued and will help inform recommendations for improving women's access to education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo and beyond.
>
> If you have any questions about this research or would like to receive a summary of the findings, please feel free to contact me at [0775841238]. This interview is now concluded.

FIELD NOTES — INTERVIEWER RECORD

Complete immediately after the interview while impressions are fresh.

Interview date	
Interview time	
Interview location	
Respondent code / ID	
Respondent category	Community woman / School head / NGO rep / Government official / Community leader
Interview conducted in	English / Shona / Mixed
Audio recorded?	Yes / No (If no, reason: _____)
Interview duration	
Overall respondent engagement	Very engaged / Moderately engaged / Reserved

Key themes and observations from this interview:

Any concerns, or follow-up actions required:

End of Interview Guide

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

An Examination of The Role of Basic Education in Enhancing Women's Empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe

Undergraduate Research Study Faculty of Science

Study topic	An Examination of The Role of Basic Education in Enhancing Women's Empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura, Zimbabwe
Research method	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)qualitative
Participants	8 women per group, purposively selected from Chiwaridzo
Number of groups	2–3 FGD sessions recommended (different participant profiles)
Estimated duration	60–90 minutes per session
Language	Shona and/or English (as preferred by the group)
Venue	A quiet, private, and neutral community space in Chiwaridzo
Facilitator	[Kuzivakwashe Zvenhamo]
Note-taker / Observer	[Assistant's Name]
Recording	Audio recording with group consent + facilitator field notes
Confidentiality	All contributions are anonymous and used for academic purposes only

FACILITATOR GUIDELINES

Read carefully before each session.

Role of the Facilitator

The facilitator's role is to create a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment in which all participants feel comfortable sharing their views. You should guide not lead the discussion, ensuring that dominant voices do not overshadow quieter participants.

Key Facilitation Principles

- Remain neutral and non-judgmental at all times. Avoid expressing personal opinions.
- Use open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses.

- Actively manage group dynamics gently redirect if one person dominates.
- Use silence and pauses to allow participants time to think before responding.
- Validate all contributions: 'Thank you, that is very helpful. Does anyone else have a different experience?'
- If discussion stalls, use probing questions or redirect with: 'What do others think about what [participant] shared?'
- Watch for non-verbal cues nodding, hesitation, discomfort and respond sensitively.
- Never press participants on sensitive topics (e.g., GBV, personal trauma). Move on respectfully if someone declines.
- Ensure the note-taker records key themes, quotes, and group dynamics, not just individual responses.

Room Setup

Arrange seating in a circle or U-shape so that all participants face each other. Place the audio recorder centrally on a table. Ensure the room is private, comfortable, and free from interruptions. Provide water. If possible, arrange for light refreshments to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Suggested Group Composition

FGD Group 1	Women aged 18–23 with some secondary education
FGD Group 2	Women aged 24-40 with primary education only or no formal education
FGD Group 3 (optional)	Mixed group including community leaders or mothers of school-age girls

OPENING PROCEDURES

Approx. 10 minutes

Before beginning, obtain verbal or written group consent. Introduce yourself and the note-taker.

Step 1: Welcome & Introductions

> Welcome and thank you all for coming today. My name is [Kuzivakwashe Zvenhamo] and I am an undergraduate student at [Bindura University] studying Development Studies.
>
> Today we are here to have an open conversation about women's access to education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo. There are no right or wrong answers what matters most is your honest experiences and opinions.

This is a discussion, not an interview, so I encourage you to speak with one another, not just to me. Everyone's voice is equally important.

To help me capture everything accurately, I would like to audio-record our session. Nothing you say will be linked to your name all responses are completely confidential and will only be used for this academic study. You may withdraw or decline to answer any question at any time.

Before we begin does anyone have any questions? Great, let us start with quick introductions.

Step 2: Ground Rules (read aloud to the group)

Please agree to these ground rules before we begin:

- One person speaks at a time please respect whoever has the floor.
- All contributions are valid there are no wrong answers or silly questions.
- What is shared in this room stays in this room please respect everyone's privacy.
- Feel free to disagree respectfully different views are welcome and valuable.
- You do not have to answer any question you are not comfortable with.
- Please switch off or silence your mobile phones.

Step 3: Warm-Up / Icebreaker

Facilitator note: Go around the circle and ask each participant to share their first name and one thing they enjoy doing in their community. This relaxes the group and establishes a conversational tone.

THEME 1: CURRENT STATE OF WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION (Research Objective I)

⏱ Approx. 15–20 minutes

Purpose: To assess the current state of women's access to education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo, Bindura.

