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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

TOPIC: DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO PREVENT AND MANAGE SCHOOL DROPOUTS AMOUNG SECONDARY STUDENTS IN RURAL ZIMBABWE: A CASE OF BUSHU SECONDARY SCHOOL.

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE HONOURS DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK.

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APPROVAL FORM

I certify that I supervised Ndoofa Ngonidzaishe in carrying out this research titled: development of a model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary students in rural Zimbabwe: a case of Bushu secondary school in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Science, Honours Degree in Social Work and recommend that it proceeds for examination.

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Chairperson of the Department Board of Examiners

The departmental board of examiners is satisfied that this dissertation report meets the examination requirements and therefore I recommend to Bindura University of Science Education to accept this research project by Ndoofa Ngonidzaishe titled: development of a model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary students in rural Zimbabwe: a case study of Bush secondary school in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Science, Honours Degree in Social work.

Chairperson

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DECLARATION RELEASE FORM

I, NDOOFA NGONIDZAISHE studying for a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Social Work, aware of the fact that plagiarism is an academic offense and that falsifying information is a breach of the ethics of Social Work research, I truthfully declare that:

1. The dissertation report titled**: DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO PREVENT AND MANAGE SCHOOL DROPOUTS AMONG SECONDARY STUDENTS IN RURAL ZIMBABWE: A CASE STUDY OF BUSHU SECONDARY SCHOOL** is my original work and has not been plagiarized.

2. The research was crafted within the confines of the research ethics and the ethics of the profession.

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DEDICATION

To my loving parent Shadreck Ndoofa, thank you for your support and your encouragement in my academic journey. I also want to dedicate this research project to my family Audrey, Kudakwashe, Bothwell, Percy and Emma who kept pushing and inspiring me even when the nights were darkest. I love you all. This would have not been possible without your support and prayers.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the persistent challenge of secondary school dropout among learners in rural Zimbabwe, with Bushu secondary school in Shamva District serving as the focus case. The overarching aim was to develop a context-specific, community- based intervention model to strengthen prevention and management of dropout. The objectives were to identify the key factors contributing to dropout, to explore existing strategies employed by schools, families and communities and to design a culturally responsive model that integrates local actors in sustaining learner retention. The study was anchored in ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the interplay of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem influences on human development, thereby providing a holistic framework for understanding dropout dynamics. A qualitative research approach was adopted, utilizing interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to capture diverse perspectives from student and, teachers. Findings revealed that school dropout is driven by spiritual factors, poor modeling by parents, proximity to school, financial constraints, Existing intervention such as child profiling, counseling, and reinforcement of laws. Recommendations emphasized the need for a community-based model that mobilizes parents, schools and local leaders to collaboratively address school dropout drivers. Key strategies include strengthening parental involvement, enhancing school-family partnership, expanding psychosocial and financial support systems, and aligning national polices with local realities. The proposed model advances inclusive education, gender equity, and sustainable development by empowering rural communities to safeguard learners' right to complete secondary education.

ACRONYMS

SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
EMIS	Education Management Information System
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a study on the development of a model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary students in rural Zimbabwe focusing Bushu Secondary School. This chapter provides the comprehensive background to the study highlighting the critical need for targeted, context-specific, and culturally responsive interventions to address secondary school dropout. In addition, the chapter presents the statement of problem, the aim of the study, research objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study. The study specifically focuses on the development of a community-based intervention to prevent and manage secondary school dropout's cases at Bushu Secondary School, a rural community in Zimbabwe. Lastly, the chapter provides definitions of key terms and summary of the chapter.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

School dropout has emerged as one of the most pressing educational challenges globally, undermining efforts to achieve inclusive and equitable education as envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite significant progress in expanding access to schooling, millions of children and adolescents remain out of school, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, due to a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors (UNICEF, 2021). Dropout is not merely an educational concern but a developmental crisis, as it carries far-reaching consequences for learners, families, communities, and national development (Christle et al., 2007).

Globally, evidence shows that dropout disproportionately affects marginalized groups. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the burden is particularly severe, with the region accounting for the largest share of out-of-school children and adolescents worldwide. Financial resources deprivation, gender inequality, early marriage, child labor, and armed conflict remain key drivers of low retention rates (Archambault et al., 2009). While countries in West and Central Africa have recorded progress in girls' enrollment, completion rates remain highly unequal. Girls account for approximately 52% of the 38.8 million out-of-school children in the region, reflecting persistent gender disparities in

educational participation (UNESCO, 2020). These statistics highlight that dropout is not only a matter of access but also of sustained retention, requiring interventions that address structural and cultural barriers.

Regionally, African countries have struggled to align dropout prevention with broader developmental goals. Donor-driven models often emphasize access and institutional reforms while neglecting community-based and culturally responsive approaches. In Nigeria, dropout rates remain high among urban youth, with parental disengagement and economic hardship cited as major contributing factors (McGOLDRICK, 1991). In South Africa, community-based interventions have been introduced, yet they remain fragile due to limited caregiver capacity and resource constraints. These regional experiences underscore the vulnerability of families and communities, who often lack the tools and support to sustain learner retention.

Nationally, Zimbabwe presents a compelling case. Despite progressive education policies such as the Education Amendment Act (2020), which allows pregnant learners and young mothers to continue schooling, dropout rates remain high, particularly in rural areas. The Education Management Information System (EMIS, 2018) reported a secondary school dropout rate of 34.1%, with completion rates significantly lower at upper secondary level (14.9%). Interventions such as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), school feeding programs, and re-entry policies for adolescent mothers have been introduced, yet their impact has been limited due to weak implementation, inadequate resources, and lack of cultural responsiveness (Geeraert et al., 2024).

The consequences of dropout are profound. At the individual level, it restricts employment opportunities, increases vulnerability to poverty, and exposes young people to risks such as early marriage, substance abuse, and criminal activities. At the societal level, dropout undermines human capital development, increases dependency ratios, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and social instability (Wilson et al., 2011).

Locally, rural communities such as Bushu Ward 11 in Shamva District face particularly acute challenges. Secondary school learners often fail to complete their education due to socio-cultural practices, poverty, household responsibilities, long distances to school, early marriages, and limited parental support. Although interventions such as scholarships, sensitization campaigns,

and legal reforms have been implemented, dropout rates remain persistently high, revealing a gap between policy intentions and local realities (MoPSE, 2019). These interventions are often not sufficiently tailored to the socio-cultural context, reducing their effectiveness in addressing community-specific drivers of dropout.

Given the persistent nature of dropout in rural Zimbabwe and the limited success of existing interventions, there is a clear need for a locally grounded, context-specific approach. This study therefore focuses on developing a practical and culturally responsive model to prevent and manage secondary school dropout in Bushu Ward 11. By addressing the unique socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors influencing dropout, the proposed model seeks to strengthen school retention and completion, contributing to sustainable educational outcomes for rural learners.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School dropout among secondary school learners remains a persistent problem in rural Zimbabwe, particularly at Bushu Secondary School in Ward 11, Shamva District. According to Education Management Information System (EMIS), in 2025, about 26,704 secondary school learners dropped out nationally. This problem mainly affects secondary school learners, their families, teachers, and the wider community. Learners who drop out are denied the opportunity to complete their education and improve their future livelihoods. School dropout is a problem because it is influenced by poverty, early marriage, lack of school fees, peer pressure, family responsibilities, and inadequate support systems for learners at risk. These challenges make it difficult for many learners to remain in school until completion. The consequences of school dropout include poor academic outcomes, unemployment, early entry into marriage or informal labor, increased poverty, and reduced community development. Despite efforts by schools and government to address the issue, dropout rates remain high in rural communities such as Bushu. This creates a need to develop a context-specific model to prevent and manage school dropout among secondary school learners at Bushu Secondary School.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

To develop a context-specific model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary school in rural Zimbabwe, with specific reference to Bushu Secondary School in Shamva District.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

i. To Identity the key factors contributing to school dropout among secondary school students at Bushu Secondary, a rural school in Zimbabwe.

ii. To explore existing strategies used by schools, families, and communities aimed at preventing and managing school dropout in rural secondary school.

iii. To develop a community-based model for preventing and managing secondary school dropouts among secondary school students in rural in Zimbabwe.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

i. What factors contribute to school dropout among secondary school students at Bushu Secondary school?

ii. What model can be developed to effectively prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary school students in rural Zimbabwe

iii. To develop a community-based model for preventing and managing secondary school dropouts among secondary school students in rural Zimbabwe.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is justified on academic, practical, and policy grounds. Academically, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on school dropout by generating context-specific evidence on the development of a model to prevent and to manage secondary school dropout in rural Zimbabwe. The finding provides a valuable reference for researchers interested in education retention, rural education challenges, and intervention model development, particularly within low-resource and rural contexts. From a practical perspective, the study benefits secondary school students by increasing awareness of the causes and consequences of school dropout and by identifying strategies that can support sustained school attendance and completion. By focusing on the development of a preventive and management model, the study empowers, learners, families, schools, and community stakeholders to take an active role in addressing dropout risks. Parents and guardians benefit from enhanced understanding of the importance of secondary education and their role in supporting learners, particularly in rural communities where socio-cultural practices may hinder school attendance. At the policy and institutional level, the study provides evidence-based insights that can inform policy makers, education planners, and school

administrators in designing and implementing effective, culturally responsive programs to reduce school dropout. The developed model offers a structured framework that can be integrated into existing education policies and programs to strengthen learner retention and re-engagement strategies in rural areas. Furthermore, teacher education institution and universities may utilize the findings to equip future educators with a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by rural learners, thereby promoting teaching practices that are sensitive to diverse socio-cultural contexts.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

i. School drop-out:

According to, UNESCO (2022) school dropout, refers to the premature withdrawal of a learner from school before completing a given level of education.it describes a situation where a leaner leaves the education system without obtaining the intended qualification.

ii Model

Creswell (2014), a model is a simplified representation of a process, concept, or system developed to explain relationships among variables or to guide action.

iii. Secondary School

Ministry of Primary and Secondary education (MoPSE 2015), describes a secondary as an institution that provides formal education to learners after primary school, usually from form 1 to form 6

iv. Rural Zimbabwe

UNICEF Zimbabwe (2023) explains rural Zimbabwe as communities where livelihoods are mainly based on subsistence farming and where children often face barriers to education including long distances to school, poverty and inadequate learning resources.

1.10 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the background to the study, the problem statement, research aim, objectives, research questions, and justification of the study. The background highlighted how school dropout has become a pressing educational and developmental challenge in rural Zimbabwe, undermining both individual opportunities and national aspirations for inclusive growth. Persistent factors such as poverty, weak family support, and limited institutional responses continue to exacerbate dropout rates, particularly in marginalized communities. The research gap

identified under the problem statement is the need to critically examine how schools, families, and communities in Bushu can collectively develop sustainable strategies to prevent and manage dropout. The study's aim was broken down into three objectives: to identify the key factors contributing to school dropout among secondary school students at Bushu Secondary School; to explore existing strategies used by schools, families, and communities to address dropout; and to develop a community-based model that integrates local actors in preventing and managing dropout among rural secondary school learners in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the theoretical and contextual foundations guiding the study on school dropout in rural Zimbabwe. The research is anchored in the need to develop a context-specific model that addresses the persistent challenge of dropout among secondary school students, with Bushu Secondary School in Shamva District serving as the case study. The chapter examines the key factors contributing to dropout, reviews existing strategies employed by families, schools, and communities, and situates these within broader debates on educational equity. It also highlights the limitations of current interventions, particularly in rural settings where poverty, cultural norms, and weak institutional support exacerbate vulnerability. Ultimately, the central focus of this discussion is to establish how a community-based model can strengthen prevention and management of school dropout in rural Zimbabwe.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.1 Ecological systems theory

This study is examined through the lens of Ecological Systems Theory, originally advanced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 20th century and later refined by scholars such as Schwartz (1995) and Leonard (2011). The theory posits that human development is shaped by multiple, interrelated layers of the environment, ranging from immediate family interactions to broader societal structures. These layers microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how individual, families, and community factors converge to influence educational outcomes, including school dropout among girls in rural Zimbabwe (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

At the microsystem level, the theory emphasizes the immediate social contexts in which individuals interact, such as family, peers, and extended kinship networks. Tanner-Smith & Wilson (2013), underscores that the microsystem represents the first line of support in times of need. In the context of Bushu Secondary School, this study will explore how family dynamics, caregiver involvement, and peer relationships shape students' decision making and socialization processes,

ultimately influencing their likelihood of remaining in or leaving school. Interviews and focus group discussions with students, parents, and school leaders will provide insights into how microsystem factors either buffer against or exacerbate dropout risks.

The mesosystem highlights the connections between different microsystems, particularly the relationship between family and school. Ceci (2006), observes that community and cultural forces directly affect family practices, which in turn shape educational engagement. This study will analyze the effectiveness of communication between schools and families, engaging community leaders to identify sociocultural factors such as religious beliefs about early marriage or gender roles that contribute to dropout. By interrogating these linkages, the research seeks to understand how collaboration and disconnection between families and schools' influences students' educational trajectories.

The exosystem refers to external settings that indirectly affect development, such as parental employment conditions and community resources. In Bushu communal area, parents' work patterns and economic constraints often limit their ability to support children's schooling. This study will investigate how these external pressures such as unstable income or lack of community infrastructure shape caregiver capacity to prioritize education, thereby influencing dropout rates.

At the macrosystem level, the theory draws attention to societal beliefs, cultural norms, and institutional policies. In rural Zimbabwe, prevailing attitudes toward gender and education, alongside the implementation of national policies promoting gender equality, directly affect girls' access to schooling. This study will review educational policies and their local application in Bushu communal area ward 11, Shamva, assessing whether institutional frameworks adequately support girls' retention in secondary education. By situating dropout within broader cultural and policy contexts, the research aims to generate recommendations that strengthen institutional responses to gender disparities in education.

Finally, the chronosystem emphasizes the role of time and historical context in shaping development. Patterns of dropout are not static but evolve with shifts in cultural values, economic conditions, and policy interventions. Bronfenbrenner (1976), argues that ecological systems theory underscores the importance of individuals and communities actively reshaping their environments. In this study, the chronosystem provides a lens for examining how long-term social

and cultural changes such as evolving attitudes toward girls' education impact dropout trends in Bushu communal area.

Ecological Systems Theory thus offers a robust framework for analyzing the multifaceted influences on students' education. By interrogating microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem factors, this study seeks to uncover how personal, familial, community, and structural dynamics converge to shape dropout outcomes. The framework underscores the need for collective action by individuals, families, communities, and government to address barriers at multiple levels, thereby fostering sustainable strategies for reducing dropout rates among girls in rural Zimbabwe.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews international, regional, and national scholarship on school dropout, with emphasis on rural secondary education. It considers the underlying drivers of dropout such as financial resource deprivation, cultural expectations, early marriage, and limited access to schooling resources, showing how these challenges weigh more heavily on rural communities. The discussion also evaluates interventions led by families, schools, and communities, including parental monitoring, community involvement, and policy initiatives, while noting both achievements and shortcomings. Comparative studies provide lessons from diverse contexts, illustrating the importance of adapting strategies to local realities. Within Zimbabwe, particular focus is placed on Bushu Secondary School in Shamva District, where the study investigates how community and institutional conditions shape dropout patterns. This review ultimately lays the groundwork for designing a community-based model tailored to the needs of rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

2.2.0 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL DROPOUT AMOUNG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS.

2.2.1 Early Marriage

Early marriage is widely recognized as a critical socio-cultural factor contributing to school dropout among adolescent girls, particularly in rural communities where poverty, entrenched gender norms, and limited educational opportunities intersect. Defined by UNICEF as a union where at least one party is under the age of 18, early marriage often marks the abrupt transition

from childhood to adulthood, shifting girls' roles from students to wives and mothers, thereby curtailing their educational trajectories. Scholars argue that this practice is not merely a private family decision but a structural issue rooted in poverty and patriarchy, reinforcing cycles of inequality and exclusion from schooling.

Globally, extensive research highlights the strong link between early marriage and educational discontinuation. Studies in India, such as those by Banerji (2013) and Saggurti (2010), demonstrate that families facing economic hardship often prioritize marriage over education, viewing it as a means of reducing financial burden. Longitudinal findings from the Young Lives Study (2016) further reveal that girls who remain in school until age 15 are significantly less likely to marry before 18, while those who drop out are quickly absorbed into early marriages and domestic responsibilities. National surveys, including NFHS-5 (2021), confirm that dropout rates among married adolescents aged 15–19 years are markedly higher than those of their unmarried peers, underscoring the bidirectional relationship between early marriage and school dropout.

Regionally, African case studies reinforce these global insights. In Tanzania, Lukuba (2015) and Jesse (2022) observed that cultural beliefs and economic pressures encourage parents to marry off daughters at puberty, interrupting their education. Mwamsojo, Ruheza, and Philipo (2023) found that early marriage was a major cause of dropout among lower secondary school girls, with domestic responsibilities such as childcare and farming making continued schooling nearly impossible. National statistics (Basic Education Statistics, 2022) further highlight the scale of the challenge, showing that tens of thousands of girls leave school annually due to early marriage, perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting future employment opportunities.

In Zimbabwe, early marriage is similarly identified as a key driver of school dropout among rural girls. (Stokes (2008), emphasizes that teenage pregnancy and early marriage are closely linked to educational exclusion, while Chikadzi (2014) argues that economic hardships and cultural expectations compel families to prioritize marriage over education. Gender activists such as Savadye (2020) highlight those girls who fall pregnant or are forced into marriage are immediately withdrawn from school, while boys are often allowed to continue. Institutional evidence from UNICEF Zimbabwe (2021) and ZIMSTAT (2019) confirms that a significant proportion of rural girls marry before 18, with low secondary school completion rates strongly associated with this practice. Scholars such as Yoosefi Lebni et al. (2023), Sigauke (2016), and Mugumbate (2016)

further stress that early marriage is deeply rooted in poverty and cultural norms that view girls as economic assets, reinforcing gender inequality and limiting educational opportunities.

For Bushu communal area, where poverty and cultural traditions converge, early marriage emerges as a critical cause of school dropout. Girls withdrawn from school to assume marital and domestic responsibilities face diminished prospects for education and employment, perpetuating cycles of deprivation. This study therefore situates early marriage within broader social development frameworks, highlighting the need for interventions that challenge harmful cultural norms, empower families to value girls' education, and provide support systems that enable adolescent girls to remain in school. By addressing early marriage as both a cause and consequence of dropout, strategies can be developed to break cycles of inequality and expand opportunities for rural girls in Zimbabwe.

