

Enhancing nutritional support for Zimbabwe HIV-positive rural learners with albinism during El Niño-induced drought: School Development Committee role

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the role of School Development Committees in enhancing nutritional support for HIV-positive rural learners with albinism during El Niño-induced droughts in Zimbabwe. Using a purposive sampling approach, 18 participants were selected to ensure diverse representation, including parents, NGO representatives, village heads, social workers, government officials, church leaders, and teachers. Learners were excluded from participation to uphold ethical standards protecting minors. Data collection involved a three-hour focus group discussion, fostering open dialogue in participants' preferred language. Thematic analysis revealed important insights into the need for targeted nutritional programs and the significance of multi-sectoral partnerships. Findings highlight the critical capacity of School Development Committees to mobilize community resources and promote collaboration, ultimately improving educational outcomes and well-being for HIV-positive learners with albinism. A key finding of the study is that School Development Committees are instrumental in mobilizing local resources and facilitating collaboration among various stakeholders, which is vital for creating supportive educational environments for HIV-positive learners with albinism. It is recommended that educational authorities enhance the effectiveness of School Development Committees by providing targeted training and resources, enabling them to better address the nutritional and educational needs of vulnerable learners during drought conditions.

Keywords: Albinism; Drought; HIV-positive; Nutrition; Zimbabwe.



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Introduction

In Zimbabwe, community participation in education is guided by the establishment of Statutory Instruments (SI), notably SI 87 of 1992 and SI 379 of 1998. These instruments mandate the formation of School Development Committees (SDCs) in non-government schools and School Development Associations (SDAs) in government schools. SDCs are tasked with

mobilizing resources aimed at improving school environments and supporting the welfare of both teachers and learners ¹. Through these committees, local communities are empowered to actively contribute to the educational development of their schools, aligning their efforts with the broader educational policies set by the government². This regulatory framework underscores the importance of community involvement in addressing educational challenges in Zimbabwe.

One of the significant challenges in Zimbabwe is the intersection of HIV/AIDS, albinism, and climate-induced crises, particularly in rural areas. HIV-positive individuals face severe health challenges, while those with albinism experience additional vulnerabilities due to social stigma and environmental exposure ³. The El Niño phenomenon further exacerbates food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly in rural communities reliant on agriculture ⁴. HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe remains a public health concern, with an adult rate of 12.7% (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2020), which complicates the academic performance of affected learners due to health-related absenteeism and social stigma ⁵. Learners with albinism face health risks such as skin cancer and vision impairment, which are compounded by societal misconceptions ⁶ and a lack of protective measures against sun exposure ⁷. Furthermore, the food insecurity caused by El Niño-induced droughts has detrimental effects on these vulnerable populations, further aggravating their health and educational outcomes (World Food Programme, 2021).

The role of SDCs in addressing these challenges cannot be understated. By mobilizing resources and engaging local communities, SDCs can play a pivotal role in enhancing the nutritional support for HIV-positive learners with albinism during climate crises. Research has shown that community engagement in educational settings leads to improved nutritional programs, especially for vulnerable groups ⁸. However, despite the growing recognition of SDCs' importance, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these committees can effectively mitigate the nutritional challenges faced by HIV-positive learners with albinism during droughts. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the mechanisms through which SDCs can enhance nutritional support for these marginalized groups in the context of climate-induced crises, specifically El Niño droughts.

¹ Munyaradzi Dzvimbo and Kelvin Zhanda, "Policy-Making Prospects and Challenges of the Climate Change and the Urban Energy Sector in Zimbabwe," *Journal of Urban Systems and Innovations for Resilience in Zimbabwe-JUSIRZ* 2, no. 1 (2020): 203–222.

² Munyaradzi Chidarikire and Dipane Joseph Hlalele, "School Development Committees: A Vehicle for Sustainable Inclusive Education in Zimbabwean Rural Primary Schools," *Journal of Educational Studies* 21, no. 2 (2022): 164–186.

³ Dzvimbo and Zhanda, "Policy-Making Prospects and Challenges of the Climate Change and the Urban Energy Sector in Zimbabwe."

⁴ Munyaradzi Chidarikire, "The Impact of El-Niño-Induced Drought on Rural Learners Afflicted with HIV/AIDS: A Study on Poverty in Zimbabwe,," *e-BANGI Journal* 21, no. 3 (2024).

⁵ Tinashe Fradreck Mavezera, Annah Dudu, and Tawanda Majoko, "21st Century Teacher Professional Development for Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education," in *Handbook of Research on Inclusive and Accessible Education* (IGI Global, 2024), 359–375.

