



Effects of Displacement due to Illegal Mining on Rural Learners' Academic Performance in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT: This qualitative study explores the effects of displacement due to illegal mining on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe. Utilising a sample that includes four learners, four teachers, two Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education officials, a member of parliament, a village head, a police officer, a human rights lawyer, and an educational psychologist, data was collected through two focus group discussions—one with learners and another with adults. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data, while ethical considerations, such as confidentiality, were prioritised throughout the research process. The study identifies a significant research gap in understanding the specific impacts of illegal mining displacement on education in rural Zimbabwe. One key finding reveals that displaced learners experience increased anxiety and emotional distress, adversely affecting their academic focus and performance. To address these challenges, the study recommends implementing psychosocial support programs that help displaced learners cope with emotional and psychological issues, ultimately enhancing their educational engagement and outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Academic performance, education, illegal mining, displacement, Zimbabwe.

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Introduction

In Zimbabwe, the Shurugwi area has faced significant upheaval due to illegal mining activities, which have led to the displacement of communities and adversely affected educational opportunities for rural learners (Lupande, 2021). This situation mirrors findings in the United States, where studies indicate that displacement from natural disasters or economic shifts can severely hinder educational attainment, as students experience instability that disrupts their learning environment (Jordan, 2013). Similarly, research in Britain has shown that urban displacement and gentrification can lead to families relocating to areas with under-resourced schools, resulting in diminished academic performance among children (London School of Economics, 2021). In Nigeria, the effects of displacement caused by environmental degradation and socio-political unrest have been linked to declining educational outcomes, particularly for rural populations, highlighting the psychological stress and loss of social networks that often accompany such upheavals (Graca et al, 2019). Botswana faces comparable challenges, where rural communities struggle with access to education due to economic disruptions, limited resources, and inadequate infrastructure, which can hinder children's academic success (Maguwu et al, 2020). In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid continues to influence educational equity, with communities uprooted from their homes experiencing a decline in educational quality and access (Lahiri Dutt, 2011). Despite a growing body of literature addressing the effects of illegal mining on the environment and local economies in Zimbabwe, there is a notable gap in research specifically examining how illegal mining-related displacements impact the academic performance of rural learners in the Shurugwi area. This study aims to explore effects of displacement from illegal mining on rural learners' academic performance in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe. This study is anchored on the following two research questions: What specific challenges do rural learners in Shurugwi face in their academic performance as a result of displacements caused by illegal mining activities? Moreover, What effective strategies and solutions can be implemented to mitigate the negative impact of displacements on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi?

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the impact of displacements on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe, due to illegal mining (OECD, 2016). The sample consists of diverse participants, including four learners, four teachers, two officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, one official from the Ministry of Environment, one Member of Parliament, a village head, one police official, one human rights lawyer, and one educational psychologist. These participants were purposively selected based on their gender, geographical location, and expertise, ensuring a comprehensive representation of perspectives relevant to the study (Scoone, 2015). Data collection was conducted through two separate focus group discussions: one for adult participants and another for learners (Takyi et al, 2021). This dual focus group approach is crucial as it allows for the exploration of distinct viewpoints and experiences. Adult participants, who include educators, officials, and community leaders, can provide insights into systemic issues and policies affecting, education in the context of displacement (Zhou, 2022).

Conversely, the focus group of learners enables an understanding of the direct impact of these displacements on their academic experiences and challenges (Bhebhe et al, 2013). Through facilitating discussions in separate groups, the study ensures that participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts freely, which may lead to richer and more candid data (Burns, 2020). The data collected from these discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Cai & Newth, 2013). This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the complex factors influencing academic performance amid displacement. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Participants were required to sign informed consent forms to ensure they understood the study's purpose and their rights (Chimhou & Woodhouse, 2010). Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms for all participants, protecting their identities throughout the research process. Additionally, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, ensuring that their autonomy and comfort were prioritised (Chipangura, 2018).

Discussion and Findings

Impact of displacements on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi due to illegal mining

The findings from the data collected reveal a significant impact of displacements caused by illegal mining on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi. Families displaced from their homes face numerous challenges that directly impact students' ability to engage in their education. The instability of living conditions often leads to economic hardship, creating an environment where basic needs take precedence over academic pursuits. Many learners report feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about their future, which distracts them from their studies (Chingono, 2020). For instance, concerns about food and shelter can overshadow the importance of homework and class participation, making it difficult for students to maintain focus and motivation. Moreover, increased absenteeism is a critical issue linked to these displacements. Many students come from families struggling to survive, where the urgency of securing daily necessities often results in education being deprioritized (Chipangura, 2018). This trend is particularly disheartening, as previously diligent students find themselves unable to keep pace with their studies. The emotional toll of such circumstances is evident, as the stress of displacement can lead to disengagement from the educational process, further hindering academic success (Nyikadzino et al, 2022).