2.2.2 Adolescent Pregnancy

Adolescent pregnancy is widely acknowledged as a significant factor contributing to school dropout among secondary students in rural areas, particularly adolescent pregnancy which disrupts educational participation and retention. From a biomedical perspective, pregnancy is defined as the state of carrying a developing embryo or fetus within the female body, typically lasting about 40 weeks and involving profound physiological, nutritional, and psychological changes (Williamson, 2006). While medically understood as a natural process, in the educational context pregnancy often becomes a turning point that interrupts or permanently halts schooling.

Globally, adolescent pregnancy is consistently identified as a major barrier to girls' education. UNESCO emphasizes that teenage pregnancy "jeopardizes educational attainment" by exposing learners to expulsion policies, social stigma, childcare responsibilities, and financial hardship. Statistical evidence underscores the magnitude of the challenge: approximately 41.3 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19 occur worldwide, with 95% of adolescent births concentrated in developing countries where access to reproductive health services and education is limited. Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean reveal that up to 36% of female school dropouts are linked to teenage pregnancy, while research in Cameroon found that 41.6% of teenage mothers left school due to pregnancy (Weetman, 1999). Similarly, in Papua New Guinea, pregnancy accounts for nearly 5% of all school dropouts. Institutional frameworks exacerbate these outcomes, as many countries still enforce restrictive policies against pregnant learners, and only a minority explicitly guarantee re-

entry rights. The World Bank further argues that adolescent pregnancy perpetuates poverty cycles by reducing future employment prospects and reinforcing intergenerational disadvantage.

Regionally, African case studies highlight the intersection of cultural norms, stigma, and weak institutional support. In Cameroon and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, teenage mothers often face exclusion from schools and communities, with limited opportunities to re-enroll. Research consistently shows that adolescent pregnancy is not only a health issue but also a socio-cultural phenomenon that undermines educational continuity.

In Zimbabwe, adolescent pregnancy is a leading cause of school dropout among rural girls. Official data from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE, 2023) reported that 4,557 girls dropped out due to pregnancy, with the majority (3,942) from rural schools, underscoring the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities. Scholars such as Magwa and Ngara (2015) note that early sexual activity, sexual abuse, and inadequate access to reproductive health information heighten vulnerability, while Mtukwa (2018) emphasizes that stigma and poor policy implementation prevent many adolescent mothers from returning to school despite re-entry provisions. Cultural expectations that prioritize marriage and domestic responsibilities over education further compound the problem, leaving pregnant learners with limited pathways to continue learning. Case studies from districts such as Masvingo and Umguza illustrate how adolescent mothers are excluded from classrooms, pressured into early marriage, and burdened with childcare, effectively ending their educational journeys.

For rural Zimbabwe, and specifically Bushu communal area, pregnancy emerges as a critical determinant of school dropout, reinforcing cycles of poverty and gender inequality. This study therefore situates adolescent pregnancy within broader social development frameworks, highlighting the need for interventions that combine reproductive health education, community sensitization, and effective re-entry policies. By addressing both the structural and cultural barriers, strategies can be developed to support pregnant learners, safeguard their right to education, and expand opportunities for rural girls.

2.2.3 Cultural Barries

Cultural barriers are widely recognized as a significant factor contributing to school dropout among secondary students in rural areas. Hofstede (2001) defines culture as shared norms that shape people's behavior, which can act as barriers when they restrict individual choices or reinforce inequality. Mohanty Ngo-Metzger et al. (2003), further emphasizes that cultural barriers are gendered, as patriarchal norms and practices limit women's access to education, healthcare, and economic participation, thereby compounding exclusion. These perspectives highlight how cultural traditions and expectations intersect with gender, race, and class to produce systemic disadvantages that undermine educational attainment.

Globally, cultural barriers are consistently identified in education literature as a driver of dropout, particularly among girls. UNESCO reports that approximately 244–258 million children and youth are out of school, with socio-cultural factors playing a major role in exclusion. UNICEF adds that 129 million girls are out of school worldwide, largely due to entrenched gender norms, early marriage, and discriminatory practices. Empirical evidence from India shows that around 40% of rural girls leave school before completing secondary education due to marriage and domestic responsibilities (Mehrotra), while in Uganda, about 33% of girls marry before 18, directly contributing to dropout. Case studies from rural India further demonstrate how caste-based discrimination and domestic labor reduce educational attainment, with marginalized groups showing significantly lower completion rates compared to privileged peers. Scholars such as Kabeer reinforce that deeply rooted gender norms and cultural expectations remain powerful determinants of dropout, particularly for girls.

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa provides strong evidence of the impact of cultural barriers on education. Studies highlight how restrictive gender norms, early marriage, and parental attitudes toward schooling drive dropout patterns. In Uganda, Bantebya-Kyomuhendo shows that practices such as bride price and dowry encourage early marriage, leading to premature withdrawal from school. In Tanzania, Chaligha and HakiElimu report that 15.6% of girls drop out due to early marriage, while Woldehanna's research in Ethiopia reveals that 38.6% of girls leave school under cultural pressures to marry. In Zambia, Ngoma and UNICEF demonstrate that cultural attitudes and gender norms significantly limit girls' access to secondary education, reflected in lower

enrollment rates compared to boys. These findings collectively underscore those cultural practices whether linked to marriage, fertility, or domestic roles remain deeply entrenched and continue to drive dropout across the region.

In Zimbabwe, cultural barriers are similarly identified as central drivers of school dropout among rural secondary students. Chirinda (2014) and Mutekwe & Modiba (2012) argue that early marriage and patriarchal norms common in rural communities contribute significantly to girls leaving school prematurely, with national statistics showing that around 34% of girls marry before 18. Muchengetwa and Chabaya (2019) highlight that Apostolic religious sect promotes early marriage and discourage girls' education, aligning with dropout rates linked to marriage and pregnancy. Kónya (2006), further notes that cultural stigma prevents adolescent mothers from returning to school, while Chinyoka and Naidu (2013) emphasize that poverty interacts with cultural practices such as assigning domestic roles to girls, reducing their participation in schooling. Mafa (2018) adds that negative parental attitudes and beliefs that undervalue girls' education contribute to high dropout rates after primary school, with about 34% of girls failing to transition to secondary education.

For rural Zimbabwe, and specifically Bushu communal area, cultural barriers emerge as a critical determinant of school dropout. Practices such as early marriage, religious beliefs, and entrenched gender roles converge with poverty to limit girls' educational opportunities. This study therefore situates cultural barriers within broader social development frameworks, highlighting the need for interventions that challenge harmful norms, promote gender equality, and empower communities to value girls' education. By addressing these cultural constraints, strategies can be developed to reduce dropout rates and expand opportunities for rural learners.

2.2.4 Financial resources deprivation

Financial resources deprivation is one of the most significant factors contributing to school dropout among students in rural areas. According to, Israel (2016), financial deprivation refers to the inability to access sufficient resources to maintain a minimum standard of living, which can affect education access and completion. These definitions highlight how financial scarcity undermines access to basic needs, including education, and directly influences school retention.

Globally, deprivation of financial resources is consistently recognized as a major driver of dropout. UNESCO (2021) reports that over 258 million children are out of school worldwide, with economic hardship as a leading barrier. UNICEF (2020) further notes that 27% of children aged 5–17 engage in child labor, reducing school attendance and increasing dropout risks. Empirical evidence reinforces these trends in rural Pakistan, over 60% of students leave school due to financial constraints (Ali Zeb et al., 2020), while in rural China, children from low socio-economic households are twice as likely to drop out to contribute to family income (Notten & Kaplan, 2021). In Zambia, surveys reveal that over 30% of dropouts cite inability to pay school fees and materials as the primary reason, while in Uganda, high education costs force many children out of school. These findings collectively demonstrate that deprivation of financial resources operates through multiple pathways fees, child labor, poor learning conditions, and opportunity costs making it both a direct and underlying cause of dropout.

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa provides strong evidence of the structural impact of financial deprivation on education. Dakwa, Chiome, and Chabaya (2014) show that inability to pay school fees and provide basic resources is a major cause of dropout among rural girls in Zimbabwe. Mandina (2013), in a case study of Gokwe District, highlights how subsistence farming households struggle to sustain education costs, leading to absenteeism and eventual withdrawal. Manwa (2017) demonstrates that financial deprivation interacts with early pregnancy and cultural practices to heighten dropout risks in Masvingo District. Similar findings are reported across the region: Chitondo (2022) in Zambia links financial deprivation to poor academic performance and dropout, while Blázquez et al. (2014) in Malawi emphasize that economic hardship combined with gender inequality significantly raises dropout likelihood. Regional statistics support these scholarly insights, with the World Bank (2011) estimating that 40% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population lives in poverty, and UNICEF (2021) noting that children from the poorest households are more than three times as likely to be out of school.

In Zimbabwe, deprivation of financial resources is consistently identified as a critical determinant of school dropout in rural areas. Dakwa, Chiome, and Chabaya (2014) argue that financial scarcity influences both the inability to pay fees and negative attitudes toward education, particularly among girls. Mandina (2013) found that households dependent on subsistence farming often fail to sustain school-related costs, resulting in irregular attendance and eventual dropout. Manwa

(2017) highlights how financial deprivation intersects with limited parental support and early pregnancy to increase dropout risks, while Dewilde (2004) emphasizes that orphans and vulnerable children in impoverished households are particularly at risk. National statistics confirm these findings: ZIMSTAT (2019) reports that 72% of the population lives below the poverty line, with rural areas most affected, while UNICEF (2020) notes that around 20% of children fail to complete lower secondary education largely due to financial barriers. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2021) further reveals that over 30% of learners in rural districts are sent home for non-payment of fees.

For Bushu communal area, financial resources deprivation emanated as a cause of school dropout, operating through mechanisms such as child labor, hunger, and lack of learning materials. This study therefore situates financial deprivation within broader social development frameworks, emphasizing the need for interventions that reduce education costs, provide financial support to vulnerable households, and strengthen social protection systems. By addressing financial barriers alongside cultural and social factors, strategies can be developed to promote school retention and expand opportunities for rural learners.

2.2.5 Individual Factors

Individual factors are widely recognized as critical determinants of school dropout among secondary students in rural areas. Beck (1979) emphasized that cognitive patterns such as beliefs, perceptions, and thought processes shape how individuals interpret experiences and respond emotionally and behaviorally. Bandura (1974), social learning theory further introduced the concept of self-efficacy, arguing that personal beliefs about one's capabilities interact with behavior and environment in a triadic reciprocal model. These perspectives highlight that dropout is not only driven by external conditions but also by internal, learner-specific characteristics.

Globally, individual factors such as academic performance, motivation, health, behavioral challenges, and personal aspirations are consistently identified as major contributors to dropout. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) argue that low achievement, poor self-efficacy, and lack of interest in schooling increase the likelihood of leaving school prematurely. Gannon (2005), in the same way notes that students who struggle academically or perceive schooling as irrelevant are disproportionately represented among dropouts. Health related challenges, including malnutrition, chronic illness, and mental health difficulties, also undermine attendance and performance (Patton

et al., 2016). UNESCO (2023) reports that approximately 258 million children and youth are out of school worldwide, with individual level factors such as poor academic performance and low motivation contributing substantially. In Latin America, Vegas and Winthrop (2020) found that students with repeated grade failures are three times more likely to drop out, while in rural India, Mehrotra observed that poor performance combined with low self-motivation accounted for 40% of dropout among girls. Sub-Saharan Africa shows similar patterns, with Colclough et al. (2003) noting that learners who consistently fail examinations or lack confidence in their abilities are disproportionately represented among those leaving school.

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa provides strong evidence of the impact of individual factors on dropout. UNESCO (2022) reports that secondary school completion rates in the region remain below 50%, with a substantial proportion of dropout linked to academic difficulties and low motivation. Oyugi (2015) found that approximately 30% of dropout in rural Kenya was due to academic struggles and lack of interest, while Chaligha (2018) reported that 25% of rural Tanzanian students left school after repeated grade failure. Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (2010) illustrates in Uganda how girls who repeatedly failed examinations or lacked confidence in their abilities were more likely to leave school, especially when personal challenges intersected with socio-cultural pressures. These findings confirm that individual-level vulnerabilities intensify dropout risks when combined with broader systemic and household constraints.

In Zimbabwe, individual factors are consistently identified as significant contributors to dropout among rural secondary students. Hick (2015), emphasizes that poor academic performance and low self-confidence are major predictors of withdrawal, while Gwirayi (2010) highlights that poor physical and mental health reduces attendance and increases the likelihood of leaving school prematurely. According to MoPSE (2020), approximately 11–15% of rural secondary students drop out due to academic difficulties, low motivation, or inability to cope with school demands. Case studies from provinces such as Manicaland and Mashonaland East demonstrate that learners who consistently fail examinations, struggle with coursework, or lack confidence in their abilities are disproportionately represented among dropouts. Zimbabwean scholarship and national statistics therefore confirm that individual factors including academic struggles, low motivation, behavioral challenges, and health issues are central drivers of dropout in rural areas.

For Bushu communal area, individual factors manifested as a critical dimension of school dropout, interacting with socio-cultural and economic pressures to intensify vulnerability. This study situates personal challenges within broader social development frameworks, highlighting the need for interventions that strengthen learners' self-efficacy, provide academic support, and address health-related barriers. By tackling individual-level determinants alongside structural constraints, strategies can be developed to reduce dropout and expand educational opportunities for rural learners.

2.3 STRATEGIES USED TO PREVENT AND MANAGE SCHOOL DROPOUT

2.3.1 Learners Profiling

Learner profiling is increasingly recognized as an important strategy used by schools, families, and communities to prevent and manage school dropout, particularly in rural contexts such as Bushu Secondary School. Israel (2016b), defines learner profiling as the use of student-level data systems that track learners' academic performance, attendance, and behavior over time. This structured process involves gathering detailed information about students' strengths, needs, and risk factors, including health status, family background, and behavioral patterns. UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that early identification of vulnerable learners is essential for designing interventions that improve retention and completion rates.

Globally, learner profiling has been linked to improved student retention through early detection of risk factors. Tinto (1975; 1993) argues that dropout is strongly influenced by whether institutions identify and address learners' academic and social needs in time. Schools that adopt systematic profiling are better positioned to intervene early with remedial lessons, counseling, or referrals to social services. Adelman and Taylor (2006) highlight that integrated support systems where teachers collaborate with community child workers are more effective in addressing absenteeism and unmet social or emotional needs. Their work demonstrates that profiling is not simply about data collection but about building coordinated responses that address barriers to learning.

At Bushu Secondary School, learner profiling is implemented through continuous monitoring and systematic record keeping. Teachers, administrators, and community child workers identify at-risk learners by analyzing indicators such as frequent absenteeism, declining academic performance, behavioral changes, and socio-economic challenges. Once identified, targeted interventions are

introduced, including remedial lessons, counseling services, and referrals to the Shamva Social Development Office. Guidance and counseling departments play a central role in maintaining learner profiles and coordinating these interventions, ensuring that support is holistic and responsive to both academic and psychological needs. Families are key stakeholders in the profiling process, providing essential information about learners' home environments, including economic conditions, health issues, and social challenges. Epstein's (1995; 2001) theory of overlapping spheres of influence underscores that collaboration between schools and families enhances student success. Parents can use profiling information to monitor progress, provide emotional support, and address issues such as absenteeism, ensuring that interventions are grounded in both school and home realities.

Communities also play a vital role in supporting learner profiling initiatives. Local leaders, organizations, and social workers help identify vulnerable learners and address external factors such as financial deprivation and harmful cultural practices. The World Bank (2018) emphasizes that community-based interventions such as financial assistance, awareness campaigns, and mentorship programs complement school-based profiling and strengthen retention.

Learner profiling offers several advantages it enables early identification of at-risk learners, supports tailored interventions, enhances monitoring and evaluation, and fosters collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Rumberger (2011) affirms that comprehensive data systems tracking student behavior and performance are essential tools in dropout prevention. However, challenges remain, particularly in rural contexts. Limited resources, inadequate data management systems, privacy concerns, and low parental or community involvement can undermine effectiveness. Stringfield (1994) notes that successful implementation requires institutional capacity, training, and sustained support. Addressing these challenges calls for investment in training, clear ethical guidelines, and strong collaboration among stakeholders.

For Bushu Secondary School, child profiling spotlighted as a critical strategy for preventing dropout, offering a structured, collaborative approach that addresses both academic and socio-cultural barriers. By strengthening this system, schools can ensure that vulnerable learners are identified early and supported effectively, reducing dropout rates and promoting educational continuity

2.3.2 Parental supervision and school retention

Strengthening parental supervision has become one of the most effective approaches to sustaining school retention, especially in rural contexts such as Bushu Secondary School. Parental supervision and school retention refer to the monitoring and guidance provided by parents that encourage learners to remain in school and complete their education. It involves parents taking an active role in monitoring their children's attendance, academic progress, and social behavior to ensure consistent engagement with education. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) highlights that children's development is shaped by multiple interconnected environments, meaning that parental oversight is essential in linking the home and school contexts to support positive educational outcomes. Supervision therefore extends beyond the household, encompassing regular communication with teachers, participation in school activities, and reinforcement of school values at home.

Globally, parental supervision has been associated with improved retention rates by fostering accountability and emotional support. Kim (2019), argue that parental involvement in monitoring and supporting academic progress significantly influences student achievement and persistence. Similarly, Hill and Tyson (2009) emphasize that when parents actively supervise and engage with their children's schooling, learners demonstrate stronger motivation, resilience, and long-term commitment to education. These perspectives affirm that parental supervision is not merely about discipline but about cultivating responsibility and sustained engagement in learners.

At Bushu Secondary School, parental supervision is practiced through monitoring attendance registers, responding to early signs of absenteeism, and engaging in school-parent communication systems such as meetings and home visits. Parents provide emotional support, discourage harmful practices like early marriage and child labor, and encourage consistent participation in school activities. Families that actively supervise their children's education contribute to improved learner retention, as children are less likely to disengage when they feel guided and supported both at home and at school.

Communities complement parental supervision by involving traditional leaders, child care workers, and local organizations in reinforcing education-supportive norms. UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that community-based interventions enhance parental involvement by addressing

external barriers such as poverty and cultural resistance. In rural Zimbabwe, traditional leaders play a significant role in ensuring that parents uphold their responsibilities, thereby strengthening school retention.

Parental supervision offers several advantages: it enables early identification of at-risk learners, fosters accountability, enhances collaboration between schools and families, and promotes holistic learner well-being. Fan and Chen (2001) affirm that consistent parental involvement is a critical tool in dropout prevention, as it sustains learners academically, socially, and emotionally.

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Limited parental literacy, economic pressures, and migration for work can weaken supervision efforts. Unequal participation among families may also reduce the effectiveness of retention strategies. Addressing these challenges requires parental education initiatives, stronger school-family partnerships, and community support systems that reinforce parental roles.

For Bushu Secondary School, parental supervision emanated as a critical strategy for school retention, offering a structured, collaborative approach that addresses both academic and socio-cultural barriers. By strengthening parental involvement, schools can ensure that vulnerable learners are identified early, supported effectively, and retained until completion, thereby reducing dropout rates and promoting educational continuity.