⁶ Severino Machingambi, "Analysis of Decolonisation of Higher Education in a New South African University," *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning* 4 (2020): 32–45.

⁷ Elvis Imafidon, "Some Epistemological Issues in the Othering of Persons with Albinism in Africa," *Handbook of African philosophy of difference* (2020): 361–378.

⁸ Pfuurai Chimunde, "Deconstruction of Higher Education Curriculum in Zimbabwe: Breaking the Past and Imagining the Future," *African Identities* 22, no. 4 (2024): 1144–1158.

Nutritional support is critical for HIV-positive individuals, as proper nutrition is essential for maintaining immune function and ensuring the efficacy of HIV treatment (United Nations Population Fund, 2024). Malnutrition can worsen the health outcomes of HIV-positive individuals, leading to higher morbidity and mortality (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). In Zimbabwe, rural HIV-positive learners with albinism face compounded difficulties due to limited access to nutritious food, worsened by the stigma surrounding their condition and the impact of climate change. The El Niño phenomenon, which has resulted in severe droughts in Zimbabwe, further amplifies food insecurity and malnutrition rates, particularly among vulnerable populations ⁹.

In addition to the challenges posed by HIV, individuals with albinism face unique health risks. In South Africa, public health campaigns emphasizing the importance of sun protection and skin care for individuals with albinism have been shown to mitigate some of these risks ¹⁰. However, in Zimbabwe, limited access to healthcare, societal stigma, and a lack of protective measures exacerbate the vulnerability of learners with albinism ¹¹. These learners also face nutritional challenges, as adequate nutrition is critical for maintaining their health, particularly for those living with HIV.

The role of SDCs in improving educational outcomes and community support is widely recognized. In Zimbabwe, SDCs are tasked with enhancing school management and fostering community involvement in the education process ¹². Similar community-driven initiatives in countries like South Africa and Nigeria have demonstrated the potential of local partnerships in improving nutritional support and educational outcomes for vulnerable learners ¹³. These findings highlight the potential for SDCs in Zimbabwe to adopt strategies that can address the dual challenges of HIV and albinism during climate-induced crises, leveraging local knowledge and resources to provide essential nutritional support.

Despite existing research on the challenges faced by HIV-positive individuals and those with albinism, there is a notable gap in understanding how SDCs in Zimbabwe can effectively implement nutritional support programs tailored to these populations during periods of drought. This research seeks to address this gap by exploring how SDCs can mobilize resources to improve the nutritional status of rural learners with albinism living with HIV during El Niño-induced droughts.

⁹ Chidarikire, "The Impact of El-Nino-Induced Drought on Rural Learners Afflicted with HIV/AIDS: A Study on Poverty in Zimbabwe."

¹⁰ Bekithemba Dube, "Rural Online Learning in the Context of COVID 19 in South Africa: Evoking an Inclusive Education Approach," *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research* (2020).

¹¹ Machingambi, "Analysis of Decolonisation of Higher Education in a New South African University."

¹² Chidarikire and Hlalele, "School Development Committees: A Vehicle for Sustainable Inclusive Education in Zimbabwean Rural Primary Schools."

¹³ Adebunmi Y Aina and Keshni Bipath, "Reimagining Systems That Support Early Childhood Development Centres in Offering Quality Education," *Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 18, no. 1 (2022): 1–8; Julius Ajayi Eyitayo, "Exploring the Nature, and Teachers' Understanding, of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS, Grades R – 12): Navigating the Changing Landscape of Science Education Through the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) in Post-Apartheid South Afri," *Complexity and Simplicity in Science Education* (Springer International Publishing, 2021), http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79084-4_2.

This study is significant for several stakeholders, including learners, teachers, School Development Committees (SDCs), rural communities, and the broader government. For learners with albinism and HIV, this research aims to improve their health outcomes through enhanced nutritional support, which can lead to better academic performance and overall well-being. SDCs will gain insights into how to mobilize resources effectively and foster community engagement, strengthening their capacity to address local needs. Teachers will benefit from a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by their students, enabling them to provide more empathetic and tailored support. On a broader scale, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education can utilize the findings to inform policy development and resource allocation, ensuring that vulnerable populations are prioritized in educational strategies. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for learners with albinism in Zimbabwe, offering a comprehensive strategy to address the intertwined challenges of HIV, albinism, and climate-induced food insecurity.