Q1	***Opening question*** Let us start broadly. When you think about girls and women getting an education here in Chiwaridzo, what comes to mind? What is the general situation like?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *Are most girls in Chiwaridzo able to complete primary school? What about secondary school?*

- *Do you think the situation has improved, stayed the same, or gotten worse compared to your mothers' or grandmothers' generation?*
- *How does Chiwaridzo compare to other communities you know of in terms of girls' education?*

Q2	***Key question*** What are the main barriers that prevent women and girls in Chiwaridzo from accessing or completing their basic education?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *What role do school fees and other costs play in keeping girls out of school?*
- *How does early marriage affect girls' schooling in this community is it common?*
- *Do household chores and caring for younger siblings stop girls from attending school?*
- *Are there cases where girls are deliberately kept at home while boys are allowed to go to school?*
- *Does distance to school, safety on the way, or lack of sanitation facilities affect attendance?*
- *Are there any community attitudes or beliefs that discourage educating girls?*

Q3	***Key question*** In your view, do parents and community members treat the education of girls and boys equally? Why or why not?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *What reasons do parents give for prioritising boys' education over girls'?*
- *Have you personally experienced or witnessed a situation where a girl's education was sacrificed for a boy's?*
- *Are there community leaders, teachers, or role models who actively encourage girls to stay in school?*

Q4	***Key question*** Are there any adult literacy programmes, vocational training, or second-chance education opportunities for women who dropped out of school? Have any of you used them?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *Who runs these programmes the government, NGOs, churches, or others?*
- *What makes it difficult for women to participate even when these programmes exist?*
- *What would make it easier for you or other women in this community to go back to learning?*

Facilitator note: Allow the discussion to flow naturally. Capture specific examples participants share local stories and concrete illustrations are valuable for your findings chapter.

THEME 2: EDUCATION & WOMEN'S SOCIAL, ECONOMIC & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (Research Objective II)

⏱ *Approx. 20–25 minutes*

Purpose: To evaluate the extent to which basic education contributes to women's participation in social, economic, and political life.

2A Social Participation

Q5	***Key question*** How does a woman's level of education affect how she is treated and respected in the community and in her home?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *Are educated women listened to more in community meetings and family discussions?*
- *Can you give an example of an educated woman in Chiwaridzo who has been able to speak up or make a difference?*
- *Does education change a woman's confidence to make decisions for herself?*
- *Are there situations where educated women still face disrespect or being ignored?*

Q6	***Key question*** How does education influence women's ability to make decisions within their own households for example, about finances, healthcare, or their children's schooling?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *Who usually makes the final decisions in most households here the man, the woman, or both together?*
- *Does a woman's education level change the balance of decision-making power in her home?*
- *Have any of you noticed a difference in your own lives between before and after gaining more education?*

2B Economic Participation

Q7	***Key question*** How does education affect women's ability to earn their own income and be financially independent in Chiwaridzo?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *What kinds of work or income-generating activities are women in Chiwaridzo involved in?*
- *Do educated women have access to better jobs or business opportunities compared to those with no education?*
- *Do women here control their own income, or is it managed by their husbands or families?*
- *What about access to savings accounts, mobile money, or loans does education help women access these?*

Q8	***Key question*** Do women in Chiwaridzo have access to and control over assets such as land, property, or livestock?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *Are there cultural or legal rules that prevent women from owning assets in their own name?*
- *Do you think education gives women more knowledge or confidence to claim their rights to property?*
- *Have you seen or heard of savings groups or cooperatives for women. Have these made a difference?*

2C Political Participation

Q9	***Key question***

How would you describe women's participation in community leadership and political life in Chiwaridzo?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts
• *Are there women in leadership roles in this community such as village committee members, councillors, or school board members?*
• *What stops women from taking on leadership or political roles here?*
• *Do you think educated women are more likely to participate in politics or leadership? Why?*
• *Would you personally be interested in taking on a leadership role in your community? What would help or hinder you?*

Probing question

Q10 Overall, do you think basic education has made a real difference to women's empowerment in Chiwaridzo? Or are there other factors that matter more?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts
• *Can education alone empower women, or does it need to go hand in hand with other changes such as economic opportunities, legal reform, or changing cultural attitudes?*
• *Are there women here who are empowered even without formal education? What has made that possible?*
• *Are there educated women who are still disempowered? Why might that be?*

Facilitator note: This synthesis question is important for your Objective II analysis. Encourage all participants to contribute, including quieter members. Use: 'We have heard from a few people — what do those of you who have not yet spoken think?'

THEME 3: CULTURAL NORMS & GENDER DYNAMICS

⏱ *Approx. 10 minutes*

Purpose: To explore how social and cultural norms shape the relationship between education and women's empowerment.