2.3.3 Reinforcement of Laws

Reinforcement of laws by Chief Bushu functions as a community-based strategy to prevent and manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary School. Reinforcement of laws refers to the systematic application of consequences, rewards, or penalties following behavior to increase compliance with established norms. Akers (1998) distinguishes between social reinforcement, which involves approval or disapproval from others, and non-social reinforcement, which includes direct rewards or sanctions. Within the educational context, this approach ensures accountability among families and aligns cultural practices with formal schooling requirements.

Globally, theoretical perspectives support the role of structured environments in reducing dropout. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory emphasizes that children's development is shaped by interconnected systems family, school, and community implying that interventions must extend beyond schools to involve community authority structures. Rutter (2000) highlights the

importance of protective factors such as clear expectations and supportive social systems, noting that enforcement of community by-laws can discourage absenteeism, child labor, and early marriage. Adelman and Taylor (2006) further argue that effective dropout prevention requires a balance between regulation and support, suggesting that legal enforcement should be complemented by counseling, financial assistance, and other supportive interventions.

Regionally, African communities often rely on traditional leadership to enforce norms that promote education. Mawere (2012) observes that traditional institutions remain central in shaping community values and can be leveraged to advance development goals such as schooling. In Zimbabwe, the authority of chiefs is legally recognized under the Traditional Leaders Act (Chapter 29:17, 1998), which empowers them to maintain order, uphold cultural values, and formulate by-laws that enhance social welfare. This mandate includes promoting school attendance and addressing behaviors that hinder education. Complementary legislation such as the Education Act (Chapter 25:04) obligates parents to ensure school attendance, while the Children's Act (Chapter 5:06) protects learners from neglect, including denial of education. The Marriage Act (Chapter 5:17, 2022) prohibits child marriage, a major contributor to dropout among rural girls. Together, these laws provide a strong legal framework for Chief Bushu's role in reinforcing school attendance and safeguarding learners.

In Zimbabwe, dropout rates remain disproportionately high in rural areas due to poverty and socio-cultural challenges (ZIMSTAT, 2022). The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education identifies absenteeism as a key predictor of eventual dropout, underscoring the importance of community-level enforcement. Reinforcement of laws by Chief Bushu offers several advantages: it compels parental responsibility for children's education, protects girls from harmful practices such as early marriage, carries cultural legitimacy that encourages compliance, strengthens accountability systems by supporting schools, and promotes behavioral change through awareness campaigns. Despite these advantages, challenges persist over reliance on punitive measures may generate fear and resistance rather than cooperation. Cultural resistance may also remain strong in communities where practices such as early marriage are deeply entrenched. Addressing these challenges requires balancing enforcement with supportive interventions, ensuring that legal reinforcement is accompanied by counseling, financial support, and community sensitization.

For Bushu Secondary School, reinforcement of laws by Chief Bushu represents a culturally legitimate and legally grounded strategy to reduce dropout. By integrating traditional authority with formal education policies, this approach strengthens accountability, protects vulnerable learners, and promotes community-wide commitment to schooling. When combined with supportive interventions, reinforcement of laws can serve as a powerful mechanism for sustaining learner retention in rural Zimbabwe.

2.3.4 Home-school communication

Home-school communication is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone strategy for strengthening learner retention and reducing dropout, particularly in rural contexts such as Bushu Secondary School. It involves the systematic exchange of information between educators and families to ensure that learners' academic progress, attendance, and social development are consistently supported. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978) underscores that learning is a socially mediated process, meaning that effective communication between schools and families enhances the learner's educational experience by bridging the gap between home and school environments.

Globally, research has shown that strong communication systems between schools and families foster accountability and improve learner outcomes. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argue that parental involvement, facilitated through regular communication, significantly influences student motivation and persistence in education. Similarly, Henderson and Mapp (2002) highlight that schools with robust family engagement practices experience higher attendance rates and improved academic achievement, demonstrating that communication is not merely informational but a tool for building trust and shared responsibility.

At Bushu Secondary School, home-school communication is practiced through progress reports, parent-teacher meetings, and home visits. Teachers and administrators use these mechanisms to identify learners at risk of dropout and engage parents in designing appropriate interventions. Families contribute by sharing insights into learners' home environments, including economic challenges, health conditions, and social pressures, enabling schools to tailor support more effectively. Parents also reinforce school messages at home, discouraging harmful practices such as child labor and early marriage, thereby strengthening learner retention.

Communities further enhance home-school communication by involving traditional leaders, child care workers, and local organizations in reinforcing education-supportive norms. The African Development Bank (2019) emphasizes that community-based communication initiatives improve accountability and strengthen retention by addressing external barriers such as poverty and cultural resistance. In rural Zimbabwe, traditional leaders play a pivotal role in ensuring that parents remain engaged with schools, thereby amplifying the effectiveness of communication systems.

Home-school communication offers several advantages: it enables early identification of at-risk learners, fosters collaboration between schools and families, enhances accountability, and promotes holistic learner well-being. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) affirm that consistent parental engagement through communication is a critical tool in dropout prevention, as it sustains learners academically, socially, and emotionally. Nonetheless, challenges persist. Limited parental literacy, economic pressures, and migration for work can weaken communication efforts. Poor coordination and inconsistent participation may also reduce effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires investment in parental education initiatives, stronger school-family partnerships, and community support systems that reinforce communication.

For Bushu Secondary School, home-school communication emerges as a critical strategy for preventing dropout, offering a structured, collaborative approach that addresses both academic and socio-cultural barriers. By strengthening communication systems, schools can ensure that vulnerable learners are identified early, supported effectively, and retained until completion, thereby reducing dropout rates and promoting educational continuity.

2.3.5 Community awareness campaigns

Community awareness campaigns are increasingly recognized as an important strategy used by schools, families, and communities to prevent and manage school dropout, particularly in rural contexts such as Bushu Secondary School. These campaigns involve organized efforts to educate parents, learners, and community members about the value of education, the risks associated with dropout, and the collective responsibility of stakeholders in sustaining learner retention. UNESCO (2015) emphasizes that awareness initiatives are essential for shifting community attitudes and practices, ensuring that education is prioritized even in resource-constrained environments.

Globally, awareness campaigns have been linked to improved retention through the promotion of positive cultural norms and the reduction of harmful practices such as child labor and early marriage. Tinto (1975; 1993) argues that dropout is influenced not only by academic challenges but also by social integration, meaning that campaigns which foster community support and shared responsibility strengthen learners' commitment to schooling. Adelman and Taylor (2006) highlight that integrated awareness programs where schools collaborate with families, NGOs, and local leaders are more effective in addressing absenteeism and socio-cultural barriers. Their work demonstrates that awareness campaigns are not simply about information dissemination but about building coordinated responses that reshape community perceptions of education.

At Bushu Secondary School, awareness campaigns are implemented through workshops, community meetings, and outreach programs led by teachers, school development committees (SDCs), and traditional leaders. These campaigns educate parents on the long-term benefits of schooling, discourage practices such as early marriage and child labor, and mobilize resources to support vulnerable learners. Families play a central role by reinforcing messages at home, ensuring consistent attendance, and encouraging children to value education. Epstein's (1995; 2001) theory of overlapping spheres of influence underscores that collaboration between schools and families enhances the effectiveness of awareness campaigns, as parents become active participants in promoting education.

Communities complement these efforts by involving chiefs, village heads, churches, and NGOs in spreading messages about the importance of education. The World Bank (2018) emphasizes that community-based awareness campaigns improve accountability and strengthen retention by addressing external factors such as poverty and cultural resistance. In rural Zimbabwe, traditional leaders hold significant influence and can enforce education-supportive norms, making them indispensable actors in awareness initiatives. Community awareness campaigns offer several advantages: they challenge harmful cultural practices, promote shared responsibility, enhance parental involvement, and foster a supportive environment for learners. Rumberger (2011) affirms that awareness initiatives are critical tools in dropout prevention, as they build collective commitment to education.

However, challenges remain, particularly in rural contexts. Limited resources, inconsistent participation, and cultural resistance can weaken the effectiveness of campaigns. Stringfield (1994)

notes that successful awareness initiatives require institutional capacity, training, and sustained support. Addressing these challenges calls for investment in community mobilization, stronger partnerships between schools and external actors, and culturally sensitive approaches.

At Bushu Secondary School, community awareness campaigns manifested as a critical strategy for preventing dropout, offering a structured, collaborative approach that addresses both academic and socio-cultural barriers. By strengthening these initiatives, schools can ensure that education is valued across households and communities, reducing dropout rates and promoting educational continuity.

2.4 MODELS USED TO PREVENT AND MANAGE SCHOOL DROPOUTS

2.4.1 School Feeding

School feeding is recognized as one of the most practical and evidence-based strategies for developing a community-based model to prevent and manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary School. The World Food Program (2013) defines school feeding as the regular provision of food to children in schools to improve nutritional status, support educational outcomes, and act as a social safety net for vulnerable households. Within the Bushu context, school feeding functions both as a preventive measure keeping learners in school and as a protective strategy buffering against risks associated with deprivation of financial resources.

The effectiveness of school feeding aligns with Vincent Tinto's (1975) student integration model, which emphasizes that retention depends on academic and social integration. Regular access to meals increases attendance and participation, strengthening learners' academic focus and social belonging. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) further supports this, positing that basic physiological needs such as food must be met before higher-level goals like learning can be achieved. In food-insecure households, common in rural Zimbabwe, school feeding directly addresses this foundational requirement. UNICEF (2023) reports that school feeding programs in Sub-Saharan Africa can increase attendance by up to 9%, while the World Food Program highlights significant reductions in dropout rates and improvements in retention, particularly among vulnerable learners. In Zimbabwe, ZIMSTAT (2022) identifies food insecurity as a key driver of absenteeism in rural schools, making feeding programs especially relevant in Shamva District.

The advantages of school feeding are multifaceted. It improves attendance and retention, enhances academic performance through better concentration, promotes equity by supporting disadvantaged learners, and strengthens collaboration between schools, families, and communities through shared responsibility. However, challenges include sustainability of food supplies, dependence on external donors, logistical constraints related to storage and preparation, and risks of inequitable distribution or stigma among learners.

Despite these limitations, when complemented by initiatives such as school gardens, community contributions, and effective management structures, school feeding remains a highly effective and evidence-based intervention. For Bushu Secondary School, it represents a critical pillar in reducing dropout and promoting learner retention, ensuring that basic needs are met so that students can fully engage in their education.

2.4.2 Skill Training

Skill training is an important component in developing a community-based model to prevent and manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary School. UNESCO (2012) defines skill training as structured learning activities designed to develop vocational, technical, and life skills necessary for employment, self-reliance, and active participation in society. Within the Bushu context, skill training provides learners with practical competencies that make education meaningful and directly connected to local economic realities, thereby reducing dropout driven by deprivation of financial resources, disengagement, and limited future prospects.

Globally, skill training is recognized as a strategy that enhances learner retention by linking education to livelihood opportunities. Tinto's student integration model (1975; 1993) emphasizes that learners are more likely to remain in school when they are academically and socially integrated, while Becker's human capital theory (1964) highlights that education is more valuable when it equips learners with skills that improve economic productivity. Evidence from UNESCO and the World Bank shows that vocational and life skills programs increase school attendance and reduce dropout by making education relevant to learners' future aspirations.

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa has adopted skill training initiatives to address dropout challenges. Programs that integrate vocational skills such as agriculture, tailoring, carpentry, and entrepreneurship have been shown to improve retention by providing learners with practical

pathways to employment. Studies across Tanzania, Zambia, and South Africa demonstrate that when schools incorporate skill training into curricula, learners are more motivated to attend and complete their education, as they see direct benefits in terms of livelihood opportunities.

At Bushu Secondary School, skill training can be implemented through the formation of clubs aligned with Education 4.0 and local economic activities such as farming, mining awareness, building construction, and sewing and tailoring. These clubs, alongside vocational training in carpentry, mechanics, and entrepreneurship, enhance learners' sense of belonging and competence. A community-supported driving school initiative could further provide older learners with marketable certification linked to employment in transport and logistics. Through collaboration among schools (coordination and monitoring), families (support and encouragement), and communities (mentorship, resources, and local expertise), learners at risk of dropout can be identified early, placed into supportive pathways, and continuously mentored.

The advantages of skill training include improved attendance and retention, enhanced relevance of education, increased employability, and stronger collaboration between schools, families, and communities. Challenges may include resource constraints, limited trained personnel, and the need for sustained community involvement. However, when supported by local expertise, community contributions, and effective management, skill training remains a highly effective intervention. For Bushu Secondary School, integrating skill training into a community-based model ensures that education is not only about academic achievement but also about preparing learners for meaningful participation in local economies. By linking schooling to practical livelihood opportunities, skill training reduces dropout risks and strengthens the long-term value of education for rural learners.

2.4.3 Resource Mobilization

Resource mobilization is a critical strategy in developing a community-based model to prevent and manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary School. Korten (1980) defines resource mobilization as the ability of communities and organizations to generate and manage resources locally for sustainable development initiatives. Within the Bushu context, effective prevention and management of dropout requires deliberate mobilization of financial, material, and human resources from schools, families, and the wider community. This ensures that key barriers to education particularly financial resources deprivation, lack of infrastructure, and limited learning materials are addressed in a sustainable and coordinated manner.

The approach is supported by Becker's (1964) human capital theory, which emphasizes that investment in education and skills development enhances productivity and long-term economic outcomes. It also aligns with Tinto's student integration model (1975; 1993), as the availability of resources improves learners' academic and social integration, thereby reducing dropout. Within this framework, income generating projects serve as a cornerstone for sustainability. Schools, in partnership with communities, can establish initiatives such as school gardens, poultry production, beekeeping, or small-scale manufacturing aligned with local economic activities in Shamva. These projects generate funds to subsidize school fees, provide uniforms and stationery, and support feeding programs. They also equip learners with practical skills, reinforcing the principles of Education 5.0, which promotes innovation, industrialization, and skills development.

Financial support mechanisms are equally important in addressing direct schooling costs. Community-based initiatives such as school development committees, savings groups, and partnerships with local businesses or NGOs can assist vulnerable learners with fees, examination costs, uniforms, and learning materials. This reduces economic pressure on families and ensures that learners are not excluded due to inability to pay. Such systems also strengthen social accountability, as community members collectively take responsibility for children's education.

Resource mobilization also extends to infrastructure development. Through community participation such as provision of labor, locally available materials, and fundraising activities schools can improve classrooms, sanitation facilities, vocational training workshops, and safe water sources. Improved infrastructure enhances learners' comfort, safety, and motivation to attend school regularly. To coordinate these efforts, a school-community resource mobilization committee composed of school authorities, parents, traditional leaders, and local stakeholders can oversee fundraising, manage income-generating projects, ensure transparency, and allocate resources effectively to priority areas such as vulnerable learners and critical infrastructure.

The benefits of resource mobilization include increased access to education, improved attendance and retention, enhanced community ownership, and greater sustainability of school programs. However, challenges may arise, including limited initial capital, mismanagement of funds, unequal distribution of resources, and dependency on external donors. Addressing these challenges requires strong governance systems, transparent financial management, and regular monitoring and evaluation.

For Bushu Secondary School, resource mobilization represents a vital pillar in building a sustainable, community-based model for dropout prevention. By pooling financial, material, and human resources, schools and communities can create resilient support systems that reduce barriers to education and promote long-term learner retention.

2.4.4 Career Guidance

Career guidance is a powerful community-based strategy for preventing and managing school dropout because it helps learners see clear connections between schooling, future employment, and life opportunities. Mair (2018), defines career guidance as a systematic program designed to assist individuals in making educational and occupational choices and managing their careers effectively. He emphasizes that career guidance encompasses information provision, counselling, and skill development. In rural contexts such as Shamva, where dropout is often influenced by deprivation of financial resources, limited career awareness, and low value placed on schooling, involving external community actors becomes essential.

Globally, career guidance has been shown to improve learner retention by raising aspirations and linking education to practical livelihood opportunities. Tinto's student integration model (Mussida & Parisi, 2020)supports this by highlighting those learners are more likely to persist when they are academically and socially integrated, and when education is perceived as relevant to future goals. Career guidance provides this relevance by exposing learners to diverse pathways and demonstrating the long-term benefits of completing education.

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa has increasingly adopted career guidance initiatives to address dropout. Programs that involve professionals, entrepreneurs, and community leaders in career talks and mentorship have been shown to reduce dropout by motivating learners and connecting schooling to employment opportunities. For example, farmers and agricultural extension officers demonstrate modern agribusiness as a profitable career requiring education, while miners emphasize the importance of science and mathematics qualifications for safe and formal employment. Similarly, small-scale entrepreneurs such as tailors and hairdressers highlight how literacy, numeracy, and business skills are essential for successful self-employment.

At Bushu Secondary School, career guidance can be implemented through structured programs involving diverse community actors. Doctors and nurses can guide learners on health-related

careers while addressing adolescent health issues such as teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Police officers and soldiers can provide insights into discipline, national service careers, and the importance of completing education. Engineers, mechanics, and ICT specialists can expose learners to technical and digital careers that require strong academic foundations. Local government officials and social workers can explain public service careers and provide support for learners facing social and economic challenges.

Career talks, mentorship programs, school visits, and career days serve as practical platforms for these actors to engage learners. Such initiatives help learners connect schooling with future livelihoods, raise aspiration levels, provide positive role models, and reduce the temptation to drop out for short-term income. The advantages of career guidance include improved learner retention, enhanced decision-making, increased motivation, and stronger community-school partnerships. Challenges may include limited availability of professionals in rural areas, resource constraints for organizing career events, and low parental involvement. However, when supported by community collaboration and effective school coordination, career guidance remains a highly effective intervention.

For Bushu Secondary School, career guidance strengthens learner engagement by making education meaningful and directly linked to future opportunities. By integrating community actors into career development programs, the school can reduce dropout, improve retention, and promote sustained educational participation among rural learners.

2.4.5 Community Participation

Community participation is a vital pillar in developing a community-based model to prevent and manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary School, as it involves individuals and communities in decision-making, planning, and implementation of educational initiatives ranging from passive involvement to full empowerment.

In rural contexts such as Sub-Saharan Africa, dropout is often driven by socio-economic constraints, cultural practices, and limited institutional support, making holistic approaches that engage parents, local leadership, and external stakeholders essential. Educational research highlights community participation as a sustainable strategy for improving learner retention because it fosters shared responsibility, local ownership, and context-specific solutions. Epstein's

theory of overlapping spheres of influence (1995) emphasizes that student success is shaped by collaboration between school, family, and community, while Tinto's student integration model (1975; 1993) underscores that retention depends on academic and social integration, both strengthened through community support. Practical strategies include educating parents on the importance of schooling, involving external stakeholders such as NGOs, government agencies, and churches to provide resources and support, and mobilizing local leadership structures like chiefs, village heads, and school development committees to enforce education-supportive norms and mobilize resources. The advantages of community participation include tackling root causes of dropout such as deprivation of financial resources and harmful cultural practices, improving retention and attendance, enhancing sustainability, and protecting vulnerable learners. However, challenges such as inconsistent participation, dependence on external actors, cultural resistance, and limited local capacity remain.