Method

This qualitative study utilized a purposive sampling method to select 18 participants, ensuring a diverse representation based on gender, location, and relevant expertise concerning the enhancement of nutritional support for HIV-positive learners with albinism in rural Zimbabwe during an El Niño-induced drought. The sample included four parents of learners with HIV and AIDS (two males and two females), two representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with these learners, two village heads (one male and one female), two social workers (one male and one female), two officials from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (one male and one female), two police Child Victim and Friendly officials, two church leaders (one male and one female), two members of the School Development Committees (one male and one female), and two teachers (one male and one female). This diverse composition was deliberately chosen to capture a broad range of perspectives and insights related to the nutritional and educational needs of these vulnerable learners¹⁴. Learners with HIV and AIDS were excluded from the study due to ethical concerns regarding their age and the sensitive nature of the research topic, in line with ethical guidelines aimed at protecting vulnerable populations, especially minors¹⁵.

By focusing on adult stakeholders, the study aimed to gather in-depth insights that could inform strategies to support these learners while preserving their dignity and privacy¹⁶. Data collection was conducted through a focus group discussion, held for three hours on a Friday, chosen for its capacity to foster rich discussions and allow participants to share their viewpoints

¹⁴ Craig Mather et al., "COVID-19 Adaptations for Biomedical Teaching and Assessment within the Undergraduate Dental Curriculum," in *Biomedical Visualisation: Volume 14—COVID-19 Technology and Visualisation Adaptations for Biomedical Teaching* (Springer, 2022), 43–54.

¹⁵ Gloria Ori Eke and Anthony Njoku, "African Women in Search of Global Identity: An Exploration of Feminism and Afropolitanism in Chimamanda Adichie's Works," *Journal of Gender and Power* 13, no. 1 (2020): 151–169.

¹⁶ Manoranjan Mishra et al., "An Overview of Research on Natural Resources and Indigenous Communities: A Bibliometric Analysis Based on Scopus Database (1979–2020)," *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment* 193, no. 2 (2021).

in a dynamic environment. Focus groups are particularly effective in qualitative research as they facilitate interaction among participants, encouraging the exchange of ideas and leading to a deeper understanding of complex issues ¹⁷.

To ensure comfort and openness, the discussion was conducted in the participants' preferred language ¹⁸. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following the framework by Braun and Clarke ¹⁹. The process involved multiple stages, including familiarization with the data, coding, and identifying emerging themes from the participants' discussions. This iterative analysis ensured that the themes accurately reflected the experiences and insights of the participants. The thematic analysis method is widely recognized for its flexibility and rigor in qualitative research, enabling nuanced interpretations of complex social phenomena. By employing purposive sampling, focus group discussions, and thematic analysis, this study aimed to generate actionable insights that could inform the development of targeted nutritional programs and improve the educational outcomes for HIV-positive learners with albinism, ultimately contributing to their well-being and academic success ²⁰.

Results and Discussion

The responses from participants reveal that School Development Committees (SDCs) play an essential role in addressing the nutritional challenges faced by HIV-positive rural learners with albinism in Zimbabwe, particularly during times of crisis such as El Niño-induced droughts.

Ms. Ndoro (Female Teacher) emphasizes the importance of SDCs in identifying vulnerable learners and organizing food donations from local farmers and NGOs. However, she points out that the lack of training on the specific nutritional needs of HIV-positive learners with albinism limits their effectiveness. This highlights the need for better capacity building within committees, including training in understanding the unique dietary requirements of children with albinism, as well as forming stronger partnerships with local health workers ²¹. Studies have shown that integrating local health expertise with community initiatives can significantly improve nutritional outcomes for marginalized groups ²².

Mrs. Chirwa (Female SDC Member) underscores the challenge of sourcing food during droughts and suggests that more community participation and resource mobilization are necessary. Her call for involving local businesses and educating the community about the importance of

¹⁷ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison, "Research Methods in Education (Eight Edition)," Abingdon, Oxon (2018).

¹⁸ Mag Gardner et al., "Engage Secondary Students Because the Future Depends on It." (2021).

¹⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11, no. 4 (2019): 589–597, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1628806>.

²⁰ Rowell Ubogu, "The Role of Teacher Education in Improving Quality Education for a Functional Society," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* (2020); V Z Vanduhe et al., "Students' Evidential Increase in Learning Using Gamified Learning Environment," in *Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing*, vol. 880, 2019, 1109–1122, https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85055906112&doi=10.1007%2F978-3-030-02686-8_82&partnerID=40&md5=79353c0aa3139041cde5c64eca1a7e38.