Parental involvement also suffers significantly in these disrupted environments. As parents seek work in mining to support their families, they often lose the capacity to assist their children with schoolwork or monitor their academic progress (Takyi et al, 2021). This lack of support at home can severely limit a child's educational development. Additionally, frequent school absences due to family obligations create gaps in learning that are hard to bridge, resulting in further academic decline (Zhou, 2022). The educational infrastructure is also impacted by the influx of displaced children, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and strained resources. Teachers struggle to provide individualized attention in an environment where many learners are dealing with trauma and instability (Chitumba, 2021). This situation underscores the need for urgent interventions to enhance

the quality of education for all students, particularly those affected by displacement.

Furthermore, the broader social implications of illegal mining activities disrupt community cohesion, weakening the support systems that typically help children thrive academically (Muchaendepi et al, 2019). The psychological distress experienced by many displaced children can lead to increased dropout rates and a cycle of underachievement (Mushonga & Scoones, 2012). Addressing these root causes is essential for creating an environment conducive to learning.

Theme 2: Effective strategies and solutions can be implemented to mitigate the negative impact of displacements on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi

The findings regarding effective strategies to mitigate the negative impact of displacements on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi highlight a multifaceted approach that encompasses community support, legislative reforms, and enhanced educational resources. Establishing community support systems has emerged as a critical strategy. Local tutoring programs and mentorship initiatives can provide displaced students with the academic assistance they need to catch up with their peers (Cuvelier, 2011). Such programs not only address immediate educational gaps but also foster a sense of belonging and motivation among learners who may feel isolated due to their circumstances. Legislation plays a pivotal role in creating a stable environment for children to thrive academically (Gono, 2022). Stricter regulations on illegal mining activities, coupled with the provision of alternative economic opportunities for affected families, can contribute significantly to long-term stability (London School of Economics, 2021). When families are economically secure, children are more likely to focus on their education rather than on survival. This holistic approach underscores the importance of governmental action in complementing community efforts. Furthermore, the need for enhanced counselling and support services within schools cannot be overstated (Hlungwani et al, 2021).

Many learners affected by displacement express a strong desire to talk to someone about their struggles. Providing access to counsellors or mental health resources can help students process their experiences and reduce feelings of isolation (Hunter et al, 2021). Such support is essential for fostering resilience, enabling learners to concentrate better on their studies and ultimately improve their academic performance. Collaboration between schools and local organisations also presents a viable solution (Lupande, 2021). Through organising workshops that equip parents with skills to support their children's education, schools can empower families to become active participants in their children's academic journeys (Graca et al, 2019). This is particularly crucial during times of economic hardship, where parental involvement can significantly influence educational outcomes. Educated parents are better equipped to assist their children with homework and navigate educational challenges, creating a more supportive learning environment at home. Lastly, raising community awareness about the environmental and educational impacts of illegal mining is vital for driving long-term change (Maguwu et al, 2020). Implementing educational programs that inform families about the repercussions of mining activities can foster a collective understanding of the need for sustainable practices (Jordaan, 2013). Providing resources to help displaced families regain stability can further enhance the community's capacity to support its learners.

Summary

The study examines the effects of displacement caused by illegal mining activities on the academic performance of rural learners in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe. It reveals that such displacement leads to significant disruptions in education, with students facing frequent absences and instability in their learning environment. The emotional and psychological toll on learners, including distress from losing their homes and communities, further diminishes their concentration and motivation. Additionally, economic hardships faced by families affected by illegal mining adversely impact their ability to support their children's education. The study also highlights the broader social disintegration within communities, further affecting learners' well-being.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, several recommendations emerge. Teachers are encouraged to provide emotional support and adopt flexible learning approaches to accommodate students affected by displacement. Learners should engage in support programs and form peer networks to foster a sense of community among themselves. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education needs to develop policies that address the specific needs of displaced learners, ensuring access to educational resources and teacher training on handling trauma. The Ministry of Environment should enforce stricter regulations on illegal mining and promote community engagement in sustainable practices. Members of Parliament are urged to advocate for legal frameworks that protect rural communities and ensure proper resource allocation for educational support. Village heads can play a pivotal role by organising community meetings to raise awareness about the importance of local initiatives and support them. Lastly, parents are encouraged to prioritise their children's education by creating a supportive home environment and actively engaging with schools to meet their children's educational needs.

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