For Bushu Secondary School, community participation is foundational, ensuring dropout prevention becomes a shared responsibility and interventions are sustainable, culturally legitimate, and responsive to local realities.

2.4.6 Provision of Transport

Provision of transport is a critical but often overlooked component in developing a community-based model to prevent and manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary School. Long walking distances to school have consistently been identified as a major barrier to sustained attendance, contributing to absenteeism, fatigue, poor academic performance, and eventual dropout.

Colclough, Rose, and Tembon (2000) found that long distances disproportionately affect rural learners, especially girls, increasing the likelihood of irregular attendance and eventual dropout. Similarly, Sabates, Hossain, and Lewin (2013) argue that physical access to school is a key determinant of participation, noting that children who travel long distances are more likely to disengage due to exhaustion and safety concerns. In the African context, Lewin (2007) highlights that distance-related challenges are among the most significant structural barriers to achieving universal secondary education.

Providing transport at least once a day within a community-based model can therefore serve as both a preventive and corrective intervention. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological

systems theory (1979), which emphasizes that a child's development is influenced by multiple environmental systems. Transport reduces environmental barriers within the child's microsystem and ecosystem, thereby promoting consistent school participation. Bourdieu (1986) further emphasizes that access to resources constitutes social capital, which enhances educational outcomes by enabling learners to fully participate in schooling opportunities. Evidence from the World Bank (2018) shows that school transport programs in rural areas significantly reduce absenteeism and improve retention rates.

In addition to transport provision, the expansion of school infrastructure through the building of more schools within Bushu offers a long-term structural solution. Increasing the number of schools reduces the average distance learners must travel, thereby addressing the root cause of transport-related dropout. Filmer (2007) found that proximity to schools significantly increases enrollment and completion rates in developing countries, reinforcing the importance of accessibility in sustaining education.

However, while transport provision and school expansion offer substantial benefits, challenges remain. These include high costs of purchasing and maintaining vehicles, fuel expenses, poor road infrastructure, and the need for sustainable funding. There is also the risk of unequal access if transport resources are limited. Despite these challenges, the long-term benefits improved attendance, reduced dropout rates, and enhanced educational outcomes outweigh the difficulties when such interventions are well managed and supported by the community. For Bushu Secondary School, provision of transport is therefore a critical strategy, ensuring that learners overcome structural barriers to access and remain engaged in education.

2.6 RESEARCH GAP

Despite the implementation of various education policies and interventions, school dropout among secondary school students in rural Zimbabwe remains a persistent challenge. National statistics indicate that dropout rates at the secondary school level remain high, particularly in rural areas where socio-economic and cultural constraints are more pronounced (MoPSE, 2018; UNESCO, 2020). In specific rural settings such as Bushu Ward 11 in Shamva District, the problem of dropout appears to be more severe, with learners facing barriers such as long walking distances, food insecurity, limited access to educational support services, and entrenched cultural practices. Although interventions have been introduced, they are often insufficient, poorly coordinated, or

not adequately aligned with the local socio-cultural and economic realities of rural communities (MoPSE, 2019).

Existing studies have tended to focus on access to education rather than sustained retention and management of learners at risk of dropping out. For example, global and regional research emphasizes structural solutions such as school expansion, policy reforms, or financial support mechanisms, yet there is limited evidence of how schools, families, and communities can collectively integrate their efforts into a structured, community-based model. This imbalance underscores the need for research that situates dropout prevention within the lived realities of rural communities, recognizing them as active participants rather than passive beneficiaries of external interventions.

Furthermore, while theoretical frameworks such as Tinto's student integration model and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory have been widely applied to explain dropout, limited attention has been given to how these theories can be adapted into practical, community driven strategies in rural Zimbabwe. The daily practices employed by schools, families, and communities such as school feeding, skill training, resource mobilization, career guidance, and provision of transport are seldom documented in academic discourse as integrated interventions. This omission weakens the applicability of theoretical frameworks to real-world contexts, as they fail to capture the holistic and culturally embedded approaches necessary for rural settings.

By foregrounding Bushu Secondary School as a case study, this research seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering insights that not only enrich scholarly debates but also inform policy and community interventions. In doing so, it positions schools, families, and communities as indispensable actors in dropout prevention, thereby addressing a neglected dimension of research and contributing to the development of a context-specific and culturally responsive model for managing school dropout in rural Zimbabwe.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

It examined the causes and management of school dropout at Bushu secondary school, showing how socio-economic constraints, cultural barriers, long distances, and weak institutional support intersect to push learners out of education. The discussion drew on theories such as human capital,

student integration, ecological systems and overlapping spheres of influence to explain how resource mobilization, career guidance, community participation, and transport provision affect retention. Strategies like feeding programs, income projects, scholarships, and parental involvement were highlighted as critical, though often limited by poor coordination and resource constraints. The chapter concluded that sustainable dropout prevention requires strong governance, transparency, and culturally responsive, community-based framework integrating schools, families, and communities as key actors.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology is the science of studying how research is done systematically. It provides the procedures and techniques that guide the researcher throughout the study (Davidavičienė, 2018). The researcher notes that the nature of school dropout as a social and educational problem required the use of a qualitative methodology as it enables the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, views, and perceptions regarding the factors contributing to school dropout and the possible strategies for preventing and managing it at Bushu Secondary School. The participants will be selected purposively to ensure that those affected

3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy is a framework of ideas that influences how research is conducted, including the choice of methods and interpretation of findings (Cresswell, 2014). This study used an interpretivist research philosophy, which focuses on understanding social phenomena through the meanings individuals attach to their experiences. According to Bryman (2016), interpretivism is the understanding of human behavior from the participant's perspective, recognizing that reality is socially constructed. The philosophy was considered appropriate because school dropout is a complex social and educational issue shaped by learners' experiences, family circumstances, school environments, and community influences. Ontologically, interpretivism assumes that reality is multiple and socially constructed, meaning that stakeholders such as learners, parents and teachers may have different understanding of the causes of school dropout and ways of addressing it. Epistemologically, the philosophy assumes that knowledge is generated through interaction between the researcher and participants, allowing the researcher to understand participants' views, meanings, and experiences in depth.

Axiologically, interpretivism recognizes that research is value-laden and that the researcher's beliefs, experiences, and interactions form part of the research process. the interpretivist philosophy was suitable for this study because it enabled the researcher to identify the key factors contributing to school dropout among secondary school students, explore the strategies used by families, school, and communities to prevent and manage school dropout, and gather rich

contextual insights from participants. These insights provided a foundation for developing a context-specific model for preventing and managing school dropout at Bushu Secondary. By engaging directly with participants, the researcher obtained detailed information that informed the design of a practical and relevant dropout prevention and management model.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

Research approach refers to the overall plan or strategy that guides the process of conducting research, including the methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation used in the study ("A Book Review," 2017). This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Denzin & Lincoln (2018), define qualitative research as a situated activity that studies phenomena in their natural settings and seeks to interpret meanings people bring to them. The approach emphasizes depth, context and participant's perspectives rather than numerical measurement. The qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because school dropout is a complex social and educational issue influenced by variety of personal, family, school and community factors. Understanding the factors contributing to school dropout required collecting detailed information from learners who dropped out of school and teachers who had direct experience with the phenomenon at Bushu Secondary school. The approach enabled the researcher to gain in- depth insights into the experiences, perceptions, and views of participants regarding the causes of school dropout and the strategies used to prevent and manage it.

Guided by participants' narratives and experiences, the study explored the realities surrounding school dropout at Bushu Secondary School. The qualitative approach generated rich descriptive data that enhanced understanding of the factors contributing to school dropout and the existing interventions used by the school. The findings further informed the development of context specific model for preventing and managing school dropout at Bushu Secondary school. By focusing on participant's lived experiences and professional knowledge, the approach was suitable for addressing the study objectives for learner retention.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design refers to the overall plan or blueprint that guides the collection, measurement, and analysis of data in order to address the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study adopted a case study design to explore the factors contributing to school dropout among secondary school learners at Bushu secondary school, examine the strategies currently used to prevent ana

manage school dropout, and develop a model for preventing and managing school dropout at the school. According to Dulock (1993), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident. The case study was appropriate for this study because it enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of school dropout within the specific context of Bushu secondary school and its surrounding community. By focusing on a single case, the researcher was able to explore the social, economic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to school dropout among learners, as well as examine the existing strategies used by school to prevent and managed the problem. The design further allowed the researcher to gather detailed insights from learners who had dropped out of school and teachers who served as key informants, thereby providing rich contextual data regarding the causes of school dropout and possible interventions. The findings generated from this real-life context informed the development of a context specific model for preventing and managing school dropout at Bushu secondary school and may provide useful insights for addressing similar challenges in other rural secondary school in Zimbabwe.

3.4 TARGET POPULATION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), a target population refers to the specific group of individuals that an intervention or study is designed to reach, often identified based on vulnerability, risk factors, or shared characteristics relevant to the research problem. In this study, the target population comprises individuals within Bushu communal area who are directly or indirectly affected by school dropout among secondary school learners. The primary participants are secondary school learners who have dropped out of school. These learners are selected because they provide first-hand information on the lived experiences and factors contributing to school dropout, including socio-economic challenges, cultural expectations, school-related difficulties, and personal circumstances influencing school disengagement.

Secondary participants refer to individuals who do not necessarily have direct lived experience of dropping out but possess relevant knowledge, professional insight, or contextual understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, secondary participants include key informants such as teachers from Bushu Secondary School. These participants are included because of their direct interaction

with learners and their ability to provide insights into attendance patterns, academic performance, behavioral issues, and school-based interventions related to dropout.

3.4.1 Primary Population

According to, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) primary population refer to individuals who directly experience or embody the phenomenon under investigation and whose lived experiences provide essential insights into the research problem. In this study, the primary population consists of secondary school learners who dropped out of school between 2025 and 2026 within Bushu communal area. A total of 11 participants will be involved in the study. These participants are central to the study because they have direct lived experiences of school dropout and are therefore best positioned to provide first-hand information on the factors that contributed to their withdrawal from school. They consist of male and female learners who left secondary education due to various socio-economic, family-related, school-related, and personal challenges. Their inclusion is important because it enables the researcher to understand dropout from the perspective of those who have personally experienced it, thereby generating rich and contextualized data on the phenomenon.

3.4.2 Secondary Population

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), secondary populations refer to stakeholders whose roles intersect with the phenomenon under investigation, thereby providing complementary and contextual insights. In this study, the secondary population consists of teachers from Bushu Secondary School who serve as key informants. A total of 4 teachers will be selected to participate in the study. These participants are chosen because of their direct involvement with learners in an academic setting and their ability to provide informed perspectives on attendance patterns, learner behavior, academic performance, and school-related factors contributing to dropout. The inclusion of teachers as key informants is justified on the basis that they interact daily with learners and are often the first to identify signs of disengagement and dropout risk. Their professional experience enables them to provide valuable insights into institutional factors, classroom dynamics, and existing intervention strategies used to address school dropout. Therefore, their participation enriches the study by complementing the experiences of learners and ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of school dropout within Bushu Secondary School.

3.5 STUDY SETTING

Study setting refers to contextual background within which data is collected (Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted at Bushu Secondary School, located in Ward 11 of Shamva District in Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. Bushu communal area is a rural setting characterized by limited socio-economic resources, high levels of poverty, and heavy reliance on subsistence farming. The area also experiences restricted access to educational support services, conditions which collectively increase the vulnerability of secondary school learners to school dropout. The selection of Bushu communal area is informed by concerns raised in national and district-level education reports indicating persistently high dropout rates in rural schools. According to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE, 2018), rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe continue to record higher dropout rates and lower completion levels compared to urban schools, largely due to socio-economic hardships, early marriages, child labor, and long distances travelled to school. Although detailed ward-level statistics are limited, district education reports highlight communities such as Bushu as being among the areas most affected by school dropout challenges (MoPSE, 2019).

Bushu communal area was therefore selected as an appropriate study setting because it provides a relevant context for exploring the lived experiences of school dropout among secondary school learners. The setting enables the researcher to engage directly with learners, households, and community structures that influence educational participation and retention. This makes it possible to examine how socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors interact within a rural environment to shape school dropout patterns. The study setting is also suitable for the development of a community-based model for preventing and managing school dropout, as it allows for the collection of context-specific data from key stakeholders within the school and surrounding community. Insights generated from this setting are expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of school dropout and support the design of practical interventions relevant to similar rural contexts in Zimbabwe.

3.6 SAMPLE SIZE

In research, a sample refers to a selected group of individuals or units drawn from a larger target population, whose responses are used to draw conclusions about the wider population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Sample size refers to the actual number of participants included in the study, and it is influenced by factors such as the nature of the study, research objectives, availability of

participants, and practical constraints (Flick, 2011). In qualitative research, sample size is guided by the need to obtain rich, detailed, and in-depth information rather than statistical representativeness. In this study, the sample consists of 11 primary participants who are secondary school learners who dropped out of school between 2025 and 2026 in Bushu communal area, as well as 4 key informants who are teachers from Bushu Secondary School. The primary participants are included because they provide first-hand accounts of the lived experiences and factors that contributed to school dropout, including socio-economic challenges, family circumstances, school-related difficulties, and personal experiences influencing educational disengagement.

The key informants, who are teachers from Bushu Secondary School, are included because they possess direct professional experience with learners' academic progress, attendance patterns, and behavioral issues related to school dropout. Their perspectives are important in understanding school-based factors and institutional responses aimed at preventing and managing dropout cases. The selected sample size is considered appropriate for a qualitative study as it allows for in-depth engagement with participants while ensuring manageable data collection and analysis. It also enables the researcher to obtain diverse yet focused perspectives from learners and teachers, thereby generating rich and context-specific data on school dropout in Bushu Secondary School.

3.7 SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Sampling refers to the process of selecting a subset of individuals or units from a larger population to represent the whole population in a study (Taherdoost, 2016). Kothari (2013) further defines sampling technique as a definite procedure used by the researcher to select a sample from a given population for data collection. A sampling technique therefore refers to the specific method used to identify and select participants in a way that ensures relevance to the research objectives and adequacy of information gathered (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, two non-probability sampling techniques were used, namely purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

3.7.1 Purposive sampling technique

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics and the objectives of the study (Ahmed, 2024). It is also referred to as judgmental sampling, as the researcher selects individuals considered most knowledgeable and relevant to the research problem. Patton (2015) explains that purposive sampling is particularly useful in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to identify

information rich cases that provide deep and meaningful insights into the phenomenon under study. In this study, purposive sampling was used to select secondary school learners who dropped out of school between 2025 and 2026 in Bushu communal area, as well as key informants such as teachers from Bushu Secondary School. These participants were selected because they have direct experience and knowledge of school dropout and its contributing factors. The use of purposive sampling ensured that only participants who could provide relevant and context-specific information were included in the study, thereby enhancing the depth and quality of the data collected. Purposive sampling is justified in this study because it allows the researcher to intentionally select participants who are best positioned to provide informed perspectives on school dropout. By focusing on learners who have experienced dropout and teachers who interact with learners daily, the study was able to gather rich, detailed, and meaningful data that reflects the real conditions influencing school dropout at Bushu Secondary School.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

According to Creswell (2014), data collection refers to the systematic process of gathering information from selected sources in order to answer research questions and evaluate research findings. In this study, data were collected using qualitative data collection methods, specifically focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

3.8.1 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews refer to insights that may not be available from ordinary participants (Akhter, 2022). Key informant interviews were used to collect data from teachers at Bushu Secondary School who are directly involved in learners' academic progress and school attendance monitoring. In this study, four teachers were interviewed as key informants.

Key informant interviews are qualitative data collection method used to obtain in-depth and expert information from individuals who have direct knowledge of a specific issue. The selected teachers were included because they interact daily with learners and are able to provide informed perspectives on attendance patterns, academic performance, behavioral challenges, and school-related factors contributing to dropout. A semi-structured interview guide was used to allow flexibility in questioning while ensuring that key areas related to school dropout were covered. The interviews were conducted in a manner that allowed participants to freely express their views, and responses were audio-recorded with permission and supplemented with note-taking. The use

of key informant interviews in this study was appropriate because it provided institutional and professional insights that complemented the lived experiences of learners. This helped to generate a more comprehensive understanding of school dropout at Bushu Secondary School and supported the development of practical, context-specific interventions.

3.8.2 Focus Group Discussions

According to, Morgan (1997), focus group refers to generated data through interaction among participants. The study utilized focus group discussions to collect data from secondary school learners who dropped out of school between 2025 and 2026 in Bushu communal area. Neuman (2014) describes focus group discussions as an exploratory qualitative method used to gather participants' views, experiences, and perceptions through group interaction, allowing for deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon. In this study, one focus group discussion was conducted with 11 learners who had dropped out of school. The use of a single focus group was appropriate as it allowed participants to share and reflect on their experiences collectively, while also enabling interaction that generated deeper discussion on the factors contributing to school dropout. The focus group was conducted in a safe, private, and convenient location to ensure participants' comfort and confidentiality.

A semi-structured discussion guide with open-ended questions was used to facilitate the discussion, allowing participants to freely express their experiences while keeping the discussion aligned with the research objectives. With the consent of participants, the discussion was audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of the data. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the process.

The use of focus group discussions was appropriate in this study because it enabled the collection of rich, in-depth data through shared experiences and interaction among participants. It also allowed the researcher to identify common patterns, challenges, and lived experiences related to school dropout in Bushu Secondary School.

3.9 Data presentation and Analysis

Data presentation refers to the systematic organization and arrangement of collected information in a manner that makes it clear, meaningful, and accessible for interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Data analysis refers to data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions (Notten &

Kaplan, 2021) In this study, data presentation involved the transcription of interviews and focus group discussions conducted with secondary school learners who had dropped out of school and teachers from Bushu Secondary School. The transcribed data were then organized into meaningful categories guided by the study objectives, including factors contributing to school dropout, existing strategies for managing and preventing dropout, and inputs for the development of a community-based model.

Data analysis refers to the systematic process of examining, interpreting, and making sense of qualitative data in order to identify patterns, themes, and relationships (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, thematic analysis was adopted as it is suitable for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data based on participants' experiences and perspectives. This approach enabled the researcher to analyses how learners and teachers at Bushu Secondary School understand the causes of school dropout, the strategies currently in place, and the possible interventions for improving learner retention.