Key question

Q11 What cultural or social norms in Chiwaridzo do you feel most limit women's opportunities in education, work, or public life?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts
• *Are there specific customs, traditions, or expectations that affect what women can and cannot do?*
• *How do religious beliefs shape attitudes towards women's education and empowerment here?*
• *Have these norms been changing over time? What has been driving that change?*
• *Has education helped women challenge or navigate these norms, or does it make little difference?*

Q12	***Key question*** How does gender-based violence or the threat of it affect women's ability to go to school, earn income, or participate in community life?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts
• *Is this something that affects women in Chiwaridzo? (Facilitate sensitively do not press)*
• *Does education reduce women's vulnerability to abuse or exploitation?*
• *Are there community support systems or organisations that help women facing violence?*
Facilitator note: Handle this topic with great care and sensitivity. Do not press. Acknowledge with: 'Thank you for sharing that — it takes courage. Is there anything anyone else would like to add, or shall we move on?'

THEME 4: STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS (Research Objective III)

⏱ Approx. 15 minutes

Purpose: To generate community-informed strategies for strengthening the role of basic education in women's empowerment.

Q13	***Key question*** If you could change three things to improve women's access to and completion of education in Chiwaridzo, what would they be?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts
• *Should change come from the government, schools, families, or the community or all of these together?*

- *What specific actions should each group take?*
- *Are there examples from other communities or countries that could work here?*

Q14 ***Key question***
What role should the government play in improving women's education and empowerment in Chiwaridzo? Are current policies and programmes working?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *Are government programmes like BEAM (Basic Education Assistance Module) reaching women and girls here?*
- *What policy changes are most urgently needed?*
- *How should local government and traditional leaders be involved?*

Q15 ***Key question***
What can organisations such as NGOs, churches, or women's groups do to better support women's education and empowerment in this community?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *Are there NGOs or community organisations already working on this in Chiwaridzo? What are they doing well?*
- *What gaps remain that no one is currently addressing?*
- *How should men, fathers, and community elders be engaged in supporting women's education?*

Q16 ***Closing / visioning question***
Imagine it is ten years from now and women in Chiwaridzo are fully empowered through education. What does that look like? What has changed?

Probing questions & facilitation prompts

- *What are women doing differently in your imagined future?*
- *What had to change for that future to happen?*
- *What is one thing each of you could personally do to help move things in that direction?*

Facilitator note: This visioning question is a powerful way to close the substantive discussion — it gives participants a sense of hope and agency, and often generates rich, quotable material for your conclusion and recommendations chapter.

CLOSING PROCEDURES

Approx. 5 minutes

Summary & Member Check

Before we close, let me briefly summarise the key themes from our discussion today. Does that capture what was shared? Is there anything important I have missed or misrepresented?

Is there anything else any of you would like to add something we did not get to discuss, or a final thought you would like to share?

Thank you so very much for your time, your honesty, and your willingness to share your experiences. Your contributions will help shape recommendations that could make a real difference to women's lives in Chiwaridzo and beyond. I am grateful to every one of you.

Facilitator note: After the session: Stop the audio recorder. Allow a few minutes for informal conversation if participants wish to continue. Note any significant points raised after recording stops. Distribute refreshments if available.

FACILITATOR FIELD NOTES SESSION RECORD

Complete immediately after the session while observations are still fresh.

Session date	
Session time (start / end)	
Venue / location	
Session number	FGD 1 / FGD 2 / FGD 3
Number of participants	
Participant profile	
Language(s) used	Shona / English / Mixed
Audio recorded?	Yes / No (Reason if no: _____)
Note-taker present?	Yes / No

Overall group engagement	Very engaged / Moderately engaged / Reserved / Mixed
Dominant voices in group	
Quiet / non-participating members	

Key themes that emerged

Significant quotes (record verbatim where possible)

Unexpected issues, tensions, or group dynamics observed

Questions or themes that need follow-up in the next session

End of

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

CHAIRPERSON'S OFFICE

Tuesday 24 March 2026

TO WHO IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: RESEARCH SUPPORT LETTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STUDENT

I am writing on behalf of the Sustainable Development Department requesting your collaboration on the research of our fourth-year student, KUZIVAKWASHE ZVENHAMO REGISTRATION NUMBER B213631B. The student is studying for a 4-year Bachelor of Science (Honours) Degree in Development Studies (HBSc.DG).

In the fourth year of study, students are required to do field research which require them to do their data collection for research purposes.

Kindly accord her the due cooperation she truly deserves.

Yours faithfully,

CHAIRMAN
GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF SCIENCE

.....
DR. J. BOWORA (CHAIRPERSON)
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT