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Editorial Note

The *Journal of Management, Science, Innovation and Technology (JMSIT)* is pleased to present Volume 2, Issue 1, a rich and multidisciplinary collection of scholarly works that collectively advance discourse at the intersection of management, innovation, technology, and sustainable development, particularly within the African context.

This issue brings together diverse empirical and conceptual contributions that interrogate contemporary challenges and opportunities in society. A strong thematic thread across the manuscripts is the pursuit of *contextualised innovation and inclusive development*, with a clear emphasis on *indigenous knowledge systems, human capital development, and institutional transformation*. Several contributions in this volume explore *human resource development and leadership dynamics*. Studies on *ethical leadership, Ubuntu philosophy, and moral courage* within Zimbabwean urban councils provide critical insights into governance and organisational integrity. Complementing these are investigations into *employee training, career development, and human resource strategies* in sectors such as mining and local authorities, highlighting the centrality of people-centred approaches in driving performance and sustainability.

The issue further underscores the importance of *knowledge systems and collaborative innovation*. Research on knowledge sharing in state universities reveals its mediating role in enhancing institutional performance, while studies on artificial intelligence and blockchain technologies demonstrate the transformative potential of digital innovation in Zimbabwe's banking sector. A notable contribution of this volume is its strong focus on *indigenous knowledge, harurwa and localised value chains*.

In addition, the issue engages with *entrepreneurship and economic transformation*. Articles on the silver economy and elderly entrepreneurship in informal sectors broaden the discourse on inclusivity, while analyses of tax incentives and foreign direct investment offer policy-relevant insights for regional economic development within SADC and beyond. Tourism and hospitality also feature prominently, with critical examinations of domestic tourism strategies, community empowerment in sustainable tourism, and the conceptual foundations of hospitality as a discipline. These contributions deepen understanding of how tourism can be leveraged for community development and national growth.

Collectively, the manuscripts in this issue reflect a commitment to *evidence-based scholarship, contextual relevance, and practical applicability*. They not only contribute to academic knowledge but also provide actionable insights for policymakers, industry practitioners, and development stakeholders.

The Editorial Board extends its sincere appreciation to all authors and reviewers whose dedication and scholarly rigour have made this publication possible. As JMSIT continues to grow, it remains committed to fostering impactful research that drives innovation, informs policy, and contributes to sustainable development in Africa and beyond.

Editor-in-Chief

Journal on Management, Science, Innovation and Technology

**Knowledge sharing as a determinant of Zimbabwe's State universities' performance:
The mediating role of research collaboration**

Chikono Lucy¹, Chikazhe Lovemore² & Manyeruke Josphat³

Chinhoyi University of Technology, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences
(Corresponding author: lichikono@cut.ac.zw)

²Chinhoyi University of Technology, Graduate Business School,

³Chinhoyi University of Technology, Department of Retail and Consumer Sciences

Abstract

Knowledge sharing enhances organisational performance, fosters competitive advantage, organisational learning, and innovation; it is of significant interest to both researchers and practitioners. The study sought to examine whether knowledge sharing positively influences university performance and collaborative behaviour among academics and researchers. Also, the study investigated how university collaborations influence university performance. A cross-sectional survey of 180 academic staff was conducted, and data gathered using a self-administered structured questionnaire. Respondents were randomly sampled from selected universities, and data were analysed through SPSS V23 and AMOS V23. Results from the study show that knowledge sharing has a positive influence on both university research collaborations and university performance. Additionally, university research collaborations were found to influence university performance. Lastly, it was concluded that university research collaborations mediate the relationship between knowledge sharing and university performance. By examining the influence of knowledge sharing on university collaborations and performance, the current study aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the performance of the higher education institutions domain.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, research collaborations, and university performance.

Introduction

University performance is a subject that is both current and growing, and it is discussed by both academic scholars and practitioners (Purwanto et al., 2023). The idea of performance is

examined generally and specifically in academic settings (Mehmood et al., 2022). The notion of performance has experienced a remarkable transformation in the last few decades. Initially, definitions of performance solely focused on financial metrics; however, as time went on, non-financial metrics were also considered, which proved to be crucial for the smooth operation of the organisation, particularly within higher education institutions (Miao et al., 2024). In order to compare and differentiate institutions, either in terms of their study programs or overall, or for financial purposes, accreditation, and quality assurance, performance assessment employs certain metrics (Ahmed & Barry, 2023).

One of the newest fields of management, knowledge sharing, is dedicated to the study of how information is created, arranged, disseminated, and used for the growth of organisations (Purwanto et al., 2023). Knowledge sharing is of great importance for many organisations in the knowledge-based economy (Miao et al., 2024). Also, knowledge sharing is a key part of the knowledge management process (Alyouzbaky et al., 2024) and structures that ensure effective utilization of available knowledge resources to improve performance (Mehmood et al., 2022). It enables firms to improve their strategic, innovative, and marketing abilities (Chatterjee et al., 2022). As a result, developing a sustainable competitive advantage heavily depends on employees' knowledge sharing (Mehmood et al., 2022). Consequently, the competence to share knowledge is crucial for most organizational processes and performance outcomes (Rossoni et al., 2024) and attracts a lot of interest from the academic community (Chikazhe & Makanyeza, 2022).

Research that involves cooperation between researchers, institutions, organisations, and/or communities may be referred to as collaborative research (Miao et al., 2024). This collaboration can contribute unique knowledge to a project. International research partnerships greatly improve institutions' academic standing and excellence (He & Ismail, 2023). Universities may have access to a variety of information and skills by collaborating with organisations and researchers throughout the world (Miao et al., 2024). Establishing creative partnerships between research teams from academia, government, and the corporate sector can also benefit from collaboration (Nurdiana et al., 2023). These partnerships may lead to long-term research collaborations that advance society, science, and a wide range of economic interests (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Despite having individual researchers and academics, Zimbabwe's higher education institutions continue to underperform in terms of the production of goods (Chikazhe & Makanyeza, 2022; Mazikana et al., 2023). Zimbabwean state universities' performance does not match world standards, where universities are ranked among the best goods producers through research (Dangaiso et al., 2022). Individual researchers in Zimbabwe are researching, but university performance within the country remains low (Chikazhe et al., 2022; Chivasa et al., 2021). Intention to research is there, but can good results come from sole research? The current study therefore, attempted to investigate whether Knowledge Sharing and university collaborations amongst academics can improve Zimbabwean state universities. In trying to achieve this, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the effect of knowledge sharing on university performance?*
- 2. Does Knowledge Sharing influence university research collaborations?*
- 3. Do university research collaborations have an effect on university performance?*
- 4. What is the mediating role of university research collaboration on the relationship between Knowledge Sharing and university performance?*

The remainder of the document is structured as follows: Hypotheses are developed in the hypothesis development section. The literature review section presents the research and discusses the theories supporting it. The research methodology section explains the methodology used for data collection and analysis, as well as the presentation of research findings. The discussion section discusses the study's findings, and the conclusion and implications follow.

Literature Review

Theories anchoring the study

According to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), an individual is more likely to participate in a certain behaviour if they have a greater intention to do so (Manstead & Parker, 1995). It shows the link between beliefs and behaviour, further indicating that behaviour can be planned and is intentional (Wahyuni et al., 2020). The theory proposes that people's actions are not solely determined by their attitudes or aims but also influenced by the perceptions of what others think of them, in addition to their ability to control those intentions (Peters et al., 2020). The TPB serves as the foundational research framework for analysing the attitude, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norm about the academics' intention to share

their knowledge. The TPB in the current study was used to assist in examining how academics' attitudes toward continuing to share knowledge in universities may influence collaboration and research.