Thematic analysis was conducted through the following stages:

- **Familiarization with the data** –The researcher transcribed all interviews and focus group discussions and read through the transcripts repeatedly to gain a deep understanding of participants' responses in relation to school dropout at Bushu Secondary School.
- **Generating initial codes** – The researcher identified and coded meaningful segments of data related to the study objectives, particularly causes of school dropout, existing intervention strategies, and suggested solutions.
- **Searching for themes** – Codes were grouped into broader themes such as socio-economic factors, school-related factors, family influences, current dropout prevention strategies, and proposed community-based solutions.
- **Reviewing themes** – The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data and were aligned with the research objectives.
- **Defining and naming themes** – Each theme was clearly defined and named in a way that reflected its relevance to understanding school dropout and informing model development.
- **Producing the report** – The final stage involved presenting findings in a narrative form supported by direct quotations from participants, while linking the themes to existing literature and the study objectives to ensure meaningful interpretation.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.10.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent is the voluntary agreement of an individual to participate in research based on adequate knowledge and understanding of the relevant information (Emanuel et..,2000). One of the primary ethical principles is informed consent, which requires researchers to brief potential participants with comprehensive information about the study. This includes details about the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. It is important that researchers facilitate an environment where individuals feel comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). This sees that participants are fully informed; researchers empower them to make knowledgeable decisions regarding their involvement and experiences. This process fosters a sense of agency and respect for individual autonomy, as participants are made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any negative consequences.

3.10.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to protecting participants' identities and the information they provide from unauthorised access, disclosure, or misuse (Kumpošt & Matyáš, 2009). During the course of the study, the researcher will consider confidentiality of participants as another critical aspect of ethical research. It plays a vital role in protecting participants' identities, especially in studies involving sensitive topics. (LaFrance & Bull, 2009). However, the researcher will be obligated to implement measures by using pseudonyms that safeguard personal information and ensure secure data storage. Anonymizing data is a key practice that prevents the identification of participants, thus preserving their privacy. When participants feel assured that their information will remain private, they are more likely to share honest and candid responses, which enrich the quality of the data collected.

3.10.3 Minimizing Harm

According to, Flicker & Lunt (2010) minimizing harm as the researcher's duty to anticipate, prevent, and manage any physical, emotional, psychological, or social harm that participants may experience during the research process. Social work ethics are grounded in avoiding harm and promoting well-being, requiring practitioners to carefully assess risks in interventions (Lelkes et al., 2012). In this study, minimizing harm was upheld by ensuring that participants were not exposed to any physical or emotional discomfort during data collection. Participants were treated

with dignity and respect, and sensitive questions were asked carefully to avoid causing distress. The researcher also ensured that participants were free to skip any question they were uncomfortable answering at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and privacy were maintained throughout the research process to protect participants from any possible harm. Through these measures, the researcher upheld the ethical principle of 'do no harm' during the study.

3.10.4 Voluntary Participation

According to, Report (1979) identifies voluntary participation as a key requirement of ethical research stating that participation must be free from coercion or undue influence. Voluntary participation and right to withdraw is crucial for fostering trust among participants, stakeholders, and the broader community. Researcher will inform the participants of their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. This openness allows others to evaluate the validity and reliability of the research, facilitating a collaborative approach to knowledge advancement. When researchers practice respect to participant's autonomy and reduce the risk of coercion especially where traditional leaders or community elders are involved, they enhance public participation.

3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the extent to which findings are credible, consistent, and grounded in the participants' lived realities, ensuring that the study is both rigorous and authentic (Iphofen, 2020). It is commonly established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which together enhance the quality and rigour of qualitative inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

3.11.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence that the findings accurately represent the experiences and meanings expressed by participants (Shenton, 2004). In this study, credibility was ensured through triangulation of data sources, which included focus group discussions with 11 secondary school learners who dropped out of school and key informant interviews with 4 teachers from Bushu Secondary School. Member checking was also applied, where participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm interpretations of their responses. These strategies ensured that the findings reflected authentic accounts of the factors contributing to school dropout in Bushu Secondary School.

3.11.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which qualitative findings can be applied or transferred to other contexts, depending on the level of detail provided about the research setting and participants (Polit & Beck, 2010). In this study, transferability was ensured through thick and detailed descriptions of Bushu Secondary School and Bushu communal area, including socio-economic and educational conditions influencing learner dropout. By providing rich contextual information, the study allows readers to determine whether the findings may be applicable to similar rural school environments in Zimbabwe.

3.11.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of research findings and the extent to which the research process is logical, traceable, and well-documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, dependability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail that documented all stages of the research process, including data collection procedures, instruments used, and steps followed during thematic analysis. This systematic documentation enhances transparency and allows the research process to be reviewed or replicated in similar contexts.

3.11.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which research findings are shaped by participants' responses rather than researcher bias, motivations, or assumptions (Martin et al., 2007). In this study, confirmability was ensured through the use of direct quotations from both learners and teachers, triangulation of data sources, and reflexivity throughout the research process. These measures ensured that the findings on school dropout at Bushu Secondary School were grounded in participants' experiences and not influenced by the researcher's subjectivity.

3.12 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study acknowledges several limitations that may affect the scope and interpretation of the findings. As a qualitative case study conducted at Bushu Secondary School, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other rural or urban schools in Zimbabwe due to contextual differences (Patel, 2016a). The study also relied on self-reported data from learners and teachers, which may be influenced by recall bias or social desirability bias. Furthermore, the sensitive nature of school dropout may have limited the extent to which some participants fully disclosed personal or household challenges. Limited availability of teachers due to school responsibilities may also have affected scheduling and depth of engagement. Despite these limitations, the study maintained

methodological rigor through confidentiality, triangulation of data sources, and careful thematic analysis to ensure credible and contextually grounded findings.

3.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the methodology used to investigate school dropout among secondary school learners at Bushu Secondary School in Shamva District. The study was guided by a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for exploring lived experiences and social realities surrounding school dropout in a rural context. A qualitative research approach was adopted to allow an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon within its real-life setting. The study focused on 11 learners who dropped out of school between 2025 and 2026 as primary participants, and 4 teachers as key informants. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience and knowledge of school dropout. Data were collected through one focus group discussion with learners and key informant interviews with teachers. Thematic analysis was used to analyses the data, allowing patterns and themes to emerge from participants' experiences regarding the causes of dropout and possible intervention strategies. Ethical principles including respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice guided the study throughout the research process. The chapter also highlighted limitations such as contextual restrictions and reliance on self-reported data. Overall, the chapter provided a clear methodological foundation for the study and ensured that the research is ethically sound, systematic, and capable of generating meaningful insights for addressing school dropout in Bushu communal area.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the findings of the study on developing a community-based model to prevent and manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary school. The findings are based on data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions conducted with 15 participants, comprising 11 learners who had dropped out of school and 4 key informants who were teachers at Bushu Secondary school. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, which are appropriate for exploring participant's experiences, views and perspectives regarding school dropout. Data collected from participants were analyzed using thematic analysis, where responses were organized into themes and sub- themes according to recuring patterns emerging from the interviews and discussions. The interpretation and analysis of the findings were guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which provided a framework for understanding how different environmental systems such as family, school and the wider society. The finding in this chapter is presented according to the research objectives outlined in chapter one. Direct quotations from participants are included to support the analysis and discussion of the findings.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Demographic characteristics are classifiable features of a population (Sharma, 2017). The demographic characteristics of the study participants provide essential context for understanding the findings related to school dropouts at Bushu Secondary School. This section summarizes key demographics such as age, gender, and education level, which are crucial for analyzing how these factors affect school dropouts.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of School drop outs

PARTICIPANT	AGE	GENDER	LEVEL OF EDUCATION
Participant 1	17 years	Male	Form 3
Participant 2	16 years	Male	Form 3
Participant 3	16 years	Male	Form 3
Participant 4	16 years	Female	Form 4
Participant 5	18 years	Female	Form 4
Participant 6	15 years	Female	Form 2
Participant 7	14 years	Female	Form 1
Participant 8	15 years	Male	Form 2
Participant 9	17 years	Female	Form 4
Participant 10	14 years	Male	Form 2
Participant 11	16 years	Female	Form 4

Table 4.1.2 Demographic Characteristics of Key informants

PARTICIPANT	AGE	GENDER	LEVEL OF EDUCATION
Key informant 1	52 years	FEMALE	diploma in education
Key informant 2	55 years	Female	Degree in education
Key informant 3	57 years	Male	degree in education
Key informant 4	50 years	Male	degree in Education

The tables above present the demographic characteristics of both school dropouts and key informants who participated in the study. The participants were drawn from different age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds in order to capture diverse experiences and perspectives regarding school dropout among secondary school students. The inclusion of both male and female participants enabled the researcher to gather balanced views on the development of a model to

prevent and manage school dropout. The majority of the school dropout participants were adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 years, reflecting the age group most affected by dropout in secondary schools. Their educational levels ranged from Form 1 to Form 4, which provided important insights into how dropout occurs at different stages of secondary education. The inclusion of younger participants was significant because it provided lived experiences and firsthand accounts of the challenges leading to school dropout.

The key informants consisted of experienced education professionals aged between 50 and 57 years, comprising both males and females with diploma and degree qualifications in education. Their professional knowledge and long-term involvement in the education sector contributed valuable expert opinions on the development of a model to prevent ana manage school dropout at Bushu Secondary school. Although the distribution of participants was not equal in terms of gender and educational level, this was influenced by participant availability and willingness to participate in the study. The diversity of participants enhanced the credibility and reliability of the findings as it allowed the researcher to obtain varied opinions, experiences, and interpretations concerning school dropout among secondary school students.

4.2. KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

This theme presents the major factors contributing to school dropout among secondary school learners at Bushu Secondary School. The research revealed spirituality, poor modeling of parents, proximity to school, and financial constraints are major causes of school dropout.

4.2.1 Spiritual factors

Participants highlighted that spirituality, when misapplied, can contribute to school dropout. Families that prioritize religious activities over education often disrupt children's learning. Instead of complementing schooling, excessive church involvement replaces it, leaving learners behind academically and discouraged. Participants highlighted that their parents believed church activities were more important than school which made them attend daily services and prayer meetings, even during class hours and because of this they fell behind eventually losing interest in school altogether. This was recorded from participant 1 who was quoted verbatim saying,

> *"I dropped out because my parents believed church activities were more important than school. They made me attend daily services and prayer meetings, even during*

class hours. At first, I tried to balance both, but missing lessons meant I fell behind. Eventually, I lost interest in school altogether because I was always absent and could not catch up." **(Participant 1)**

Similarly Participant 4 also agreed with this view and was quoted verbatim saying,

"In my family, religion was placed above education. I was taken to prayer camps for weeks, and when I returned, I had missed too much. Teachers scolded me for not doing assignments, and classmates laughed at me. I felt discouraged and ashamed, so I stopped going back to school." **(Participant 4)**

Key informant 1 also had this to say

"We often see learners absent because of religious commitments. Instead of complementing education, spirituality sometimes replaces it. When children are pulled out of class for church activities, they fall behind academically, and this repeated absence eventually leads to dropout." **(Key informant 1)**

Participant testimonies reveal that religious commitments often overshadow educational priorities, creating a direct pathway to school dropout. Participant 1 explained that daily services and prayer meetings were prioritized over class attendance, which led to repeated absences, academic decline, and eventual disengagement from school. Participant 4 reinforced this view, describing how prolonged stays at prayer camps resulted in missed lessons, teacher reprimands, and peer ridicule, which fostered feelings of discouragement and shame until school attendance ceased altogether. Key Informant 1 confirmed that such patterns are common, noting that spirituality sometimes replaces education rather than complementing it, with children being withdrawn from class for church activities that ultimately compromise their academic progress.

The lens of ecological systems theory highlights how religion interacts with multiple systemic layers to influence dropout. At the microsystem level, the child's immediate learning environment is disrupted when religious activities conflict with school schedules, leading to academic gaps and emotional strain. Within the mesosystem, the relationship between family and school becomes strained as caregivers prioritize spiritual obligations over educational responsibilities, resulting in tension with teachers and alienation from peers. At the exosystem level, religious institutions

indirectly shape educational outcomes by organizing extended activities such as prayer camps that remove learners from classrooms.

These findings align with existing literature that documents the negative impact of religious practices when they displace schooling. Studies in Ghana have shown that prolonged participation in spiritual camps leads to absenteeism and eventual dropout (Adu-Gyamfi, 2015), while research in South Africa highlights how conflicting cultural and religious obligations undermine school attendance and performance (Patel, 2016b). Taken together, the testimonies and literature illustrate that although religion can provide moral guidance, its misalignment with educational priorities creates systemic barriers to learning. Within the ecological framework, caregiver decisions and institutional practices converge to displace schooling, reinforcing dropout risks. Interventions must therefore balance respect for spiritual practices with safeguarding children's right to uninterrupted education, ensuring that religious devotion does not compromise academic continuity.

4.2.2 Poor Modelling by Parents

Caregivers interviewed strongly believed that their behavior strongly influences children's attitudes toward education. When parents model irresponsibility through substance abuse, unstable relationships, or neglect, children internalize these patterns. The researcher was made aware that Poor modeling undermines the value of schooling and pushes learners toward dropout. Participant 7 had this to say,

> *"My mother used to bring different men around and argued loudly. I lost respect for her rules and copied that lifestyle. I stopped listening to her advice about school because her actions contradicted her words. Soon I stopped attending altogether, and no one seemed to care."* **(Participant 7)**

Participant 3 also said,

> *"My father drinks heavily and never talk about school. Watching him, I thought education was useless. I started skipping classes, spending time with friends who also didn't care about school. Eventually, I dropped out because I believed there was no point in studying when my own parent showed no responsibility."* **(Participant 3)**

Key informant 3 who stated,

> *"Children mirror their parents. When caregivers model irresponsibility, students disengage from school. We see learners who lose motivation because their parents show no commitment to education. Poor parental modeling is a silent but powerful driver of dropout."* **(Key informant 3)**

Parental modeling stressed as a critical factor in shaping children's attitudes toward education and ultimately influencing dropout. When caregivers demonstrate irresponsible or contradictory behaviors, children internalize these patterns and disengage from schooling. Accounts of parents who argued loudly, engaged in unstable relationships, or neglected their responsibilities illustrate how such actions erode respect for authority and diminish the credibility of parental guidance. In these circumstances, children begin to view education as irrelevant, mirroring the lifestyle choices they observe at home. Exposure to parental neglect, substance abuse, or indifference toward schooling creates a perception that academic achievement holds little value, leading to absenteeism and eventual withdrawal from school. Observations from key informants reinforce this view, noting that children mirror their parents and that poor parental modeling silently but powerfully drives dropout.

Ecological Systems Theory provides a useful lens for understanding these dynamics. At the microsystem level, the child's immediate environment is destabilized when caregivers fail to embody responsibility, undermining the consistency of rules and expectations around schooling. Within the mesosystem, the relationship between family and school becomes strained, as parental neglect weakens the child's engagement with teachers and peers. At the exosystem level, parental lifestyles indirectly shape children's social networks, exposing them to peers who reinforce negative attitudes toward education. At the macrosystem level, cultural norms that tolerate or normalize irresponsible parental behavior perpetuate cycles of disengagement, embedding dropout risks within broader societal structures. These insights align with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that children acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. When caregivers model irresponsibility, children replicate these patterns, often at the expense of their education. Regional studies further confirm this relationship: structured parental monitoring programs in Malawi reduced truancy and delinquency by limiting exposure to deviant peer groups, while caregiver involvement in South Africa lowered absenteeism and gang

affiliation. Such evidence underscores that parental modeling is not a peripheral influence but a central determinant of school engagement.

In synthesis, poor parental modeling undermines the credibility of caregivers, erodes respect for authority, and fosters disengagement from education. Within the ecological framework, the convergence of family dysfunction, peer influence, and cultural tolerance of irresponsible behavior creates systemic barriers to schooling. Effective interventions must therefore prioritize caregiver education and support, ensuring that parents embody responsibility and commitment to education. By reinforcing positive behavioral patterns at home, caregivers can strengthen children's motivation to remain in school and reduce the risk of dropout.

4.2.3. Long distance to School

Accounts from participants and key informants highlighted that distance to school is a cause of school dropout. It was reviewed that Learners who travel long distances face fatigue, lateness, and safety risks, especially girls which directly affects attendance and retention, making it a critical factor in dropout. Also, learners were alleged to walk more than 8 kilometers every day to reach school. By the time they arrive they will be exhausted and often late. Participant 2 forwarded this idea saying,

> *"I walked more than 8 kilometers every day to reach school. By the time I arrived, I was exhausted and often late. Teachers punished me for lateness, and I felt embarrassed. After some time, I stopped going because the journey was too long and draining."* **(Participant 2)**

Participant 6 was also of the same view and had this to say

> *"As a girl, I feared walking alone such a long distance. Sometimes men harassed me on the way, and my parents worried about my safety. They eventually told me to stay home, and that's how I dropped out. The distance made school unsafe and discouraging."* **Participant 6**

Key informant 4 also had this to say

"Distance is a structural barrier. Learners who travel long distances lose motivation and attendance drops, especially among girls who face safety risks. Without nearby schools or safe transport, dropout becomes inevitable." **Key informant 4**

Distance to school manifest as a structural barrier that directly contributes to dropout. Accounts reveal that long daily walks left learners exhausted late and embarrassed with punitive responses from teachers further discouraging attendance. For girls, the challenge was compounded by safety concerns, including harassment on the way to school and parental fears about vulnerability during long commutes. In such cases, families often decided to withdraw children altogether, prioritizing safety over education. Key informant observations confirm that distance undermines motivation and attendance, particularly among girls, and without nearby schools or safe transport, dropout becomes almost inevitable.

Viewed through Ecological Systems Theory, the impact of distance operates across multiple levels. At the microsystem level, the child's immediate experience of fatigue, lateness, and harassment directly undermines learning and emotional well-being. Within the mesosystem, strained interactions between family and school emerge, as parents prioritize safety while teachers penalize lateness, creating conflicting pressures that weaken the learner's engagement. At the exosystem level, the absence of accessible infrastructure, such as nearby schools or reliable transport, indirectly shapes educational outcomes by making attendance burdensome. At the macrosystem level, broader structural inequalities in rural and peri-urban areas perpetuate the problem, embedding geographic disadvantage into the educational system.

These findings resonate with literature that identifies distance as a critical determinant of dropout Studies in rural Kenya and Malawi have shown that learners walking long distances face higher absenteeism and dropout rates, with girls disproportionately affected due to safety risks (Ramachandran et al., 2012). Research in Zimbabwe similarly highlights that inadequate school infrastructure in rural districts forces children to travel long distances, reducing attendance and increasing dropout (Chireshe & Shumba, 2011). Such evidence confirms that distance is not merely a logistical issue but a systemic barrier that interacts with gender, safety, and institutional responses to shape educational outcomes.