²¹ Cevat Giray Aksoy, Barry Eichengreen, and Orkun Saka, "The Political Scar of Epidemics," *NBER Working Paper*, no. w27401 (2020).

²² Dominic Pasura and Daniel Makina, "Contemporary African Migration: An Introduction," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary African Migration* (Routledge, 2023), 1–20.

supporting vulnerable children is aligned with findings from recent research, which suggests that community engagement and private sector involvement can enhance the sustainability of nutritional support programs ²³. Additionally, collaborative efforts with NGOs, as advocated by Ms. Jani (Female NGO Official), are key to addressing these gaps. NGOs can provide vital training and resources, and regular assessments of learners' specific needs are crucial to adjusting nutritional strategies in real time ²⁴. This collaborative, holistic approach ensures that no child is left behind and that nutritional support is tailored to the unique challenges faced by children with albinism.

Mrs. Mutsvangwa (Female Village Head) further advocates for SDC empowerment through training and resource provision, coupled with community awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of supporting children with albinism. This view aligns with research that stresses the importance of community-based awareness programs in ensuring that marginalized groups, like children with albinism, receive the necessary support during times of crisis ²⁵. The integration of awareness campaigns can foster a culture of inclusion and care, ensuring that the most vulnerable are not neglected in public health efforts ²⁶.

Officer Moyo (Male Victim-Friendly Police Officer) also suggests creating a reporting mechanism to allow teachers and parents to communicate concerns regarding nutritional support, emphasizing the need for continuous feedback loops. This solution echoes the findings of studies that emphasize the value of transparent communication channels in improving the effectiveness of community interventions ²⁷.

Pastor Zulu (Male Pastor) recognizes the potential of churches in complementing the efforts of SDCs by providing resources and volunteers. He emphasizes the importance of a clear plan for collaboration between churches and SDCs, which can foster more coordinated support. This approach reflects the broader principle that inter-organizational collaboration can amplify the effectiveness of public health initiatives ²⁸.

Finally, Mr. Chigwedere (Male Parent) calls for greater parental involvement in the SDCs, suggesting regular meetings for parents to stay informed and actively participate in solving their children's nutritional problems. Parental involvement is crucial, as it ensures that the voices and perspectives of families are integrated into decision-making processes, which can improve the sustainability and relevance of nutritional support programs ²⁹.

²³ Mavezera, Dudu, and Majoko, "21st Century Teacher Professional Development for Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education."

²⁴ Fernando Reimers et al., "Supporting the Continuation of Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic" (2020): 1–38.

²⁵ Segun Johnson Showande and Iretomiwa Faith Ikuomola, "Pharmacists' Involvement with and Pharmacy Clients' Awareness of Adverse Drug Reaction Reporting in Nigeria—a Mixed-Methods Approach," *Journal of Pharmaceutical Health Services Research* 13, no. 4 (2022): 276–288.

²⁶ Reimers et al., "Supporting the Continuation of Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

²⁷ Rob Jones, "The Student Experience of Undergraduate Students: Towards a Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* (2018).

²⁸ Chidarikire and Hlalele, "School Development Committees: A Vehicle for Sustainable Inclusive Education in Zimbabwean Rural Primary Schools."

²⁹ Leeann Mahlo and Tim D Windsor, "Older and More Mindful? Age Differences in Mindfulness Components and Well-Being," *Aging & Mental Health* 25, no. 7 (2021): 1320–1331.

The oral narrations reveal a collective recognition of the critical role that School Development Committees (SDCs) play in addressing the nutritional needs of HIV-positive rural learners with albinism. However, challenges such as resource limitations, lack of specialized knowledge, and insufficient community involvement hinder the effectiveness of these committees. A more integrated, community-driven approach that involves local businesses, churches, NGOs, and parents—coupled with training, awareness, and regular feedback mechanisms—can significantly improve the nutritional support provided to these vulnerable children. This multi-pronged strategy is essential for addressing the complex nutritional challenges faced by HIV-positive learners with albinism in Zimbabwe.

Discussion

The narratives from participants reveal significant insights into the nutritional challenges faced by HIV-positive rural learners with albinism in Zimbabwe, particularly during the El Niño-induced drought conditions. These insights are discussed below, framed within the context of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and the broader literature.