The Theory of Reasoned Action introduced by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) underpins the decisions to focus on the knowledge-sharing intention of employees, as opposed to their attitude or actual knowledge-sharing behaviour. In this instance, the Theory of Reasoned Action explains actual behaviour as a function of attitude and intention towards a specific behaviour (Razak et al., 2016). In the context of knowledge sharing, this suggests that an employee's intention to share information would be greater if they had a more positive attitude towards doing so. In turn, an employee's likelihood of sharing information with colleagues increases with the strength of their intention to do so. Lyu et al. (2020) assert that a lack of knowledge-sharing intention may negatively influence actual knowledge-sharing behaviour. To profit from real information sharing, it is crucial to investigate the elements that affect knowledge-sharing intention. In order to relate the exogenous and endogenous variables that have contributed to the present body of knowledge, this study has connected the two theories.

Knowledge sharing

Since the efficacy of information sharing among employees and the resulting value created for the organisation ultimately determine the success of knowledge management activities, knowledge sharing is a key component of knowledge management (Al-Husseini et al., 2021). The deliberate dissemination and transmission of both explicit and implicit information by individuals is referred to as knowledge sharing (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Lam et al., 2021). According to Al-Kurdi et al. (2020), Knowledge Sharing was found to be significantly influenced by attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, organizational variables, and technology. Bock et al. (2005) pointed out that knowledge sharing intention refers to the degree to which individuals believe that they will engage in knowledge sharing behaviours. This study refers to the definition of knowledge sharing intention by Bock et al. (2005). Intention to share knowledge in an organization refers to the willingness of employees to share knowledge with others that they have acquired or created (Chikazhe et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the intention to share knowledge indicates how someone has a desire to share knowledge with others, and the intention is due to a relationship or relationship interaction between the person and other individuals, which is manifested in behaviour (Miao et al., 2024). Furthermore, it is well understood that the desire to exchange knowledge is fuelled by the

presence of knowledge-sharing self-efficacy (Miao et al., 2024). Knowledge sharing self-efficacy is a behavioural control variable that may help people overcome issues in the learning environment connected to knowledge sharing (Lyu et al., 2020). Knowledge-sharing intention is the source for any employee before they can begin sharing anything in organizations (Fait et al., 2023). Intention to share knowledge is considered one of the variables affecting knowledge sharing (Gupta et al., 2009).

University Research Collaboration

Collaboration refers to the capacity of an individual to contribute effectively in a group (Haider et al., 2022). This entails tenacity, adding to the collective knowledge, appreciating the efforts of others, and settling disputes. Effective collaboration involves a division of labour with participants who are engaged in active discourse that results in a compilation of their efforts (Scoular et al., 2025). According to Chedid et al. (2020), Collaboration has been considered a way to address the challenges of the 21st century, fostering the necessary innovation, growth, and productivity for all parties involved. The importance of scientific knowledge generated by academic institutions in collaboration with the private sector is undeniable for the economic growth of a nation, in less developed countries, diverse barriers may impede this type of cooperation (Chikazhe et al., 2022). By integrating all of the current technological skills and capacities, cooperation between highly trained academics and professionals in private organisations and businesses might strengthen local economies. Several scholars have looked at examples of how research institutes working together might affect economic growth. Largely influenced by the Anglo-American model, HE in the Arabian Gulf is characterized by the evolving roles of universities, which now have traditional missions of teaching and research, as well as a third mission of economic development (Al-Thani et al., 2021; Sam and Van Der Sijde, 2014). Although there may be different perspectives on this new goal, universities in the Gulf region are expected to adopt the concept of an entrepreneurial university, which emphasizes partnerships between universities and external stakeholders (Al-Maadeed, 2019). This means that they are now placing more emphasis on making a positive social and economic impact (Al-Kuwari et al., 2021). This is in line with the decades-old trend of higher-education institutions (HEIs) adopting economic objectives and entrepreneurial approaches, patenting, and licensing technologies to commercial entities (Fisher and Atkinson-Grosjean, 2002). Alongside the preservation, production, and transmission of knowledge, HEIs are engaged in the promotion of economic growth and development to promote societal welfare (Al-Thani et al., 2021). In the Gulf region, this means that HEIs are increasingly seen as knowledge-

production hubs and as partners for industries with the goal of maintaining competitiveness (Al-Qahtani et al., 2022).

University Performance

Performance refers to the degree of achievement of the mission at the workplace that builds up an employee's job (Cascio, 2006). University performance can also be divided into financial and non-financial performance (Guthrie & Neumann, 2007). Research and teaching performance are typically included in non-financial performance. He and Ismail (2023) indicated that the role of higher education, especially universities, is an important role in efforts to improve the quality of human resources, and universities compete to increase competitiveness by improving their performance. In this regard, state universities' performance is based on their capacity to manufacture things, conduct research, provide students with relevant and high-quality higher education, and give staff and other stakeholders fulfilling jobs.

Empirical Literature and Research Hypotheses Development

A study carried out by Huang and Zhou (2020) on Chinese students' intention to use Internet-based technology for learning indicated that Chinese university students' intention to use Internet-based technology with a learning focus was significantly influenced by attitude, perceived usefulness, and the subjective norm. A study by Hosen et al (2023) aimed to examine knowledge sharing behaviour among academics from a behavioural perspective through the lenses of the theory of planned behaviour, perceived trust, and organizational climate. The results showed that academics' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control are greatly influenced by their salient beliefs, which include behavioural, normative, and control beliefs. Alyouzbaky et al. (2024) stated that when workers share their experience and knowledge with others, organizational staff performance will improve (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020), and studies have proven that knowledge sharing directly affects improving organizational performance (Oyemomi et al., 2017). Based on the debate above, it is therefore hypothesised that:

H1: Knowledge Sharing has a positive effect on university performance

The study by Nurdiana et al. (2023) examined the implementation and impact of collaborative partnerships for digital education in improving students' learning achievement at the Institute of Islamic Religion of Sultan Muhammad Syafiudd in Sambas, Indonesia. Since they provide

new ways to improve teaching and learning, digital technologies have become essential to education. The study's findings add to the body of knowledge already available on cooperative partnerships in digital education and offer guidance to practitioners, legislators, and educational institutions looking to improve student learning outcomes through productive partnerships. The results emphasised how crucial it is to build long-lasting relationships and use digital tools to advance high-quality education and help students succeed in Indonesia. Fait et al.'s (2023) study's primary goal was to show how "volunteer" employees' perceptions of the human, structural, and relational capital elements of intellectual capital foster a motivating atmosphere that improves knowledge sharing and encourages "volunteer" employee engagement. The concept is used in the non-profit sector, which bases its strategy on sharing values with volunteers and staff. As a result, it requires the implementation of engagement techniques that are advantageous for the development and deployment of organisational and individual human resources. The findings demonstrate that the advantageous environment brought about by the incentives below the industrial collaboration dimensions has a direct and beneficial impact on knowledge sharing. Volunteer employee involvement benefits from increased knowledge sharing, which is a result of industry collaboration. Considering the above, it is therefore hypothesised that:

H2: Knowledge Sharing positively influences university research collaborations

Rossoni et al. (2024) analyzed university-industry collaborations set up for the purpose of research and development in an effort to recognize the barriers and facilitators of the process and to identify the approaches by which such barriers may be overcome. The findings demonstrate the value of building relational social capital and offering tax breaks to support the industry's efforts to innovate through partnerships with academia. They also demonstrate that, to some extent, collaborative barriers in R&D can be removed by beginning with smaller projects and progressively increasing their complexity. A study by Tseng, Huang, and Chen (2020) on traditional viewpoints, which mostly confine university–industry collaboration within a separate channel, to build the relationship between university–industry collaboration overall channel characteristics and university research performance. Two collaboration strategies are collaboration breadth, which is the scope of different channels, and collaboration depth, which is the extent to which universities delve into different channels. Based on a comprehensive panel dataset of Chinese universities in mainland China in 2009–2013, it was found that collaboration breadth and collaboration depth have a linear and curvilinear effect on academic research performance, respectively. Moreover, the interaction of collaboration

breadth and depth shows a negative impact on academic research performance. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: University research collaborations have a positive effect on university performance