In overall, the testimonies illustrate that long distances to school create physical exhaustion, emotional discouragement, and safety risks that converge to push learners out of education. Within the ecological framework, the interplay of family decisions, school practices, community infrastructure, and structural inequalities reinforces dropout risks. Effective interventions must therefore address both the physical accessibility of schools and the safety of learners, particularly girls, by expanding school infrastructure, providing safe transport, and aligning institutional practices with the realities of learners' journeys.

4.2.4 Financial Constraints

The participants highlighted those financial constraints is one of the key factors contributing to school dropout at Bushu Secondary School. The researcher was made aware of most parents are failing to provide for basic school needs such as timely payment of school fees, provision of stationery and other necessities. The effect to provide school requirement results in student being frequently being sent home to collect fees and other school requirements. This creates an inferiority complex among levels resulting in them to stay at home, even absconding class. Participant 2 said,

> *"My parents couldn't afford fees, uniforms, or books. I felt embarrassed when classmates had everything and I had nothing. Teachers sent me home several times for unpaid fees, and eventually I stopped going back because poverty made it impossible to continue."* **Participant 2**

Participant 9 was also of the same view and had this to say

> *"I wanted to learn, but poverty stood in the way. Sometimes I went to school hungry, without proper clothes or stationery. I felt ashamed and discouraged, and after being sent home repeatedly, I gave up and dropped out."* **Participant 9**

Key informant 1 also added

> *"Financial hardship is the most common reason for dropout. Without subsidies or support, families cannot sustain education. We see bright learners forced out of school simply because their parents cannot pay fees or provide basic materials."* **Key informant 1**

Financial constraints emanated as one of the most pervasive and systemic drivers of school dropout. Testimonies reveal that financial hardship prevents families from meeting basic

educational requirements such as fees, uniforms, and books. Learners describe feelings of embarrassment when classmates had the necessary materials while they had none, and repeated exclusion from class due to unpaid fees eventually led to permanent withdrawal. Others highlight the emotional toll of attending school hungry or without proper clothing, which fostered shame and discouragement until dropout became the only option. Key informant perspectives reinforce this reality, emphasizing that financial hardship is the most common reason for dropout, with bright learners forced out of school simply because their parents cannot sustain the costs of education.

Analyzed through Ecological Systems Theory, poverty operates across multiple layers to shape educational outcomes. At the microsystem level, the child's immediate experience of hunger, lack of materials, and repeated exclusion from class undermines both academic performance and self-esteem. Within the mesosystem, strained interactions between family and school emerge as caregivers fail to meet institutional demands, leading to conflict and eventual disengagement. At the exosystem level, broader community economic decline reduces household income opportunities, indirectly shaping children's access to education. At the macrosystem level, structural poverty and national economic instability perpetuate exclusion, embedding financial hardship into the educational system as a systemic barrier.

These findings are consistent with global and regional literature. UNICEF (2018) notes that financial is a leading cause of educational exclusion, with children from low-income households disproportionately affected by dropout. Research in Kenya (Mutua, (2015 & South Africa Leoschut,2009 similarly highlights that poverty-driven deprivation undermines school attendance and increases vulnerability to delinquency. In Zimbabwe, studies confirm that inability to pay fees and lack of school materials remain central to dropout, particularly in rural and peri-urban communities where economic opportunities are scarce (Chireshe & Shumba, 2011). Such evidence underscores that poverty is not merely a household issue but a systemic determinant of educational participation.

In overall, financial constraints creates material deprivation, emotional strain, and social exclusion that converge to push learners out of school. Within the ecological framework, the interplay of family incapacity, institutional exclusion, community economic decline, and structural inequality reinforces dropout risks. Effective interventions must therefore address both household-level

support and broader socio-economic reforms, including subsidies, school feeding programs, and accessible educational materials. By mitigating the impact of poverty across ecological layers, such measures can sustain children's participation in education and reduce dropout rates.

4.3 EXISTING STRATEGIES USED BY SCHOOLS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES TO MANAGE SCHOOL DROPOUT

4.3.1 Child Profiling

Participants explained that child profiling is used by schools to identify learners at risk of dropping out. By monitoring attendance, performance, and behavior, teachers can detect early warning signs and intervene before students disengage completely. This proactive approach helps schools provide targeted support, though its effectiveness depends on family cooperation. The research also reviewed that at school, teachers kept records of those who missed classes, they hand in glove with child care worker. Participant reviewed child care worker visit a child's homestead to understand why they skipped often and sometimes called their parents, but nothing changed at home. Even though they tried, they eventually dropped out because the problems were bigger than school could handle." Participant 3 was recorded saying,

> *"At my school, teachers used to track students who missed classes often. I was on that list because I skipped lessons. They called my parents and tried to help, but my family didn't respond. Without proper follow-up, I eventually dropped out."* **Participant 3**

Participant 2 added that

> *"I remember being profiled as a child at risk because I was always absent. Teachers spoke to me and encouraged me to attend, but the problems at home were too big. Even though they noticed me, I still left school."* **Participant 2**

Key informant 1

> *"Child profiling helps us identify learners who are vulnerable. We monitor attendance and performance, and once we see patterns of absenteeism, we intervene. It doesn't always stop dropout, but it gives us a chance to act early."* **Key informant 1**

Child profiling and monitoring of attendance martialized as an important strategy in identifying learners at risk of dropout. Accounts reveal that schools often tracked students who missed classes frequently, placing them on lists for closer observation. Teachers attempted interventions by contacting parents and encouraging learners to attend, but without adequate family response or support, these efforts were insufficient. Learners described being profiled as vulnerable and receiving encouragement from teachers, yet persistent problems at home overshadowed these interventions, leading to eventual disengagement. Key informant perspectives confirm that child profiling provides an opportunity to act early by monitoring attendance and performance, though it does not always prevent dropout.

Analyzed through Ecological Systems Theory, child profiling reflects the interaction of multiple systemic layers. At the microsystem level, teachers directly engage with learners, identifying absenteeism and attempting corrective measures. Within the mesosystem, the effectiveness of interventions depends on collaboration between school and family; when caregivers fail to respond, the child remains unsupported and dropout risks persist. At the exosystem level, institutional practices such as profiling and monitoring shape educational outcomes indirectly, offering structural mechanisms to detect vulnerability. At the macrosystem level, broader cultural and policy frameworks determine whether schools have the resources and authority to sustain such interventions, influencing their overall impact on dropout prevention.

The findings support previous studies which found the importance of early identification of at-risk learners. Research in South Africa has shown that systematic monitoring of attendance helps schools anticipate dropout and design targeted interventions (Mncube & Harber, 2013). Studies in Malawi similarly highlight that structured monitoring programs reduce truancy and delinquency by limiting exposure to deviant peer groups (Scarce, 1995). International evidence from Italy demonstrates that participatory monitoring enhances accountability and reduces dropout rates (Cavadini, 2016). Such evidence underscores that while profiling alone cannot eliminate dropout, it provides a critical foundation for timely intervention.

The study therefore concludes that, child profiling represents a proactive institutional strategy that enables schools to detect vulnerability and attempt early corrective action. Within the ecological framework, its effectiveness depends on the interplay between teacher vigilance, family cooperation, institutional capacity, and broader policy support. When families fail to respond,

profiling loses its preventive power, highlighting the need for integrated approaches that strengthen caregiver involvement and community support. By embedding monitoring within a holistic system of care, schools can transform profiling from a reactive measure into a sustainable strategy for reducing dropout

4.3.2 Counseling

Participants spotlighted that counseling was identified as a vital strategy to address emotional, social, and academic challenges that contribute to dropout. Through counseling, learners receive guidance, encouragement, and coping mechanisms to deal with stress, peer pressure, and family problems. Participant reviewed that, teachers noticed that they were struggling with family issue and they were referred to guidance and counselor teacher and it helped them but it was not enough without family support, they end dropping out of school.

Participant 11 was recorded saying that

> *"I was struggling with peer pressure and family issues. When the Guidance counselor spoke to me, I felt understood. Counseling gave me hope, but because my parents didn't support me, I still dropped out. It showed me how important emotional support is."* **Participant 11**

Participant 8 was also of the same view with participant 9 and had this to say,

> *"Counseling helped me when I was depressed about failing exams. The counselor encouraged me to try again and gave me advice. For a while, I stayed in school, but later financial problems forced me out. Counseling works, but it needs family support too."* **Participant 9**

Key Informant 3 also added

> *"Counseling is vital in addressing emotional and social issues that lead to dropout. It helps learners cope with stress, peer influence, and family challenges. Without counseling, many students would leave school much earlier."* **Key informant 3**

Counseling emphasized as a vital intervention in addressing the emotional and social challenges that contribute to school dropout. Testimonies reveal that learners struggling with peer pressure, family issues, or academic failure found hope and encouragement through counseling sessions.

Emotional support from school counselors helped them cope with stress and depression, motivating them to remain in school for a time. However, the absence of sustained family support and persistent financial hardship ultimately undermined these gains, leading to dropout despite the positive impact of counseling. Key informant perspectives reinforce this view, emphasizing that counseling plays a crucial role in helping learners manage stress, peer influence, and family challenges, and without it, many students would leave school much earlier.

According to, Ecological Systems Theory, counseling operates across multiple systemic layers. At the microsystem level, counselors provide direct emotional support to learners, helping them navigate personal struggles and reinforcing resilience. Within the mesosystem, counseling bridges the gap between school and family, but its effectiveness is limited when caregivers fail to reinforce the guidance provided. At the exosystem level, institutional structures that embed counseling services within schools indirectly shape educational outcomes by offering learners coping mechanisms. At the macrosystem level, cultural and policy frameworks determine the extent to which counseling is institutionalized within education systems, influencing its sustainability and reach.

Further literature confirms the importance of counseling in preventing dropout. Studies in Malawi have shown that structured counseling programs reduce truancy and delinquency by equipping learners with coping strategies (Chirwa, 2019). Research in South Africa highlights that school-based counseling lowers absenteeism and improves learner engagement, particularly when combined with caregiver involvement (Scott, 2005a). International evidence also supports this view, with counseling interventions in Italy enhancing accountability and reducing dropout rates (Scott, 2005b). Such evidence confirms that counseling is not merely a supportive measure but a critical component of dropout prevention strategies.

It can therefore be argued that, counseling provides learners with emotional resilience and coping mechanisms that mitigate the impact of peer pressure, family dysfunction, and academic stress. Within the ecological framework, its effectiveness depends on the interplay between counselor support, family reinforcement, institutional capacity, and cultural acceptance. When counseling is not backed by family involvement or broader structural support, its impact is limited, and dropout risks persist. Effective interventions must therefore integrate counseling into the school curriculum, strengthen caregiver participation, and ensure policy frameworks sustain emotional

support services. By embedding counseling within a holistic system of care, schools can reduce dropout rates and promote learner well-being.

4.3.3 Reinforcement of laws

The research reviewed that at the school of study reinforcement of laws by traditional leader, chief Bushu as a strategy in place to prevent and manage school dropout within the community. Participants revealed that the chief works together with school, families, village heads, and community members to discourage early marriage, child labor, drug abuse, illegal mining, and school absenteeism. Community campaigns and traditional gathering such as Dare raMambo are also used to educate parents and community members about the importance of education. Participant 12 was recorded saying

> *'Chief Bushu helps children by ensuring that every child attend school. Parents are encouraged to work hard so that children can go to school and get an education for a butter future.'* **Participant 3**

Participant 8 also said that

> *'Chief Bushu works closely with the community to fight against child abuse and to ensure that children attend school instead of engaging in harmful activities. Chief Bushu has by-laws that protect children from abuse. Those who violate these laws are punished. The chief also helps children who do not have birth certificates so that they can access education. The chief also encourages parents to support their children's schooling'.* **Participant 8**

Key informant 2 added that,

> '*Every Sunday during the Dare raMambo, the chief encourages parents to send children to school and discourages child labor. Campaigns are held in communities where traditional leaders educate people about children's rights and the importance of education'.* **Key informant 2**

The research revealed that traditional leadership plays a significant role in promoting children's education and preventing school dropout within the community. Participants emphasized that

Chief Bushu actively encourages parents to prioritize education and work hard to support their children's schooling. The testimonies further demonstrate that the chief works collaboratively with the community to combat child abuse, discourage child labor, and ensure that children remain in school instead of engaging in harmful activities. The establishment of by-laws protecting children and punishing offenders reflects the commitment of traditional leadership in safeguarding children's rights and educational opportunities. Additionally, the chief's efforts in assisting children to obtain birth certificates show how traditional leaders help remove structural barriers that prevent access to education.

The findings also indicate that traditional community platforms such as the Dare raMambo are being utilized to raise awareness about the importance of education and children's rights. Through regular meetings and campaigns, parents are encouraged to value education and actively support their children's learning. Such initiatives strengthen community responsibility toward children's welfare and create a supportive environment that promotes school retention and reduces dropout rates.

Ecological Systems Theory explains that, the role of traditional leadership operates across several interconnected systems that influence children's educational outcomes. At the microsystem level, children directly benefit from protection against abuse, encouragement to attend school, and parental support reinforced by community leadership. Within the mesosystem, collaboration between families, traditional leaders, and the community strengthens social support networks that promote educational participation. At the exosystem level, traditional by-laws, awareness campaigns, and community meetings indirectly shape children's educational experiences by creating structures that prioritize schooling and child protection. At the macrosystem level, cultural values, traditions, and community norms promoted by traditional leaders reinforce the importance of education, discipline, and collective responsibility for children's welfare.

These findings are consistent with literature that highlights the important role of traditional leaders in promoting child welfare and education in African communities. Studies in Zimbabwe and other African countries have shown that chiefs and community leaders contribute significantly to reducing school dropout through advocacy, enforcement of by-laws, and mobilization of community support for education (Moyo, 2016; Ncube, 2020). Research conducted in rural Zambia and Malawi also revealed that traditional leaders help reduce child labor and early

marriages by promoting children's rights and encouraging school attendance through community campaigns and local regulations (Phiri, 2018; Banda, 2021). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that access to birth registration is essential for school enrollment, and community leaders often play a critical role in helping vulnerable children obtain legal documentation necessary for education access.

The research therefore concludes that, traditional leadership spotlighted as a powerful community-based mechanism for promoting educational access and preventing school dropout. Through advocacy, enforcement of child protection by-laws, community awareness campaigns, and parental encouragement, Chief Bushu strengthens children's opportunities to remain in school. Within the ecological framework, traditional leadership reinforces the microsystem through direct child support, strengthens the mesosystem through community-family collaboration, and shapes the exosystem and macrosystem by embedding cultural values and community accountability toward education. These findings suggest that effective dropout prevention strategies should incorporate traditional leaders as active stakeholders in promoting child protection, educational participation, and community development.

4.3 DEVELOPING A MODEL TO PREVENT AND MANAGE SCHOOL DROPOUT

4.3.1 Parental Empowerment

Evidence from participants suggests that empowering parents with knowledge and skills is central to preventing dropout. When caregivers are trained to monitor progress, encourage learning, and value education, they become active partners in safeguarding children's schooling. Parental empowerment ensures that families provide consistent support, reducing vulnerability to dropout. Most of students dropped out of school due to lack of support from their parents, somewhere even told by their parent not to attend school because they need in supporting the family. Participant also highlighted that, when they get home, they did not have time to do homework or even prefer for end of term examination, and they failed every term leading to school dropout. The researcher was made aware by participants that parents in Bushu community are very ignorant when it comes to school, a student can attend school without paying school fees for the whole year, they were sent home to collect money and they never returned to school. Participant 5 said that

"I dropped out because my parents didn't know how to support me. They never helped with homework or encouraged me to stay in school. If parents were trained to understand the importance of education, children like me would not leave so easily." **Participant 5**

Participant 11 also added that

"My parents' thought school was only the teacher's responsibility. They didn't follow up on my progress, and when I struggled, I gave up. If parents were empowered with skills and knowledge, they could guide us better and prevent dropout." **Participant 11**

Key Informant 4 added that

'Parents in Bushu community are very ignorant when it comes to school, a student can attend school without paying school fees for the whole year, they were sent home to collect money and they never returned to school. **Key informant 4**

Parental empowerment manifested as a critical determinant of school retention and dropout prevention. Testimonies reveal that when parents lack the skills or knowledge to support their children academically, learners feel neglected and disengage from education. Accounts highlight that some parents viewed schooling as solely the responsibility of teachers, failing to monitor progress or provide encouragement. This absence of guidance left children vulnerable to discouragement and dropout. Key informant perspectives reinforce this reality, emphasizing that when parents are trained to monitor progress, provide encouragement, and value education, dropout rates decline significantly, as empowered parents become active partners in the learning process.

Within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, parental empowerment operates across multiple systemic layers. At the microsystem level, children's immediate experiences of encouragement, homework support, and parental involvement directly strengthen motivation and resilience. Within the mesosystem, collaboration between family and school is enhanced when parents actively monitor progress and engage with teachers, creating a supportive network around the learner. At the exosystem level, institutional programs that provide parental training indirectly shape educational outcomes by equipping caregivers with the tools to sustain children's participation. At the macrosystem level, cultural and policy frameworks that prioritize parental

involvement embed accountability and shared responsibility into the education system, reinforcing the value of schooling across society.

The research support previous studies which found the importance of parental empowerment in sustaining education. Studies in Uganda and Malawi have shown that structured parental training programs reduce dropout by equipping caregivers with skills in monitoring, communication, and non-violent discipline (Kagotho & Ssewamala, 2012; Chirwa, 2019). Research in Parental empowerment emerges as a critical determinant of school retention and dropout prevention. Testimonies reveal that when parents lack the skills or knowledge to support their children academically, learners feel neglected and disengage from education. Accounts highlight that some parents viewed schooling as solely the responsibility of teachers, failing to monitor progress or provide encouragement. This absence of guidance left children vulnerable to discouragement and dropout. Key informant perspectives reinforce this reality, emphasizing that when parents are trained to monitor progress, provide encouragement, and value education, dropout rates decline significantly, as empowered parents become active partners in the learning process.

According to, Ecological Systems Theory, parental empowerment operates across multiple systemic layers. At the microsystem level, children's immediate experiences of encouragement, homework support, and parental involvement directly strengthen motivation and resilience. Within the mesosystem, collaboration between family and school is enhanced when parents actively monitor progress and engage with teachers, creating a supportive network around the learner. At the exosystem level, institutional programs that provide parental training indirectly shape educational outcomes by equipping caregivers with the tools to sustain children's participation. At the macrosystem level, cultural and policy frameworks that prioritize parental involvement embed accountability and shared responsibility into the education system, reinforcing the value of schooling across society.

The findings support previous studies which found the importance of parental empowerment in sustaining education. Studies in Uganda and Malawi have shown that structured parental training programs reduce dropout by equipping caregivers with skills in monitoring, communication, and non-violent discipline (Kagotho & Ssewamala, 2012; Chirwa, 2019). Research in South Africa highlights that community-based parenting circles strengthen caregiver authority and reduce juvenile delinquency by fostering peer support and shared strategies (Ndayisenga, 2023).