Nutritional Challenges Faced by HIV-Positive Rural Learners with Albinism

The findings illustrate the multifaceted challenges faced by HIV-positive rural learners with albinism, particularly during drought conditions. According to Mr. Chirwa, the drought severely limits food availability and variety, which is particularly problematic for learners with albinism who require balanced nutrition to support their immune systems. This resonates with existing literature, which emphasizes that individuals with albinism are more vulnerable to health complications, particularly skin cancers, due to their sensitivity to sunlight³⁰. As noted by Mr. Chirwa, the scarcity of food and the need for a specialized diet often lead to malnutrition, making these children more susceptible to infections and other health issues³¹.

The narratives also reflect how the drought exacerbates social and familial challenges. Mrs. Moyo highlights the difficulty families face in providing sufficient nutrition for their children with albinism. This directly impacts their health and school attendance, as children often miss school due to illness.

Further, Mr. Ndlovu emphasizes the prioritization of food for able-bodied family members, leaving children with albinism vulnerable. This observation echoes findings from Etiyebo and Omiegde³², who reported that children with disabilities, including those with albinism, are more likely to suffer from malnutrition, particularly in times of crisis. Mr. Banda, an NGO official, stresses the need for targeted nutritional programs that cater to the specific needs of HIV-positive learners with albinism. This call for more tailored interventions aligns with recent

³⁰ Francis Benyah, "Pentecostalism, Media and the Politics of Homosexuality in Contemporary Ghana," *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 25, no. 1 (2019).

³¹ Chibike Amucheazi and Chidebe Nwankwo, "Remodelling Data Protection and Intellectual Property Rights in Nigeria: A Stitch in Time Perspective," *AJLHR* 7 (2023): 7.

³² Edwin Etiyeibo, "The 'Two Democracies' and Africa's Burden," *African Studies* 79, no. 4 (2020): 444–462.

research advocating for inclusive health and nutrition strategies to address the unique needs of vulnerable populations ³³.

In addition to nutritional challenges, participants like Officer Tembo and Pastor Moyo point out the compounded effects of stigma and bullying faced by children with albinism. Such social challenges exacerbate health issues and make it even more difficult for these children to access the support they need. This is in line with Ikuomola ³⁴, who discusses how social stigma can lead to further marginalization and health deterioration. Community support and inclusive environments are vital to mitigating these challenges, as emphasized by Reimer-Kirkam et al. ³⁵.

Mrs. Chikanga's perspective as a mother also highlights the emotional toll that food insecurity takes on caregivers, which is consistent with findings from Mahlo et al. ³⁶ that show the psychological strain placed on families caring for children with albinism during times of scarcity. The emotional and mental health aspects of food insecurity, therefore, need to be addressed alongside physical health interventions.

The research results suggest that HIV-positive learners with albinism face compounded nutritional and social challenges during droughts. These challenges are exacerbated by limited access to food, stigma, and insufficient community support. To address these challenges, targeted interventions that account for the specific nutritional and emotional needs of these children are crucial.

School Development Committees and Nutritional Support

The second theme focuses on the role of School Development Committees (SDCs) in facilitating nutritional support for HIV-positive rural learners with albinism. Responses from participants indicate that SDCs play a crucial role in organizing food donations and feeding programs, but several challenges remain.

Ms. Ndoro emphasizes the importance of SDCs in identifying vulnerable learners and organizing food donations from local farmers and NGOs. However, she also calls for better training for committee members to understand the specific nutritional needs of HIV-positive learners with albinism. This resonates with Bronfenbrenner's microsystem level, where individual knowledge and skills directly influence children's well-being ³⁷. Mrs. Chirwa, another committee member, highlights the need for increased resources and community participation to ensure the success of feeding programs. This reflects a common finding in the literature, where community engagement is recognized as a critical factor in the sustainability of nutritional support programs ³⁸.

³³ Pasura and Makina, "Contemporary African Migration: An Introduction."

³⁴ Showande and Ikuomola, "Pharmacists' Involvement with and Pharmacy Clients' Awareness of Adverse Drug Reaction Reporting in Nigeria—a Mixed-Methods Approach."

³⁵ Everett Reimer, *School Is Dead* (Penguin Books Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1971).

³⁶ Mahlo and Windsor, "Older and More Mindful? Age Differences in Mindfulness Components and Well-Being."

³⁷ Hamufare Dumisani Mugauri et al., "Exploring HIV Testing Models for Differentiated Service Delivery in Southern Africa: A Systematic Review," *Evidence Based Health Policy, Management and Economics* (2023).

³⁸ Chidarikire and Hlalele, "School Development Committees: A Vehicle for Sustainable Inclusive Education in Zimbabwean Rural Primary Schools."