A study carried out by Ting and Tan (2019), "The influence of researcher competence on university-industry collaboration: The mediating role of domain knowledge transfers and spillovers," Findings revealed that Researcher's competence serves as a success booster to initiate the collaborative endeavour, and the University-Industry collaboration is found to be substantially influenced by the domain knowledge transfers and spillovers. The goal of the study by Alyouzbaky and Tawfeeq (2024) is to investigate the variables that influence online information sharing among academics at the University of Mosul in the Republic of Iraq. The findings demonstrated that communication and knowledge self-efficacy had no bearing on the behaviour of online knowledge sharing, but that cooperation, perceived flexibility, and willingness to share had a significant impact on this behaviour, which in turn affected the respondents' academic performance. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H4: University research collaboration plays a mediating role in the relationship between knowledge sharing and university performance.

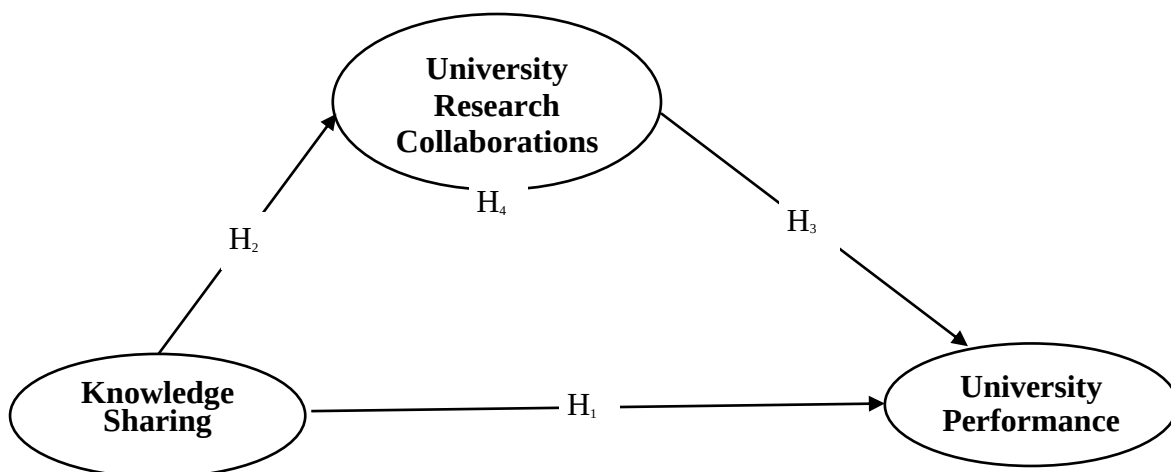


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2024)

Research gap

From the literature reviewed, it can be concluded that studies on knowledge sharing were done in many other countries and little has been done in Zimbabwe, particularly in state universities. Therefore, a gap exists in the literature to be covered Koko & Makumbe (2020). Knowledge

sharing has many factors to consider in terms of the university performance, aligning to the innovation and industrialisation concept. As a result, this research aims to fill the gaps in the current literature in two ways:

Firstly, by developing a policy recommendation framework that portrays how university performance can be enhanced through university research collaborations, knowledge sharing, and university research funding. Secondly, by investigating how university research funding plays a moderating role in the relationship between university collaborations and university performance. This gap in knowledge sharing makes this study unique and imperative as it seeks to contribute to the current body of knowledge sharing intention, university collaboration, university funding, and university performance.

Methodology

Positivist philosophy was adopted in this study. Positivism depends on statistics in revealing the truth and objectivity (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This viewpoint is free from partiality since the researcher does not influence outcomes (Martelli, 2018; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Also, positivism is open to objective and scientific analysis (Martelli, 2018; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Positivism is based on the concept that knowledge is validated by actual facts (Creswell 2017). Positivists assume that study findings may be extrapolated from other studies (Creswell, 2009, & Martelli, 2018). Bryman (2024) states that a research paradigm is a cluster of beliefs about how a particular discipline influences what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted to produce a report.

A cross-sectional survey of 180 academics was conducted within institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe between October and December 2024. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey because it provides an assessment of exposure and outcome in a sample of the population at a certain moment in time. Participants in the study were lecturers from ten out of fifteen (15) state universities in Zimbabwe. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents since some of the lecturers were not available during the time of study. Primary data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was pilot tested before actual data collection, and errors and ambiguity were eradicated. Data was collected through both physical and online questionnaire distribution. Ethical considerations were observed during the data collection process; for example, permission was sought and granted to carry out the study.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire had six components and twenty-nine (29) closed-ended questions. The three components are: knowledge sharing, collaborative research, and university performance. The questionnaire had a demographic data section.

Table 1: Items used to measure collaborative research, Knowledge Sharing, and university performance

Codes	Collaborative Research	Sources
COL1	Through collaborative research, the university benefits from multiple researchers within universities who are willing to share data.	Scoular et al. (2025), Rossoni, Vasconcellos, and Rossoni (2024)
COL2	Through collaborative research, the university benefits from collaborative research utilising resources not easily accessible to an individual	
COL3	The university benefits from sharing its expertise.	
COL4	University achieves a common goal through collaborative research	
COL5	Through collaborative research, scholars can tackle complex problems to benefit the nation.n	
COL6	Through collaborative research, innovative solutions are attained for the benefit of the university.	
COL7	Through collaborative research, the university benefits from a team with complementary skills, and knowledge is assembled.	
	Knowledge Sharing	Sources
KSI1	Knowledge sharing creates strong relationships with members who have common interests in the university.	Charband and Navimipour (2019), (Chandran and Alammari, 2021),
KSI2	Knowledge sharing draws smooth cooperation from outstanding members in the future	
KSI3	Knowledge sharing expands the scope of my association with other members in the university.	

KSI4	Knowledge sharing would strengthen the ties between existing members in the university.	Mustika et al. (2022), Moreno, Cavazotte, and Dutra (2020)
KSI5	Knowledge with other university academics answers queries regarding future knowledge.	
KSI6	Academics who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to actively share their expertise since doing so will increase their happiness and recognition.	
KSI7	Reward is one of the most effective methods of encouraging academics to share their knowledge with others	
University Performance		Sources
UNIP1	The university is enjoying good-quality research from collaborative studies.	Tseng, Huang, and Chen (2020) Bock et al. (2005) Son et al. (2020)
UNIP2	University ranking is increasing as a result of collaborative funding.	
UNIP3	The university is coming up with new discoveries and insights resulting from funded research.	
UNIP4	Researchers within the universities are developing theories to proffer solutions to solve national problems.	
UNIP5	The university attracts students due to its collaborative studies	
UNIP6	Greater talent retention is achieved by universities through collaborative studies.	
UNIP7	Through collaborative studies, the university is innovative and effective in problem-solving	
UNIP8	Through collaborative studies, the university is attracting global funding	

Source: Author (2025)

Results from the demographic data analysis are presented in Table 2 below:

The response rate

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents (82.2%) were above 30 years, and the bigger part were female (57.8%) compared to male (41.1%) respondents. Most respondents (28.9%)

were between 11-15 years of employment, followed by 16-20 years (27.8%). Master's degree holders constituted 45.6% of the bigger part of respondents who participated in the study.