International evidence from Scandinavian countries demonstrates that family support systems integrated into education policy enhance parental involvement and reduce dropout rates. Such evidence confirms that empowering parents is not merely supplementary but central to sustaining children's educational trajectories.

In synthesis, parental empowerment transforms caregivers from passive observers into active partners in education. Within the ecological framework, it strengthens the microsystem through direct support, enhances the mesosystem through family-school collaboration, and reshapes the exosystem and macrosystem by embedding accountability and cultural value for education. Without empowerment, parents remain disengaged, leaving children unsupported and vulnerable to dropout. Effective interventions must therefore prioritize parental training, awareness programs, and community-based support structures, ensuring that caregivers are equipped to guide, encourage, and sustain their children's education.

4.3.2 Community–School Partnerships

Accounts from respondents indicated that collaboration between schools, families, and communities creates a protective environment for learners. When local leaders, teachers, and parents work together, children receive consistent guidance and support. Strong partnerships reinforce discipline and accountability, reducing dropout. The participant also highlighted that there was no collaboration between school and families, to an extent that problems at home were ignored and they dropout out eventually left school. Participant 1 was recorded saying

"I felt alone when I dropped out because no one from the community cared. If schools worked closely with local leaders, they could have followed up on me. Strong partnerships would make children feel supported beyond the classroom." **Participant 1**

Participant 5 also added

"In my area, there was no collaboration between schools and families. Problems at home were ignored, and I eventually left school. If communities and schools worked together, children would get consistent guidance." **Participant 5**

Key Informant 4 said

"Collaboration between schools, families, and communities creates a safety net. When all stakeholders reinforce the same values, children are less likely to disengage. Partnerships are essential for preventing dropout." **Key informant 4**

Collaboration between schools, families, and communities underlined as a crucial safeguard against dropout. Testimonies reveal that when learners disengaged, they often felt isolated because no one from the community followed up or offered support. The absence of partnerships meant that problems at home were ignored, leaving children without consistent guidance and eventually leading them to abandon school. Key informant perspectives reinforce this reality, emphasizing that collaboration creates a safety net where all stakeholders reinforce the same values, making children less likely to disengage. Partnerships are therefore essential in preventing dropout by extending support beyond the classroom into the wider community.

Analyzed through Ecological Systems Theory, collaboration functions across multiple systemic layers. At the microsystem level, children benefit directly when families, teachers, and local leaders provide consistent encouragement and monitoring. Within the mesosystem, strong partnerships between schools and families ensure that problems at home are not overlooked but addressed in coordination with educational institutions. At the exosystem level, community structures and local leadership indirectly shape educational outcomes by reinforcing accountability and providing support mechanisms. At the macrosystem level, cultural norms and policy frameworks that value collective responsibility embed collaboration into the education system, ensuring that dropout prevention is sustained across society.

These findings align with literature that underscores the importance of community-school partnerships in sustaining education. Research in Kenya documented that caregiver participation in community child protection committees reduced delinquency and dropout by fostering collective responsibility and shared accountability (UNICEF, 2019). Studies in South Africa highlight that collaboration between schools and communities lowers absenteeism and strengthens learner engagement (Mncube & Harber, 2013). International evidence from Italy further demonstrates that participatory monitoring enhances accountability and reduces dropout rates (Cavadini, 2016). Such evidence confirms that partnerships are not supplementary but central to sustaining children's educational trajectories.

Overall, the finding suggests that, collaboration between schools, families, and communities creates a holistic support system that protects learners from disengagement. Within the ecological framework, it strengthens the microsystem through direct encouragement, enhances the mesosystem through family-school coordination, and reshapes the ecosystem and macrosystem by embedding collective responsibility into education. Without collaboration, children remain vulnerable to isolation and dropout. Effective interventions must therefore prioritize building strong partnerships, institutionalizing community involvement, and embedding collective accountability into education policy. By doing so, schools can extend their influence beyond the classroom, ensuring that learners feel supported at every level of their environment.

4.3.3 Economic Support Mechanisms

Participants highlighted those financial constraints is a major driver of dropout, and economic support mechanisms such as scholarships, subsidies, and feeding programs are essential. These interventions reduce the burden on families and ensure that learners' basic needs are met, keeping them in school. Participant 3 was recorded saying,

> *"I dropped out because my parents couldn't pay fees. If there had been scholarships or feeding programs, I would have stayed. Poverty pushes many of us out, but support could keep us in school."* **participant 3**

Participant 2 also said that,

> *"Sometimes I went to school hungry and without books. It was humiliating, and I stopped going. If schools provided meals and materials, children like me would continue learning."* **Participant 2**

Key Informant 2 also said,

"Economic support is a game-changer. Subsidies, scholarships, and feeding programs directly address poverty. When learners' basic needs are met, dropout rates decrease significantly." **Key informant 2**

Economic support accentuated as a decisive intervention in addressing poverty-driven school dropout. Testimonies reveal that learners who were unable to afford fees, uniforms, or books felt humiliated and discouraged, often being sent home repeatedly until they eventually abandoned school. Others described the emotional toll of attending classes hungry and without materials, which compounded feelings of shame and exclusion. These accounts highlight that while poverty is a structural barrier, targeted support such as scholarships, subsidies, and feeding programs could sustain learners' participation. Key informant perspectives reinforce this reality, emphasizing that economic support directly addresses poverty and significantly reduces dropout rates when learners' basic needs are met.

From an Ecological Systems Theory, economic support functions across multiple systemic layers. At the microsystem level, learners benefit directly when meals, uniforms, and materials are provided, reducing hunger, shame, and exclusion. Within the mesosystem, family-school relationships are strengthened when caregivers receive subsidies or scholarships, enabling them to meet institutional demands and sustain engagement. At the exosystem level, government and community programs indirectly shape educational outcomes by embedding financial support mechanisms into schools. At the macrosystem level, national policies and cultural frameworks that prioritize equity and inclusion institutionalize economic support, ensuring that poverty does not remain a systemic barrier to education.

These findings are consistent with literature which states that, underscores the transformative impact of economic support on education. UNICEF (2018) notes that school feeding programs improve attendance and concentration, while scholarships and subsidies reduce dropout by alleviating financial burdens. Research in Malawi and Kenya has shown that learners receiving economic support are more likely to remain in school, with feeding programs particularly effective in sustaining attendance among vulnerable children (Chirwa, 2019; Mutua, 2015). In Zimbabwe, studies confirm that poverty remains the leading cause of dropout, but targeted interventions such

as the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) have helped reduce exclusion by covering fees and materials for disadvantaged learners (Tolich, 2004). Such evidence demonstrates that economic support is not supplementary but central to sustaining educational participation.

In overall, economic support addresses the material deprivation, emotional strain, and institutional exclusion that converge to push learners out of school. Within the ecological framework, it strengthens the microsystem by meeting immediate needs, enhances the mesosystem through family-school collaboration, and reshapes the exosystem and macrosystem by embedding equity into educational policy. Without such support, poverty remains a systemic driver of dropout. Effective interventions must therefore prioritize scholarships, subsidies, and feeding programs, ensuring that learners' basic needs are consistently met. By institutionalizing economic support across all ecological layers, education systems can reduce dropout rates and promote sustained participation for vulnerable children.

4.3.4 Accessible Infrastructure

The study established that distance to school and unsafe routes discourage attendance, especially for girls. Building schools closer to communities and ensuring safe transport are structural solutions that directly reduce dropout. In Bushu area they are high rates of rape cases because are being abused on they are way home. There is one secondary school in Bushu area by building more schools, more students are willing to go to school. Students have to talk 8 kilometers to school every day which lead them to dropout. Participant 9 said that,

> *"The long distance to school discouraged me. If there had been a school nearby, I would not have dropped out. Accessibility matters for children in rural areas."* **Participant 9**

Participant 6 was recorded verbatim saying

> *"Walking far every day made me tired and unsafe. Girls especially face harassment and cases of rape cases increased over the years. Building schools closer would prevent many of us from leaving."* **Participant 6**

Key Informant 2 was recorded saying

"Infrastructure development is vital. When schools are built within communities, children attend regularly. There two secondary schools in Bushu community. Accessibility reduces dropouts' risks.' **Key informant 2**

The findings indicated that poor accessibility to schools was a major factor contributing to school dropout among children in rural areas. Participants revealed that long walking distances discouraged regular attendance and eventually pushed some learners out of school. The testimonies further highlight that travelling long distances exposed learners, particularly girls, to fatigue, insecurity, and harassment, making schooling both physically and emotionally challenging. The lack of nearby schools therefore creates barriers that negatively affect learners' motivation, safety, and educational participation. Key informant perspectives reinforce this reality by emphasizing that infrastructure development and the establishment of schools within communities improve attendance and significantly reduce dropout risks.

The findings further demonstrate that educational accessibility is closely linked to equality and child protection. Children in rural areas often face disadvantages due to inadequate infrastructure and limited educational facilities. Long travel distances consume time and energy that could otherwise be used for studying and rest. For girls, the journey to and from school increases vulnerability to gender-based violence, harassment, and abuse, factors which contribute to absenteeism and eventual dropout. The provision of schools closer to communities therefore emerges as an essential intervention for promoting school retention and educational inclusion.

Ecological Systems Theory explains that, school accessibility influences children's educational experiences across multiple environmental systems. At the microsystem level, long distances directly affect children's daily experiences by causing exhaustion, stress, fear, and reduced motivation to attend school. Within the mesosystem, weak connections between home and school arise when geographical barriers make regular interaction and participation difficult for both learners and parents. At the exosystem level, infrastructural development policies, transport systems, and the distribution of schools indirectly shape children's educational opportunities and school attendance patterns. At the macrosystem level, broader socio-economic inequalities, rural

underdevelopment, and cultural attitudes toward resource allocation influence the availability of schools and access to quality education in marginalized communities.

These findings are supported by literature which identifies distance to school as a major determinant of school dropout in rural communities. Studies conducted in Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Ethiopia have shown that children who travel long distances to school are more likely to experience absenteeism, fatigue, poor academic performance, and eventual dropout (Machingura, 2017; UNESCO, 2020). Research also indicates that girls are disproportionately affected due to safety concerns, harassment, and exposure to gender-based violence during long journeys to school (Chikoko, 2018). Furthermore, studies in rural Malawi and Zambia demonstrate that the construction of community-based schools significantly improves attendance, retention, and academic participation among vulnerable learners (Taddei & Contena, 2013). International evidence similarly confirms that improving educational infrastructure and accessibility is central to achieving equitable education and reducing dropout rates in marginalized populations.

In synthesis, school accessibility and infrastructure development are critical factors in promoting educational retention and preventing dropout among rural learners. Long distances to school expose children to exhaustion, insecurity, and discouragement, while limited infrastructure reinforces educational inequalities. Within the ecological framework, accessibility challenges directly affect children at the microsystem level, weaken family-school connections within the mesosystem, and reflect broader infrastructural and socio-economic conditions operating at the exosystem and macrosystem levels. Effective interventions should therefore prioritize the construction of schools within communities, improvement of rural infrastructure, and implementation of child protection measures that ensure safe and equitable access to education for all learners.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter analyzed school dropout at Bushu secondary school using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, showing how spirituality, poor parental modeling, proximity to school, and financial hardship weaken learner engagement. Existing strategies such as child profiling and counseling provide monitoring and emotional support but remain limited without family cooperation and resources. Overall, school dropout is a multifaceted issue requiring integrated interventions that combine school-based monitoring, parent empowerment, psychosocial support, and socio-economic reforms to sustain learner participation.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter brings together the key findings of the study, highlights the main conclusions, and offers practical recommendations for action. It also points to areas where further research is needed and introduces a model for intervention. At the heart of this inquiry is the challenge of school dropout among secondary learners in Bushu Secondary School. The study shows that parents, schools, and communities all paly vital roles in keeping learners in school. Their efforts are often undermined by financial resources deprivation, cultural barriers, and weak institutional support. The evidence makes it clear that dropout is not simply the result of an individual learner's choices or failures. It is rooted in broader social and economic realities that require collective, context-sensitive responses. When families and schools lack empowerment and collaboration, they tend to react only after a learner has already left school, rather than preventing dropout before it happens. As a result, dropout continues to be a recurring challenge in rural Zimbabwe.

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study revealed that school dropout in Bushu, Shamva District stems from financial deprivation, early marriage, poor modeling by parents, adolescent pregnancy, cultural barriers, peer pressure, and long distances to school. These factors weaken family and school support systems, leaving learners vulnerable to discontinuation. Existing interventions such as child profiling, sensitization campaigns, counselling, reinforcement of laws and parental involvement have had limited impact due to poor implementation and lack of cultural responsiveness. To strengthen retention, the study proposes a community-based model built on caregiver empowerment, cultural adaptation, accessible infrastructure, economic support mechanisms, parental empowerment institutional collaboration, and resource provision. This integrated approach shifts dropout prevention from fragmented, reactive measures to proactive developmental strategies. Anchored in ecological systems theory, the model aims to empower families, reinforce pro-education norms, and reduce structural drivers of dropout in rural Zimbabwe.

5.1.1 KEY FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AT BUSHU SECONDARY, A RURAL SCHOOL IN ZIMBABWE.

In examining the perceived causes of school dropout among secondary learners at Bushu Secondary School, the study revealed a complex interplay of spiritual, financial, parental, and environmental factors. Spiritual causes were highlighted by some caregivers, who attributed dropout to supernatural influences or cultural beliefs that discouraged sustained schooling, reflecting how traditional interpretations of misfortune shape educational outcomes. Financial constraints consistently emanated as the most pressing driver, with families unable to afford school fees, uniforms, or learning materials, thereby forcing children into informal labor or early marriage. Poor modelling by parents was also cited as weakening learner motivation, as inconsistent discipline, neglect, or lack of positive role models left children vulnerable to disengagement and risky behaviors. Finally, proximity to school was identified as a critical environmental factor, with long distances and unsafe routes discouraging attendance, particularly for girls who faced heightened risks of harassment or fatigue. These findings underscore that dropout in Bushu Secondary school is not simply an educational issue but is embedded in socio-cultural and economic realities. The causes align with ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that children's educational outcomes are shaped by the quality of their immediate environment, the strength of family support, and the broader cultural context.

5.1.2. EXISTING STRATEGIES USED BY SCHOOLS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES AIMED AT PREVENTING AND MANAGING SCHOOL DROPOUT IN RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL

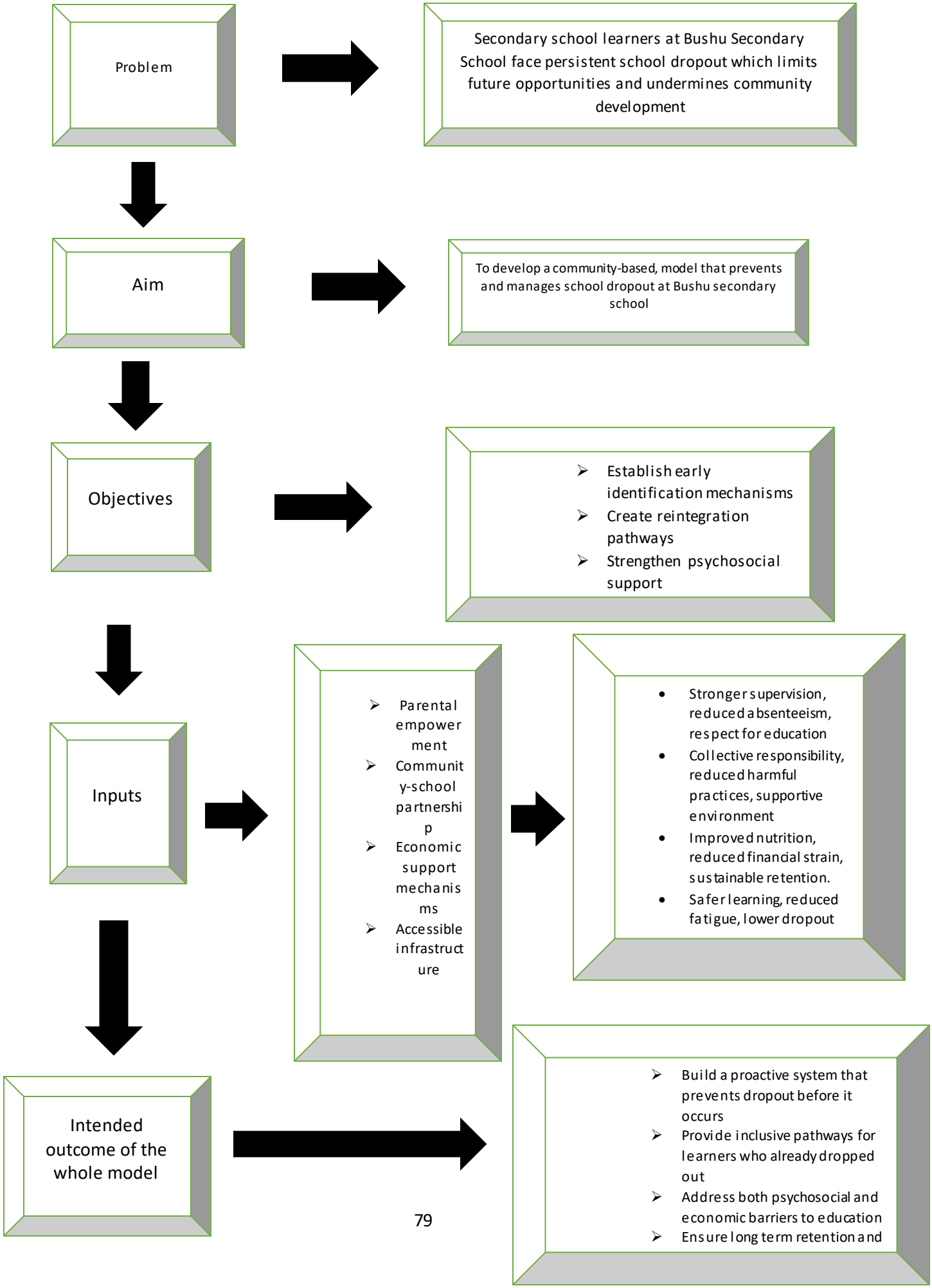
In examining the strategies employed to prevent and manage school dropout in Bushu Secondary School, the study revealed a range of community, institutional, and family-based interventions. Child profiling was identified as a key approach, where schools and parents monitor learners at risk by tracking attendance, performance, and behavioral patterns. This proactive identification enables early intervention, though its effectiveness is limited by resource constraints and inconsistent follow-up. Counselling manifested as another critical strategy, with teachers, community leaders, and religious figures providing moral guidance, emotional support, and conflict resolution to learners facing challenges. While counselling helps address psychosocial pressures such as peer influence and stigma, its reach remains uneven due to limited trained personnel and weak institutional support. Finally, reinforcement of laws was highlighted as an

important mechanism, with legal frameworks such as the Education Amendment Act and child protection statutes designed to safeguard learners' right to education. However, enforcement at the local level is often weak, undermined by cultural practices, poverty, and lack of awareness among families.