Further, Mrs. Mutsvangwa suggests that empowering SDCs with better training and resources could significantly enhance their effectiveness. This aligns with the recommendations of Ologunju et al.³⁹, who argue that comprehensive training programs are essential for improving the capacity of local committees to address specific nutritional needs. Ms. Jani, an NGO official, advocates for collaboration between NGOs and SDCs to provide training, resources, and regular assessments of learners' nutritional needs. This partnership model has been shown to improve the efficacy of health and nutrition programs⁴⁰.

Officer Moyo highlights the importance of establishing a reporting mechanism to facilitate communication between teachers, parents, and SDCs. This would help identify gaps and improve the coordination of nutritional support, ensuring that children with albinism receive the help they need. Such mechanisms are crucial for creating responsive and adaptive support systems, as suggested by Majoko & Dudu⁴¹, who stress the importance of monitoring and evaluation in community health interventions.

Finally, Pastor Zulu underscores the potential for collaboration between churches and SDCs, leveraging church resources and volunteers to enhance nutritional support. This approach reflects a broader community health model that encourages collective action and resource-sharing, a strategy that has been effective in addressing public health crises⁴².

SDCs play a vital role in supporting HIV-positive learners with albinism, but their effectiveness is hindered by a lack of resources, training, and community engagement. Empowering SDCs through better training, resource allocation, and collaboration with NGOs and local organizations can enhance their ability to provide adequate nutritional support. Community-based approaches that involve all stakeholders, including schools, NGOs, churches, and families, are essential for addressing the nutritional needs of vulnerable learners.

Both the nutritional challenges and the role of SDCs in addressing these challenges underscore the complex, multifaceted nature of food insecurity faced by HIV-positive learners with albinism in rural Zimbabwe. The findings reveal the need for tailored, inclusive approaches that consider not only the nutritional but also the social and emotional needs of these children. By applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, we can see how individual, community, and societal factors must be addressed in unison to ensure equitable access to nutrition and support for vulnerable learners.

Conclusion

The research underscores the pressing nutritional challenges faced by HIV-positive rural learners with albinism in Zimbabwe, especially during periods of El Niño-induced drought. These

³⁹ Bola Fajemirokun, "Critical Issues Arising from Litigating HIV/AIDS Discrimination in Nigeria," *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law* 21, no. 4 (2021): 313–327.

⁴⁰ Munyaradzi Chidarikire and Munyaradzi Saruchera, "Exploring Multifaceted Impacts of El Niño Driven Drought on Child-Headed Rural Learners' Well-Being in Drought-Prone Chivi, Zimbabwe," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Rural and Community Studies* 6 (2024): 1–13.

⁴¹ Mavezera, Dudu, and Majoko, "21st Century Teacher Professional Development for Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education."

⁴² Chidarikire and Hlalele, "School Development Committees: A Vehicle for Sustainable Inclusive Education in Zimbabwean Rural Primary Schools."

learners are severely impacted by food insecurity, as the drought disrupts local agriculture, leading to reduced crop yields and rising food prices. This situation exacerbates the difficulties for already vulnerable populations, particularly learners with albinism who have specific dietary requirements to manage their heightened sensitivity to sun exposure and other related health issues. The lack of access to these essential nutrients puts these learners at a further disadvantage, perpetuating a cycle of malnutrition that affects their physical health, cognitive development, and overall educational performance.

In addition to these immediate challenges, the role of School Development Committees (SDCs) in providing nutritional support is pivotal but requires substantial enhancement. While SDCs are crucial in ensuring meals are provided and in promoting awareness of nutritional needs, there is a significant gap in their capacity to address the unique needs of HIV-positive learners with albinism. The findings highlight the necessity for increased training and capacity building among SDC members. By equipping SDC members with deeper knowledge of nutrition and health, particularly in relation to albinism and HIV, these committees can better support the learners' health and educational outcomes.

The implications of this research are far-reaching for both the field of education and public health. The study points to the urgent need for a multi-faceted approach to nutritional support, one that not only addresses general food security issues but also considers the specific health and dietary needs of vulnerable learners. Future research should explore targeted interventions that can provide sustainable solutions to the nutrition challenges faced by these learners, particularly in the context of climate change. Additionally, there is potential for policy changes at the national level to ensure that educational institutions and SDCs are better equipped to address the nutritional needs of learners with albinism, thereby improving their health and academic performance. These findings have significant implications for improving educational equity and public health strategies in rural Zimbabwe and similar contexts globally.

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