Table 2: Demographic

Demographic profile of the sample		Frequency	Percent%
Age group of respondents	Less than 30	32	17.8
	30-39	30	16.7
	40-49	60	33.3
	50-59	50	27.8
	60 and above	8	4.4
Gender of respondents	Male	74	41.1
	Female	104	57.8
Length of employment of the respondent	Less than 5 years	31	17.2
	6 -10 years	30	16.7
	11-15 years	52	28.9
	16 - 20 years	50	27.8
	21 years and above	17	9.4
Educational level	First Degree	28	15.6
	Masters	82	45.6
	Doctoral	69	38.3

Source: Authors (2025)

Results

Present results in terms of each research question.

1. Does Knowledge Sharing influence university research collaborations?

The results show that in a context where the government exercises subsidy strategies, actors within university-industry collaborations receiving the subsidy will generate more profit and greater social welfare. University-industry collaboration (UIC) can moreover formulate strategies for promoting products. Existing research by Tian, Su, & Yang 2022) has shown that UIC helps a firm achieve superior innovation outcomes. They examined the influence of UIC on firm innovation performance by considering the interfirm alliance network. Through collaborative research, the university benefits from multiple researchers within universities

who are willing to share data. Through collaborative research, the university benefits from collaborative research utilising resources not easily accessible to an individual.

2. Do university research collaborations have an effect on university performance?

The findings and interpretation of the results provide enough evidence to conclude that university collaborations have a positive effect on university performance. This implies that Higher education institutions should continue offering support to researchers to improve university performance. In addition, the study concludes that the University achieves a common goal through collaborative research. This implies that university collaborations should be supported as well, since they complement each other. Based on the hypothesis tested, the study concludes that through collaborative research, scholars are able to tackle complex problems to benefit the nation. The study's findings demonstrated that through collaborative research, the university benefits from collaborative research utilising resources not easily accessible to an individual. Furthermore, the study findings revealed that the university benefits from sharing their expertise.

3. What is the mediating role of university research collaboration on the relationship between Knowledge sharing and university performance?

University research funding was found to play a moderating role on the relationship between university collaborations and university performance. The results provide adequate confirmation that University research funding plays a moderating role on the relationship between university collaborations and university performance. In addition, the study sought to establish what should be done by the government or the Higher Education Institutions to improve university performance.

Scale Validation

Before conducting a structural equation modelling to test research hypotheses, data were validated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), reliability analysis, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to better understand variable item structures and to determine which items in the questionnaire truly measured the underlying constructs. According to Gesing, Burbage, Hoang, Kulo and Tornwall, (2023), the main goal of factor analysis is to understand the structure of a latent variable and to create a questionnaire to measure this latent variable. These analyses were done in SPSS version 20 and AMOS version 21. Scale validation was done through sampling adequacy, reliability, and validity (discriminant & convergent) testing

Sampling adequacy testing

KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to test the sampling adequacy in AMOS V23. Results for the KMO test are presented below in Table 2.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.765
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	15001.536
	Df	404
	Sig.	.000

Source: Author (2025)

As illustrated in Table 2, the sample was adequate and allowed confirmatory factor analysis to be conducted (Kline, 2015). Thus, in accordance with the recommendations of Bartlett (1954) and Kaiser (1974), KMO should be at least 0.6, with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significant at $p=0.00$.

Reliability results

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha scale, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Reliability results

Item	No. of items	alpha value
Collaborative Research	7	0.889
Knowledge Sharing	7	0.901
University Performance	8	0.864

Source: Author (2025)

The results in Table 3 indicate that minimum requirements for reliability were achieved as all alpha values were above 0.8 (Bujang et al., 2018; İnal et al., 2017).

Validity testing

Validity was tested using convergent and discriminant validity. A model fit index test was conducted before the validity test.

The measurement model was carried out using AMOS version 23. CMIN/DF (χ^2/DF), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted GFI (AGFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis

Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were the measurement model fit indices calculated. A satisfactory match is indicated by values of GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, and CFI that are closer to 1, and an acceptable RMSEA is less than .08 (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2007). According to Hooper et al. (2008), a decent model should have a χ^2/DF that is between 0 and 5, with smaller values signifying a better fit. Model fit indices test results show that the model was fit and met minimum expectations, as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Measurement model fit indices results

Item	Actual	Recommended	Source
CMIN/DF	3.175	Between 0-5	Hooper et al. (2008), Monteiro et al. (2017), Reisinger and Mavondo (2007)
GFI	.909	>.900	
AGFI	.951	>.900	
NFI	.936	>.900	
TLI	.944	>.900	
CFI	.917	>.900	
RMSEA	.052	Between .05 and .10	

Source: Author (2025)

The standardised factor loadings, individual item reliability, critical ratio, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability were used to evaluate convergent validity. Results for convergent validity are shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Results for convergent validity

Construct & items	Standardised factor loading	Individual item reliability	Critical ratio	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability
<i>Collaborative Research</i>					
COL1	.654	.677	-	.878	.890
COL2	.792	.843	16.556***		
COL3	.809	.861	17.442***		
COL4	.732	.911	15.120***		

COL5	.845	.754	14.223***		
COL6	.712	.922	16.900***		
COL7	.844	.779	17.528***		
Knowledge Sharing					
KSI1	.914	.852	-	.855	.901
KSI2	.925	.925	18.025***		
KSI3	.898	.707	17.345***		
KSI4	.738	.879	15.642***		
KSI5	.896	.658	17.336***		
KSI6	.738	.934	16.760***		
KSI7	.863	.722	16.784***		
University Performance					
UNIP1	.703	.733	-	.821	.865
UNIP2	.756	.743	15.330***		
UNIP3	.745	.846	15.221***		
UNIP4	.623	.762	14.434***		
UNIP5	.689	.867	14.740*** -		
UNIP6	.770	.788	16.001***		
UNIP7	.787	.832	17.001***		
UNIP8	.623	.749	14.221***		
Notes: – CR is fixed; *** significant at p < 0.001					

Source: Author (2025)

The analysis's findings, which are displayed in Table 5 above, indicate that the requirements for convergent validity were met as the standardised factor loadings and individual item reliability were all acceptable (Monteiro et al., 2017). Critical ratios were large enough, and the Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability results were all above 0.7 as recommended by Reisinger and Mavondo (2007).

Discriminant validity

As suggested by Hooper et al. (2008), discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing squared inter-construct correlations (SICCs) and average variance extracted (AVEs). The findings of the discriminant validity test are displayed in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Discriminant validity test results

Construct	Mean	SD	COL	KSI	UNIP
Collaborative Research (COL)	4.132	1.003	0.713		
Knowledge Sharing (KSI)	4.112	0.932	0.298	0.687	
University Performance (UNIP)	3.996	1.104	0.327	0.287	0.693

Note: Diagonal elements in bold represent AVEs

Source: Author (2025)

The diagonal bold figures AVEs must be above 0.5 and greater than the equivalent figures below each of them (SICC) for the results of a discriminant validity test to be considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Accordingly, all constructs exhibited AVEs higher than 0.5 and above their corresponding squared inter-construct correlations (Masuwai et al., 2024), according to the data in Table 6. This demonstrates that the requirements for meeting discriminant validity were met (Henseler et al., 2015).

Hypotheses test results

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) was applied in AMOS 23 to estimate the hypothesised model (H₁, H₂ and H₃). The adoption of SEM was based on the recommendation by Kline (2011) that it is one of the dominant techniques for testing complex models. Also, McQuitty and Wolf (2013) commend that SEM is effective in removing the effects of measurement error. Table 7 below presents the results of direct relationships (H₁, H₂, and H₃).