5.1.3 DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL FOR PREVENTING AND MANAGING SECONDARY SCHOOL DROPOUTS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RURAL IN ZIMBABWE.

To design a model for intervention, the study examined what can be done to strengthen families, schools, and communities in preventing dropout among learners at Bushu Secondary School. Findings revealed that parental empowerment is essential, raising awareness of the importance of education, equipping parents with positive parenting skills, and promoting non-violent discipline methods. Community–school partnerships were emphasized as critical, with collaboration between families, schools, churches, and local leaders seen as necessary to build coordinated responses that reinforce learner retention. Economic support mechanisms such as scholarships, feeding programs, and income-generating projects were highlighted as vital to reduce the burden of poverty and enable families to keep children in school. Accessibility infrastructure was also identified as a key factor, with improved transport, safe routes, and nearby facilities needed to reduce the challenges posed by long distances to school. The proposed model emphasizes adaptability, integration, and empowerment. By combining parental training, community collaboration, resource provision, and infrastructural support, the model responds to entrenched challenges such as poverty, cultural barriers, and weak institutional capacity. Its overarching aim is to transform dropout prevention from fragile, individualized efforts into a coordinated, developmental strategy that promotes resilience, inclusivity, and sustainable educational outcomes for rural learners in Zimbabwe.

DROPOUT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT MODEL


Problem
Secondary school learners at Bushu Secondary School face persistent school dropout which limits future opportunities and undermines community development
Aim
To develop a community-based, model that prevents and manages school dropout at Bushu secondary school
Objectives
Establish early identification mechanisms
Create reintegration pathways
Strengthen psychosocial support
Inputs
Parental empowerment
Community-school partnership
Economic support mechanisms
Accessible infrastructure
Stronger supervision, reduced absenteeism, respect for education
Collective responsibility, reduced harmful practices, supportive environment
Improved nutrition, reduced financial strain, sustainable retention.
Safer learning, reduced fatigue, lower dropout
Intended outcome of the whole model
Build a proactive system that prevents dropout before it occurs
Provide inclusive pathways for learners who already dropped out
Address both psychosocial and economic barriers to education
Ensure long term retention and

The model emerges directly from the realities highlighted in Chapter Four, where dropout was shown to be driven by spiritual commitments, poor parental modeling, long distances to school, and financial hardship. These factors converge to weaken learner engagement and push students out of school. Existing strategies such as child profiling and counseling have provided partial solutions, but their effectiveness has been undermined by persistent poverty and limited caregiver involvement. The model therefore integrates these findings into a community-based framework that strengthens monitoring, builds caregiver capacity, and addresses socio-economic barriers. It moves beyond fragmented responses toward holistic prevention and reintegration, situating schools, families, and communities as central actors in sustaining learner participation

Core Components

1. Early Identification Mechanisms

Building on child profiling, the model formalizes systematic monitoring of attendance, performance, and behavior. Teachers act as first responders, identifying learners at risk before disengagement escalates. This transforms profiling into a proactive tool, ensuring timely interventions.

2. Reintegration Pathways

Chapter Four revealed that adolescent mothers and married learners often fail to return. The model introduces flexible re-entry policies, catch-up classes, and targeted support to restore dignity and opportunity. Reintegration reframes dropout as reversible, challenging stigma and enabling learners to complete their education.

3. Psychosocial Support

Counseling was noted as a key existing strategy, but limited by poverty and weak family cooperation. The model expands this into structured psychosocial support counseling services, peer mentorship, and life-skills training ensuring learners are emotionally resilient and socially supported.

4. School-Community Partnerships

Poor parental modeling and weak caregiver involvement were major drivers of dropout. The model strengthens collaboration through parent committees, community dialogues, and local leader involvement. This embeds dropout prevention within cultural values, reducing harmful practices such as early marriage and prioritizing education as a collective responsibility.

5. Economic Empowerment

Financial hardship was identified as a critical barrier. The model integrates scholarships, feeding programs, and income-generating projects to reduce financial strain. By empowering families economically, learners are supported sustainably, ensuring poverty does not force them out of school.

Intended Goals

The ultimate goal is to prevent dropout before it occurs while also managing existing cases through reintegration. By addressing the specific drivers identified in Chapter Four spirituality, parental modeling, distance, and financial hardship the model ensures that interventions are context-responsive, culturally grounded, and sustainable. It seeks to strengthen completion rates and contribute to long-term community development in Bushu Ward 11.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

From all the discussions highlighted above, the following conclusions were drawn from the research findings:

The findings concluded that school dropout at Bushu Secondary school is shaped by a constellation of interrelated socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Poverty consistently emerged as a central driver, limiting families' ability to pay school fees, provide uniforms, and meet basic needs, while early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and entrenched cultural barriers further weakened learner retention and normalized premature withdrawal from school. Household responsibilities, peer influence, and long distances to school compounded these challenges, discouraging attendance and undermining motivation. These findings align with ecological systems theory, which emphasizes that children's educational outcomes are shaped by the quality of their immediate environment and the strength of social bonds. Literature such as UNESCO (2020) and UNICEF (2021) reinforces that socio-economic hardship and structural deficits exacerbate dropout, underscoring that dropout in rural Zimbabwe is not a random occurrence but structurally rooted, requiring interventions that address poverty, cultural practices, and fragile institutional support alongside individual learner engagement.

The study further concluded that families, schools, and communities employ a range of strategies to mitigate dropout, though their effectiveness varies depending on context and resources. Child profiling was used to identify learners at risk, while counselling provided moral and emotional

support to those facing challenges. Legal frameworks and reinforcement of laws were also emphasized, safeguarding learners' right to education. These practices align with behavioural and ecological theories, which emphasize reinforcement, modelling, and institutional collaboration as central to learner retention. However, the findings also reveal significant constraints. Poverty limits families' ability to sustain interventions, while fragmented community structures reduce collective responsibility for education. Institutional support from schools, social services, and local authorities is often inadequate or inconsistently applied. Consequently, community efforts, though critical, remain fragile and uneven. The study accentuates that capacitating families and schools requires systemic reinforcement through training, resources, and community-based support structures. Only then can interventions move from reactive measures to proactive developmental guidance.

Finally, the study concluded that developing a community-based model is essential to strengthen the role of families, schools, and communities in preventing dropout and ensuring sustainable educational outcomes. Parental empowerment was identified as a priority, raising awareness of the importance of education and equipping caregivers with positive parenting skills. Community–school partnerships were emphasized as critical to building coordinated responses, while economic support mechanisms such as scholarships and feeding programs were highlighted as necessary to reduce the burden of poverty. Improved accessibility infrastructure was also recommended to address the challenges posed by long distances to school. These enhancements demonstrate a strategic shift from fragmented, reactive interventions to proactive, developmental approaches that embed resilience, dignity, and empowerment at the core of education.

In sum, the findings of this study illustrate that families, schools, and communities in Bushu secondary school are indispensable actors in mitigating school dropout, but their efforts must be systematically capacitated to achieve meaningful outcomes. By moving beyond residual, individualized responses and embracing coordinated, developmental strategies, stakeholders can foster resilience, expand learners' opportunities, and restore dignity, thereby contributing meaningfully to community stability and sustainable development. The model presented in this study illustrates how structured, integrated strategies can transform dropout prevention into a tool for empowerment and inclusive growth, ensuring that learners are not only protected from

exclusion but are also nurtured toward completion, responsible citizenship, and national development.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The implications of this study for social work and educational practice are profound, as the findings highlight the centrality of families, schools, and communities in mitigating school dropout and the necessity of reorienting interventions toward approaches that are holistic, preventive, and participatory. Social workers and education practitioners are called to design and implement strategies that strengthen caregiver and community capacity, recognizing that dropout is not merely an individual learner's problem but a reflection of broader socio-economic, cultural, and institutional dynamics. This requires practitioners to move beyond residual responses and embrace strategies that integrate psychosocial support, parenting education, livelihood strengthening, and community mobilization, thereby ensuring that interventions are both dignified and comprehensive.

The emphasis on resilience and precise targeting positions social workers and educators as advocates for equity, requiring them to conduct household assessments, recognize intersectional vulnerabilities, and safeguard against exclusion errors. In this context, practitioners must not only provide direct services but also act as facilitators of parental empowerment, equipping families with knowledge, skills, and resources to guide children toward sustained school attendance. The integration of parental training, support groups, and community–school partnerships expand the scope of practice into areas of behavioral change and family resilience, where social workers and educators mentor caregivers, facilitate peer learning, and encourage investment in long-term wellbeing.

Community participation further reinforces the profession's ethos of people-centered development, as practitioners engage caregivers, schools, and local institutions as co-creators of solutions, fostering ownership, accountability, and trust. The call for economic support mechanisms and improved accessibility infrastructure elevates the role of social workers and education planners in advocacy and governance, enabling them to influence policy reforms, resource mobilization, and institutional resilience. Taken together, these shifts position social work and education not only as disciplines of service delivery but as transformative forces in building

inclusive, resilient, and sustainable futures for children and families. By embedding caregiver empowerment and community collaboration at the heart of dropout prevention, practitioners can contribute meaningfully to community stability, child protection, and national development. The model presented in this study illustrates how structured, integrated strategies can transform dropout prevention into a tool for empowerment and inclusive growth, ensuring that learners are not only protected from exclusion but are also nurtured toward completion, responsible citizenship, and sustainable development.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to strengthen the capacity of schools, families, and communities in preventing and managing school dropout at Bushu Secondary School.

- For government and policy makers, there is need to institutionalize integrated interventions that address both household and structural barriers. Policies should prioritize subsidies for school fees, provision of stationery, and school feeding programs, while simultaneously expanding rural school infrastructure and safe transport systems. By embedding these measures into national education frameworks, dropout can be reduced through improved accessibility and affordability.
- For schools and regulatory authorities, proactive strategies such as child profiling, continuous counseling, and early warning systems should be strengthened. Teachers must be capacitated to monitor attendance and performance, while guidance and counseling services should be expanded to address emotional and social challenges. Schools should also align disciplinary practices with supportive interventions, ensuring that learners are retained rather than excluded.
- For families and caregivers, there is need to enhance parental involvement and positive modeling. Caregivers should be supported through training programs that emphasize responsible parenting, monitoring of children's progress, and reinforcement of education as a priority. Livelihood support initiatives can further empower families to meet school-related costs, thereby reducing dropout driven by poverty.
- For community organizations and NGOs, interventions should be tailored to local realities by providing complementary resources such as scholarships, counseling services, and

awareness campaigns. Partnerships with schools and families should be strengthened to ensure that dropout prevention becomes a shared responsibility. Flexible programming that recognizes poverty, cultural beliefs, and gender vulnerabilities will make interventions more sustainable.

- For local communities and leadership structures, participation must be institutionalized through school-community partnerships, parenting committees, and feedback platforms. Chiefs, village heads, and school development committees should be actively engaged in mobilizing resources, monitoring attendance, and fostering accountability. This collective responsibility will strengthen the social fabric that supports education.
- For churches and faith-based organizations, there is need to balance spiritual commitments with educational priorities. Religious institutions should collaborate with schools and families to ensure that learners are not withdrawn from classes for prolonged church activities. Instead, they can provide supportive programs such as mentorship, moral guidance, and school fees assistance.
- For multisectoral stakeholders, dropout prevention must be broadened beyond schools and families alone. Collaboration among government, NGOs, churches, and community organizations will create a comprehensive framework that addresses structural drivers such as poverty, distance, and weak parental involvement. By embedding intersectoral cooperation, Bushu Secondary School can move toward a community-based model that is inclusive, resilient, and responsive to local realities.

5.5 AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should extend this study by examining the wider influences that shape school dropout beyond the immediate roles of parents and teachers. While this study focused on the interaction of caregivers, learners, and schools at Bushu Secondary, other agents such as peers, churches, community organizations, and media also play a significant role in shaping learner attitudes and decisions. Exploring how these actors reinforce or undermine parental and school interventions would provide a deeper understanding of dropout dynamics in rural Zimbabwe.

Further studies could also compare dropout patterns across different rural districts to determine whether the factors identified at Bushu Secondary are consistent nationwide or vary according to local socio-economic and cultural contexts. Longitudinal research that follows learners over time

would help to assess how early interventions such as counseling and child profiling influence long-term retention. In addition, future work should investigate structural reforms such as safe transport, school feeding programs, and digital learning platforms, linking household-level challenges with broader policy solutions.

By broadening the scope to include diverse socialization agents and structural supports, future research can contribute to the development of a more holistic, community-based model that strengthens parental involvement, sustains learner participation, and reduces dropout across rural Zimbabwe.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Finally, the chapter underscored the study by summarizing findings, conclusions, recommendations, and the proposed intervention model for preventing and managing school dropout at Bushu secondary school. It highlighted school dropout as a reflection of wider socio-economic and cultural realities, noted existing strategies like counseling, sensitization, and parental involvement, and emphasized their limitation due to weak resources and collaboration. To address these gaps, a community-based model grounded in ecological systems theory was proposed, focusing on parental empowerment, school- community partnership, economic support mechanisms, accessible infrastructure, and cultural adaptation. Recommendations stressed strengthening parental capacity, expanding partnership, diversifying resources, and fostering collaboration among school, families, NGOs, and government. The chapter concluded by positioning parental, school, and communities as central actors in sustaining education and called for future comparative and longitudinal research to deepen understanding of school dropout dynamics in rural Zimbabwe.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Dear Participants

My name is Ndoofa Ngonidzaishe. I am a fourth-year student at Bindura University of Science Education pursuing a Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Social Work. As part of the requirements of the degree, the student is required to carry out a research project, which I kindly invite you to participate in. Before you decide to participate in the research, you are free to talk to anyone you feel comfortable about the research. If there may be some words, you do not understand you are free to ask, and I will explain. I am therefore kindly asking you to help me in carrying out my research by taking a few minutes of your time to respond to the following questions as openly and freely as you can. Your cooperation and support are greatly appreciated.

Title of the study

Development of a model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary schools in rural areas in Zimbabwe. A case study of Bushu Secondary School.

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to develop a context-specific model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary school in rural Zimbabwe, with specific reference to Bushu Secondary School in Shamva District.

Ethical considerations; privacy, confidentiality and voluntary participation

Be reminded that your participation in this study and in this interview is confidential. Your responses will be treated with confidentiality and will **ONLY** be used for the purposes of this research. Your participation is based on voluntary basis. Therefore, you have the power to decide whether you feel comfortable or not to be interviewed. You may decide to withdraw from the interview at any moment.

Contact details

If you have any other questions, you can contact me on the following details

Email; ngonidzaishendoofa@gmail.com

Phone number; 0712571914/ 0789031350

If you are willing to partake and contribute to and in the study, you can kindly fill your details in the spaces below.

Participant signature ……. …….…….

Signature of researcher…….

Date…….…….

With thanks

Ngonidzaishe Ndoofa.

APPENDIX 2: Focus group discussion GUIDE with DROPOUT.

In-depth interview guide

Aim of the study: The aim of this study is to develop a context-specific model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary school in rural Zimbabwe, with specific reference to Bushu community in Shamva District.

Biographic information

Gender of participant male female

Age .....

Highest level of education .....

QUESTIONS:

1. May I know the reasons why you decided to drop out of school.

2. How do family, economic, cultural, or community-related factors influence students' decisions or circumstances to leave school?

3. Can you share experiences or examples of challenges that make it difficult for students in this community to complete secondary education?

4. What measures are currently being used by schools, families, or community leaders to prevent students from dropping out of school?

5. How effective do you think these strategies are in helping students stay in school? Please explain your answer.

6. What challenges do schools and families face when trying to support students at risk of dropping out?

7. What kind of support system do you think would help prevent students from dropping out of school in this community?

8. How can schools, parents, traditional leaders, and community members work together to support students' education?

9. If you were to design a model or program to reduce school dropouts among students in Bushu, what key components would it include?

APPENDIX 3: KEY INFORMANT GUIDE FOR TEACHERS.

In-depth interview guide

Aim of the study: The aim of this study is to develop a context-specific model to prevent and manage school dropouts among secondary school in rural Zimbabwe, with specific reference to Bushu community in Shamva District.

Biographic information

Gender of participant male female

Age .....

Highest level of education .....

QUESTIONS:

1. From your experience as a teacher at Bushu Secondary School, what are the main factors contributing to school dropout among secondary school students?

2. How do academic performance, absenteeism, family background, or socio-economic challenges influence students' decisions or risk of dropping out?

3. What early warning signs do you observe in students who are at risk of leaving school before completing their secondary education?

4. What measures or interventions does Bushu Secondary School currently implement to prevent and manage school dropout among students?

5. In your opinion, how effective are the current school-based strategies in retaining students in school, and what challenges do you encounter?

6. What recommendations would you give for developing an effective model to prevent school dropout among students in Bushu community?

7. How can teachers play a stronger role in supporting a community-based approach to managing and preventing dropout?

8. What key components should be included in a sustainable, context-specific model to ensure that girls in rural areas complete their secondary education?

All communications should be addressed to the
Secretary for Primary and
Secondary Education
Telephone: +263 242 794 509
Toll Free: 317

ZIMBABWE

Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
35 Nkrumah Nkoumoh Avenue
Queen Lozikeyi House
P O Box 121
Causeway, Harare

Ref : C/426/3
27 March 2026
Marked Ngonidzashe
Golden Heights
Std no 2063
Shamva

RE: PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT A RESEARCH IN MASH CENTRAL PROVINCE:SHAMVA DISTRICT: BUSHU SECONDARY SCHOOL.

Reference is made to your application to carry a research from the above- mentioned schools on the research title:

"DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL TO PREVENT AND MANAGE SCHOOLDROPOUTS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RURAL ZIMBABWE : A CASE OF BUSHU SECONDARYSCHOOL."

Permission is hereby granted. However, you are required to liaise with the Provincial Education Director for Mash Central who is responsible for the schools in which you want to involve in your research. You should ensure that your research work does not disrupt the normal operations of the school.

You are also required to provide a copy of your final report to the Secretary for Primary and Secondary Education

Musingarimi H
ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT FOR SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

26 MAR 2026

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zimbabwe/

→ DSI SHAMVA
May you assist as per approval

HUMAN RESOURCES
MINISTRY OF PRIMARY AND
SECONDARY EDUCATION
27 MAR 2026
MASHONALAND CENTRAL PROVINCE
P.O. BOX 40, BINDURA

MIN OF PRY & SECONDARY EDUCATION
HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
30 MAR 2026
SHAMVA DISTRICT OFFICE
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