Table 7: Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Hypothesised Relationship	SRW	CR	Remark
H ₁	KSI → UNIP	0.312	16.325***	Supported
H ₂	KSI → COL	0.241	15.023***	Supported
H ₃	KSI → UNIP	0.275	14.256***	Supported

Notes: SRW standardised regression weight, CR critical ratio, *** significant at p < 0.001

Source: Author (2025)

The outcomes of the tests for hypotheses H₁, H₂, and H₃ were confirmed to be affirmative (supported) as shown in Table 7 above. All examined relationships had positive results, as shown by standardised regression weights (SRW) greater than 0.2. Furthermore, at $p < 0.001$, the critical values (CR) were both significant and acceptable.

The mediation effect of university research collaboration on the effect of knowledge sharing on university performance was further investigated using structural equation modelling in AMOS 23. The mediation effect results are displayed in Table 8 below;

Table 8: University research collaboration mediation results (H₄)

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	Description	Comment
H ₄	KSI → COL → UNIP	0.281***	COL partially mediates the effect of KSI on UNIP	Partial mediation
Note: ***Significant at $p < 0.001$				

Source: Author (2025)

The path knowledge sharing → research collaboration → university performance was a significant one, as shown by the data in Table 8 (path coefficient = .281; $p < 0.001$). The results show that research collaboration mediates the knowledge-sharing effect on university performance. Consequently, H₄ received support.

Discussion and Implications

Studies of this nature are important as they promote team building, hence improve performance within businesses and the success of the nation at large. Therefore, by examining the influence of knowledge sharing on research collaboration and university performance, the current study aimed to add to the body of knowledge in the management and performance of higher education institutions, leading to the production of goods. Earlier studies by Scoular et al. (2025), Rossoni, Vasconcellos, and Rossoni (2024) supported that knowledge sharing influences collaboration, which is similar to the findings of the current study. Evidently, the study has demonstrated that academics who are intrinsically motivated are likely to share their expertise and, by doing so, increase their happiness and recognition. Furthermore, the current study established that collaborations by researchers partially mediate the effect of knowledge sharing

on university performance. This implies that if collaboration is fully supported, knowledge sharing will have a positive effect on university performance. This corroborates an earlier study by Ting and Tan (2019) that settled for almost similar results. The current studies further extended findings by prior studies and went on to focus on how reward is one of the most effective methods of encouraging academics to share their knowledge with others.

Theoretical implications

This study improves our understanding of the effect of knowledge sharing on research collaboration and university performance, and it adds to the literature on higher education institutions' performance. The study sheds light on the effect of Knowledge Sharing and provides a theoretical contribution to the literature which agrees with the study findings (Rahman et al., 2021; Al-Kurdi et al., 2020; Fait et al., 2023; Oyemomi et al., 2017; Nurdian et al., 2023). As a result, this study supports the theoretical justification that currently exists for the beneficial effects of research knowledge sharing on team research and academic achievement.

Also, the study findings agree with theories underpinning the study. The TPB in the current study was used to assist in examining how academics' attitudes toward continuing to share knowledge in universities may influence collaboration and research. The study results confirmed that sharing knowledge has a positive influence on university performance. The TPB hypothesis is thus supported by the study's findings. Furthermore, choices to concentrate on workers' intentions to share information in order to enhance company outcomes are supported by the Theory of Reasoned Action. This has been supported by the study's results, in that knowledge sharing was found to influence both research collaboration and university performance, hence supporting the Theory of Reasoned Action.

Additionally, the study concluded that research collaborations mediate the impact of knowledge-sharing intentions on university performance. Thus, this study went further to add more on direct relationships among knowledge sharing, research collaboration, and university performance. The mediation results add new insights to the already existing body of knowledge on sharing and business performance.

Practical implications

This study sheds light on how leaders or executives oversee academic personnel to improve their intention to share information. Management should improve collaborative research, as universities benefit from multiple researchers within institutions who are willing to share data and knowledge. Through collaborative research, the university benefits from collaborative research utilising resources not easily accessible to an individual academic researcher. Furthermore, the university benefits from sharing its expertise and achieves common goals through collaborative research. Through collaborative research, scholars can tackle complex problems to benefit the institution and nation as innovative solutions are attained. Over and done with collaborative research, the university benefits from a team with complementary skills as knowledge is assembled for better results.

Management should be encouraged to promote knowledge sharing by academics through offering various incentives as this is one solution used to create strong relationships among researchers who have common research interest areas. This also draws smooth co-operation from outstanding members. Promotion of knowledge sharing among academics expands the scope of association with other members in the university and strengthen the ties among academics.

Management for higher education institution need to understand that the performance of their institutions is hinged on the production of goods and publications made by academic employees. Hence, universities should enjoy good quality research from collaborative studies. University raking results from collaborated new discoveries and insights, and this sometimes comes from funded research. University growth can be determined by increased enrolment which can result from students being attracted by collaborated and funded research.

Therefore, policymakers and university authorities are advised to support knowledge sharing and collaborated researches in universities so as to improve on the university performance. The study discovered that a reluctance to share knowledge has an impact on academic achievement. Regardless of the amount or nature of the rewards, management may put in place a system that is specifically tailored to encourage employees to share their expertise. Both inner and extrinsic incentives will successfully increase the exchange of information. Management should take into consideration factors that hinder knowledge sharing and assist in any way possible to make academics enjoy sharing knowledge amongst themselves.

Future research implications

The study was conducted within state universities only. Expanding similar studies to other private universities, not to state universities, may draw new insights which can assist the education sector. In this study, data were gathered from academic staff only. Future research may also take non-academic opinions into account when assessing the factors that influence Knowledge Sharing. It will also be interesting to consider other factors that can stand as mediators and moderators in the relationship between factors affecting knowledge sharing and knowledge sharing intention.

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The raging polemics of defining the phenomenon of hospitality: Towards silencing the storm

Maringeni Rosemary Poshai¹ & Patrick Walter Mamimine¹

¹Chinhoyi University of Technology, (Corresponding author: rosemaryposhai@gmail.com)

Abstract

The term hospitality became widely used in the 20th century to refer to an industry that covered hotels, restaurants and tourism. Etymologically, the concept was derived from the terms 'hospitalite' and 'hospitalis' as French and Latin derivatives, respectively. However, noteworthy is that the current discourse on the concept of hospitality remains a slaughter house of ideas and perspectives without any foreseeable consensus on the horizon. The debate largely features scholars who challenge a management-oriented perspective or the hegemony of the 'managerial' paradigm, which conceptualizes hospitality as a series of organisational functions or service transactions that provides ambience to the social and commercial manifestations of hospitality. In essence, the management-oriented perspective is too linear to embrace the multi-faceted nature of the hospitality phenomenon. The latter view also fails to bring closure to the conceptual disharmony in that its emphasis on 'commercial manifestations' is also too obscure and general to offer practical guidance to the hospitality industry. This scenario leaves the industry practitioners stuck in a cul-de-sac with hardly any clear pointers on what the phenomenon is about. This paper seeks to address the ongoing conceptual fragmentation that develops a more integrative approach to defining hospitality. Specifically, it aims to identify and synthesize the critical elements of hospitality from existing literature in order to propose a composite index of hospitality. The paper originates not to align with either pros or cons of the debate but to demonstrate with reviewed literature on the futility of such a disposition. Using a qualitative literature review, the paper tracked the polemical debate on hospitality. The analysis revealed that both managerial and socio-cultural interpretations of hospitality remained incomplete abstracts when considered in isolation. The literature highlighted the multiple dimensions that ranged from the quality of service, organizational efficiency to ethical, social, and experiential factors that together shaped the phenomenon of hospitality. The conclusion led to a rewarding discourse in the hospitality industry. The findings showed that the hospitality concept through informed extracts in the literature review comprised elements of critical importance

that defined the discipline. Scaffolding on the literature review this manuscript attempts to discuss on a 'composite index of hospitality' with the aid of a battery of critical hospitality indicators which serves as a distinct score card for any hospitality establishment that envisages to assess and evaluate itself in terms of how hospitality services are offered.

Keywords: Composite Index, Cul-de-sac, Hospitality, Linear and Tourism.

Introduction

Traditionally, the hospitality industry was celebrated as an open and benevolent act of welcoming a stranger. That description has become a deeply contested concept in contemporary academic, political, and social discourse. The term now occupies a paradoxical space idealized in theory and yet compromised in practice. From the commodification of care in the service industry to the ethical dilemmas surrounding migration, tourism, and cultural appropriation, hospitality has evolved into a site of intense polemics. Philosophers such as Jacques Derrida have highlighted the inherent contradictions between conditional and unconditional hospitality, while industry practitioners grapple with reconciling profitability and genuine human connection. Despite the growing scholarly interest in these debates, there remains a lack of consensus on what constitutes ethical and sustainable hospitality in an increasingly globalized and crisis-prone world.

This disconnection calls for a critical examination of the political, economic, and moral threads embedded in the concept, practice, and institutionalization of hospitality today. Hospitality often regarded as the simple act of welcoming others, has historically held deep cultural, ethical, and commercial significance. However, in recent decades, scholars have increasingly problematized it's meaning that have revealed a set of competing interpretations among ideological tensions. These polemics challenge the idealized notion of hospitality as altruistic and universal which reveals the contradictions between ethical responsibility and commercial interests in the wake of some conditional power dynamics.

The History of the Concept of Hospitality

The concept of hospitality was rooted in the act of welcoming strangers which has played a pivotal role in human societies for millennia. While it began as a cultural and ethical practice among ancient civilizations, hospitality has transformed over time into a global, commercialized industry that encompasses tourism, overnight lodging, food services, and event management.

Ancient and Medieval Origins

Hospitality, in its earliest form, was a sacred social obligation. Ancient civilizations such as the Greeks and Romans viewed hospitality as both a moral duty and a religious obligation. In Greece, the concept of *xenia* described the mutual respect and generosity between hosts and guests, often tied to divine favour from the gods like Zeus Xenios (Derrida, 2021). Similarly, in ancient Rome, hospitality (*hospitium*) involved structured agreements between households and traveling dignitaries or soldiers.

During the medieval period, hospitality took on a more institutional role through religious and feudal structures. Monasteries and churches provided shelter to pilgrims, while noble households were expected to host travelers as a symbolic demonstration of status and benevolence (Brotherton & Wood, 2023).

With reference to ancient primitive societies, hospitality in its broad sense was viewed essentially as an organic integral part of such societies that revealed the host's cultural values and beliefs. Lugosi (2022) and Chen and Mattila (2022), noted that the principles which governed the peoples' attitudes towards hospitality among these societies were religious practices and beliefs, the contemporary evolution in trade and commerce, transactional networks, social status and the potential unforeseen strangers' xenophobic norms. Whilst these concepts are still practiced nowadays, the fear of strangers that views the customer as the king in the provision of quality service is slowly replaced by the respect of strangers.

In everyday life, hospitality is mainly represented as a host's disposition toward their guest who provides security, generosity and an extended warm, welcoming atmosphere through the provision of the "holy trinity" food, beverages and shelter (Brotherton, 1999, p. 168), (Golubovskaya *et al.*,

2024). Whilst this definition provides nuggets of essential components of hospitality, it is however narrow and constrained as hospitality does not only cater for food, beverages and shelter but rather other services like entertainment among many. More so, such a definition cannot be operationalized as it becomes unclear on the satisfactory threshold of a generosity niche that qualified as adequate what components of caring for the guest are referred to and what could be defined as a yardstick in the welcoming of guests. One would go further to probe whether offering any kind of accommodation or beverage would be considered hospitality though such activities culture specific. Golubovskaya *et al.* (2024) further notes that this holy trinity can be conceptualized as the “artefacts” of hospitality namely accommodation, food and beverages though there are a lot of other offerings in hospitality such as entertainment.

A more familiar definition is provided by Ogbeide (2025), who stated that hospitality is the generous and friendly treatment of guests and visitors. This also is a vague definition as it leaves a lot to the imagination. Lugosi (2021) on the other hand stated that, “hospitality is the relationship, process, presentation, formality and procedure experienced between a visitor/customer/guest and a host. It specifically includes the reception and entertainment of those who require or are invited to experience an organization's service (Lugosi 2021). However, this definition just discusses about the welcome and welfare of guests. How these guests are received and treated is not clear in terms of regulatory processes and procedures. Another view from Ogbeide (2021) defined hospitality a social science (psychology) that refers to the friendly, empathetic, and kind manners when attending to people. Hospitality has often been viewed as a fundamental, albeit supporting component of the tourism ‘product’ (see Page, 2021; Smith, 2023; Lugosi 2021).

The Endless Discourse

'Hospitality' became a standard term in academia and business circles though now it is ironic that, after more than three decades of its use the industry desires to replace earlier referent terms such as hotel, catering, and restaurant operations or alternatively lodging and food service in the United States semantics. This opens contemporary debate over what the same phenomenon is and how it should be defined. Observers from both within and outside the industry continue to align to such arguments which underlines a persistent conceptual uncertainty (see Chen 2026, Stephens 2025, Tartem 2025). Chen (2026) engaged the various viewpoints and shifted the focus of hospitality

research from a narrow set of managerial concerns about service quality and operational efficiency to the social and emotional dimensions of the consumer experience.

Despite the existence of a variety of literature defining hospitality, the scope has really been profoundly disappointing. Middleton (2024) noted that there was a definitional problem arising from the term ‘hospitality industry’ which was not in common use in the United Kingdom. Middleton (1983) observed that it was surprising that, in the 1980’s, one would contemplate educational programmes for the hospitality industry without agreement on what the industry comprised. In the same period, literature argues that a thorough understanding of hospitality as a phenomenon lacked, because hardly any research had been done on this subject (see Jiang & Chen, 2023; Xu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023). More than a decade later, the situation was much the same. Jones (1996) pointed out that the reality is that there is certainly no commonly shared paradigm of what is meant by hospitality. A review of literature also indicated that there was not much discussion of what the term ‘hospitality’ meant” (see Pizam *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, in the editorial launching a new journal, Lynch (2023), Lugosi and Lashley (2021:5) admitted that considerable literature had been generated across a range of disciplines that regards definitions and approaches to hospitality. However, there is still neither a single definition of hospitality nor is there a unified theoretical framework within which hospitality studies are situated.

Hospitality is not a simple concept but rather it is a ‘mystifying concept’, its contextual manifestations can be, and indeed usually are, idiosyncratic and highly dissimilar if not unique (Chen 2026). In its current thrust, it seeks to identify and describe dissimilarity and diversity in relation to alternative forms and types of hospitality rather than working from the universality of the concept and the consequent variety generated when this concept is operationalized in the real world.

Problem Statement

The failure to define hospitality as a commercial phenomenon created a fragmented academic discourse. The limitation of an acceptable universal nomenclature among global industry players has made it difficult to operationalize and standardize the phenomenon (see Chen 2026, Lynch *et al.*, 2021, Stephens 2025, Kully 2025). Despite the existence of a spirited debate, to date, there seems to be no consensus on what could pass for a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon ‘hospitality’.

Hence, this review paper on one hand seeks to demonstrate the lack of scholarly consensus on what should pass for a comprehensive definition of the concept 'hospitality'. On the other hand, the paper therefore again serves to argue that the prevailing lack of consensus points to the need for the search for a more unifying platform that has potential to shift scholarly attention from a more individualistic and polarized pursuit of the meaning of hospitality. The envisaged meaning ought to be characterized by a robust and operational-friendly enterprise of a 'composite hospitality index'. If efforts are not made to develop a composite hospitality index, the industry should continue to operate under the delusionary view that provides the clients with the purported best service. A reliable 'hospitality index' enables hosts to align their services that benchmark along satisfactory customer expectations.

Main Research Question

How can the diverse and often conflicting perspectives on hospitality be synthesized into a coherent framework that identifies critical elements of the concept and develops a composite index of hospitality that guides both scholarly discourse and industry practice?

Research Questions

1. What are the prevailing perspectives on hospitality in academic and industry literature, and how does the managerial paradigm dominate this discourse?
2. What are the conceptual and practical limitations of the managerial and alternative perspectives on hospitality?
3. Which elements recur across scholarly and industry literature as critical to defining hospitality?
4. What indicators can be derived from the literature to construct a composite hospitality index?

Main Research Objective

To synthesize the diverse and conflicting perspectives on hospitality into a coherent framework by identifying critical elements of the concept and developing a composite index of hospitality that can guide both scholarly discourse and practice in the industry.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the competing perspectives on hospitality, particularly the dominance of the managerial paradigm and alternative conceptualizations.
2. To analyze the limitations of current perspectives in providing a coherent and practical definition of hospitality.
3. To synthesize elements of critical importance to defining hospitality by conducting an extensive literature review.
4. To propose the composite index as a practical score card for the hospitality establishments which assist in the assessment and evaluation their performance.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in an extensive review of literature. A critical interpretive synthesis was employed to trace the etymological, historical, and scholarly evolution of the concept of hospitality. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference papers drawn from hospitality, tourism, sociology, and service management fields. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Hospitality & Tourism Complete were searched using keywords that included hospitality definition, managerial paradigm, social manifestations of hospitality, and hospitality philosophy. Considering the overwhelming number of publications in hospitality and tourism the publications were limited to the area of hospitality only. The primary reason for this restriction was to concentrate on hospitality area since hospitality theories research had different theoretical quests and approaches. Research Gate and Mendeley offered an informative coverage of hospitality journals which provided a historical perspective on topics, primarily on hospitality business operations, management techniques, business trends and definition of hospitality. Through diligent searches, it became evident that not all of the hospitality publications were included in these massive databases. The review process followed a structured approach that first, identified and screened literature relevant to the competing perspectives of hospitality. Secondly, some categorization of the dominant themes, namely the managerial, social, and commercial orientations were done. Thirdly, some synthesizing of recurring elements that emerged

across perspectives were recorded. These thematic segregates were applied to code and extract critical indicators that were deemed pertinent to the conceptualization of the discipline ‘hospitality’.

In order for the researcher to locate author profile missing, another database, Hospitality and Tourism Complete mounted on EBSCO host, which provides indices, citations, abstracts, and full text of articles since 1931, was used. Only peer-reviewed articles were selected from both databases to segregate definitions used in different segments and functional areas. Effort was made to capture as many publications as possible however, it is possible that some articles may have escaped detection. Each selected article was sifted to isolate the definitions used (see Oluwatosin 2023, Cheong *et al.*, 2025). A preliminary scan of the peer-reviewed published research in hospitality clearly indicated that much of the serious research work started after the year 2000, which Pizam *et al* (2022) classified as the “Innovator” phase. Therefore, a period of twenty years that started from the year 2005 through to 2025 was selected in order to review all published peer-reviewed research literature in hospitality management. Another focus was on the latest publications since 2022 to 2025 due to the rapid expansion of empirical studies and theoretical refinement in the field (Jiang & Chen, 2023). The primary collection of data was restricted to the Mendeley database, Research gate and Bookfi, with index citations, abstracts, and full-text articles. Keywords used included, hospitality, and defining hospitality. These databases provided hundreds of articles from various disciplines under the heading of hospitality and hospitality theories. This required a painstaking effort that applied the Boolean logic operators AND, OR, NOT in order to locate publications that pertained to hospitality under each reviewed year.

Findings and Discussion

Approaches to Defining Hospitality

Amongst the evolving and growing literature on hospitality there are, on the one hand, a number of authors who have focused on the etymology, language and, linguistics of ‘hospitality’(see Bernard *et al.*, 2023; Wan & Forey, 2024; Purnomo, 2025; Syarifah *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, there are those who favour to define hospitality in terms of its multiple manifestations that differs in contexts (Oleson, 2022; King, 2023; Lashley, 2024, 2022, Conti & McAlpine, 2023; Chen and Mattila 2022). Many consciously or unconsciously, seek to define hospitality with reference to the

existence of certain motives and behavioral characteristics. (Ritzer, 2023, 2021; Lashley, 2017). Some have chosen to explore the issues through a spiritual moral/ethical, and/or religious prism (see Gowreesunkar et al 2024; Derrida, 2022; Dikec, 2022; Chen and Mattila 2022, 2025, 2022a; Lashley, 2024b).

However, much, if not most, of this work reveals an almost total absence of any attempt to develop a hospitality index through empirical enquiry. Only Brotherton (2022) and Brotherton and Wood (2023) present results, derived from empirical enquiry that concerned how hospitality is perceived, and may be defined, by those most closely associated with providers and receivers. Using a small-scale survey (Brotherton, 1989) (Brotherton, 2023a, 2025; Brotherton & Wood, 2022, Brotherton 2021) techniques, these studies revealed that the overwhelming response of hospitality managers, hotel guests, and fast-food customers defined hospitality in behavioral terms. Although product and place were emphasized only a minority of respondents in each study were not asked to comment on the locations or the specific products they associated with hospitality. Similarly, this focus upon the behavioral aspect of hospitality did not detract from the recognition that other dimensions of the hospitality concept could be identified, which will be addressed later.

Recently, there are those, for example Hemmington (2023) and Melissen (2022), who seemed to have been seduced by Pine and Gilmores (2023, 2022) experienced economy work that focused attention on hospitality as an experience that is designed, manipulated and managed by human activity. However, Brotherton (2022) argued that this is a false dawn because anything may be described as an experience to a human being and, he demonstrated that the only way to differentiate a 'hospitality experience' from any other human's perspective within the context of a hospitality site. In addition, and perhaps the greatest culprit in terms of clouding further the mists of this activity, is the ubiquitous tendency for commentators to use the adjective hospitable and the nouns of hospitableness and hospitality as entirely synonymous and perfectly interchangeable. It is, or indeed should be, argued that they are not. This really begs the question of why these two distinct and dominant themes of diversity and difference that consider hospitableness and hospitality as synonymous and interchangeable have been acceptable among the industry players. It is clear that the former has essentially arisen due to a period of '*prometheus unbound*' within which the old boundaries and certainties of hotel and catering or industrial hospitality management became challenged by wider and more critical thinking in relation to the nature and relevance of the

phenomenon of hospitality in a more generalized context. The narrative no longer is constrained by ‘the tyranny of applied relevance according to Taylor and Edgar (2024). This, in a manner of speaking led opportunist academics exploit their freedom through broad views on the hospitality debate (Brotherton, 2025).

In turn, this has spawned, as Wood (2025) correctly identified, a series of perspectives and approaches to these central questions that are loosely connected under the umbrella term ‘hospitality studies. The broad movement essentially was characterized by a central concern that envisaged to identify and comment on different classifications of hospitality, within commercial and non-commercial contexts. He further explored and adopted a range of social science perspectives, methodologies and techniques in investigating the previous hegemony of the ‘managerial’ paradigm that was evident in the narrower field of hospitality management. Although these are endemic to this new world of hospitality, they are perhaps typified in the views expressed by Lashley (2022). For example, the so-called ‘three domain approach’ to hospitality produced by Lashley (2022a, 2023b) has been quite influential for one to appreciate the approach taken in his published work.

Though there is nothing inherently wrong to focus on the difference when you intend to identify and explore the diversity of the hospitality phenomenon, their morphologies have largely been ignored. The result was a universally accepted definition of hospitality which helped to circumscribe the field in a more logical and defensible manner.

Mobility and hospitality

Kunwar (2023) offered a comprehensive discussion of two themes that regarded hospitality. The first theme suggested that mobility brought about hospitality and social control and the second being reciprocity. Different management revolved around social issues such as welcome versus non-welcome, inclusion versus exclusion, and acceptance or tolerance versus conflict. Giving and receiving hospitality are effective ways to avoid a latently harmful host-guest relationship. Ethics also play a role in the control and management of Otherness and differences as the two sides to hospitality include the host’s duty to ensure the well-being of the guest and the guest’s obligation to respect the culture of the host and to reciprocate.

Host–Guest Interaction

Regarding the second theme, Kunwar (2023) discussed the two features of the host-guest interaction, namely, reciprocity and transaction. According to Kunwar (2023), hospitality becomes a transaction when hospitality behavior is mainly concerned with economic exchange for a profit. Reciprocity comes in when the guest pays for the hospitality service. These approaches are similar in the sense that they imply two key actors, the host and the guest in relation to their social and commercial contract (Golubovskaya *et al.*, 2022). The research does explore the meaning of the concept during the service encounter with attention focused on hospitality from the viewpoint of the host, who non-verbally interprets the appearance and behavior of employees (Ariffin & Maghzi, 2022; Blain & Lashley, 2024; Derrida, 2023; King, 2025; Nailon, 2022; O’Sullivan, 2024; Pfeifer, 2023; Reynolds, 2020; Tasci & Semrad, 2022; Pijls *et al.*, 2024).

Considering the above definitions, it suffices to say that there is no clear and comprehensive operational definition of hospitality. Hospitality focused enquiries have therefore dominantly been conceived in relatively narrow, utilitarian terms that help to improve productivity, satisfaction and profitability. However, multidisciplinary scholarship shifted the scope of hospitality studies by exploring the interests and experiences of all stakeholders but in cognizance of the hospitality implications (Lugosi, 2021). The illustration below simply illustrates the interaction between the guest, technology and the operator such as the hoteliers.



Figure 1: Defining Hospitality through guest, operator and technology (Source: Chen 2026)

Defining hospitality through technology

Restaurant reservation systems empower operators by helping them overcome hospitality challenges. With technology, operators can create guest profiles to better recognize new and repeat guests. Since its faster in-service, technology consistently deliver experiences satisfy real time expectations. Technology is tenfold the knowledge of the best maître 'ds, hosts and servers. It stores records beyond employee institutional memory nor turnover that is retrieval in real time for reference. So, how does this relate directly to the definition of hospitality? Hospitality technology focuses on optimizing the service component of this equation (Chen 2026)



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Figure 2: Cultural context and variations in hospitality (Source: Chen 2026)

Cultural and Contextual Variations

The definition of hospitality varies significantly across cultures and contexts. What constitutes a hospitable act in one culture may be perceived as invasive or inappropriate in another. For instance, in the Shona culture they cannot greet each other through a hug or kiss but in the Moslem culture they kiss when greeting each other.

Cultural distinctions make universal definitions of hospitality problematic. As Higgins-Desbiolles et al., (2022) asserts, attempts to globalize hospitality practices often erase local traditions and values, leading to cultural homogenization, particularly in the tourism and hotel sectors.

There is a plethora of definitions, but it can be understood that culture governs our view in life. It comprises the shared values, understandings, assumptions, and goals we have learnt from earlier generations that passed on to posterity. Your culture is informed with a range of environmental factors, such as climate, legal systems, religion and languages. This forms general values, norms and beliefs, which again influence to attitudes and individual behavior.

Understanding cultural differences

In hospitality industry, cultural sensitivity is about openness, tolerance and empathy to other cultures. However, gaining some general cultural knowledge may be a welcome initiative. One useful framework for understanding how basic values underlie organizational behavior is Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Hofstede (1926) identified four cultural dimensions with other studies weighing two more Power distance, Uncertainty avoidance, Individualism and collectivism, Masculinity and femininity, long versus Short-term orientation, Indulgence versus. Restraint. As an example, uncertainty avoidance has nothing to do with risk avoidance, nor with following rules. It has to do with anxiety and distrust in light of uncertainties that should have fixed truthful habits and rituals. The implication to individuals with such cultural background may view hospitality in the context of what they originally know but not enthusiastic to experiment and experience new services (*see* Shkurko, 2023, Piotrowska & Piotrowski 2023, Osiobe, 2024)

The newest trends and topics surrounding hospitality research and development is the management of multicultural talent and the political landscape affecting the hospitality industry. With the development of globalization, multicultural issues are facing and disturbing the industry operators. Bringing the far corners of the world together is part and parcel of what the hospitality sector does. Blending amenities to cater for the needs of the world's different cultures is central to the success for large, international hospitality chains. Cultural issues have never before been such a crucial determinant of how hospitality should operate. In some Asian cultures, for example, eye contact is

not sought, as it can make guests feel uncomfortable, while in Western tradition it is equated with openness and honesty (see Osiobe 2024, Shkurko 2023).

In addition, for example, cultures in very cold climates tend to be more egalitarian than hierarchical. It is because in the past if you did not work together, regardless of age, gender or social status, you would not be able to survive the cold in the winter months. Therefore, if you do not fully understand certain attitudes and behaviors of customers or employees from other countries, it may help to conduct some research to improve your knowledge about the history and current affairs of the country. By learning about other cultures, you are more likely to be tolerant. cultural sensitivity, or an ability to understand different perspectives and care about another person's culture in the end offering the best hospitality. (Zhang et al 2025)

Hospitality and space

In relation to defining hospitality, it should also be clear that hospitality can only occur within the context of a place and that the spatial dimensions of such places are necessarily constrained in the vast majority of cases (Brotherton, 2023). Of late these spaces even extend to one's home with the advent of virtual hospitality that has been necessitated by staying in door due to COVID-19. Examples of such places are restaurants, theatres, hotels, and hospitals. Hence, according to Brotherton (2023), the starting point to construct a sensible, and universally applicable, definition of hospitality must be the type of spatial entity, or place, and the temporal dimensions relating to its occupancy and use. Meaning the occupation of any hospitality space should be temporary. The essence of this, which has remained temporarily constant and is spatially consistent, is that entry to this space is voluntary, temporarily constrained, and does not embody any transfer of ownership of any kind of resource or asset for future use or consumption. Whilst this might be true when referring to accommodation, when it comes to food there actually is transfer of ownership of the product. It is therefore a type of 'access and usage' or temporary rental transaction within which the obligations of the provider and user are known to each other. In the hospitality industry, embracing diversity has become a strategic necessity rather than a choice. Companies and leaders that prioritize inclusivity not only enhance employee satisfaction and retention but also create a richer guest experience by fostering environments where diverse perspectives thrive.

Commercialization and the Hospitality Industry

One of the most intense debates arises from the commodification of hospitality within the service sector. As hospitality became institutionalized through hotels, restaurants, and tourism enterprises, its meaning shifted from an ethical obligation to a transactional relationship. Lashley (2022) argued that in the contemporary hospitality industry, the guest-host relationship is often reduced to a buyer-seller exchange, hollowing out the moral dimensions that once defined it. The industry's reliance on performance, emotional labour, and scripted interactions further blurred the line between genuine care and economic necessity (Brotherton & Wood, 2023).

This commercial framework raises ethical concerns: Can paid hospitality truly be considered "hospitable"? Or does the introduction of financial motive inherently alter the nature of the exchange? These questions fuel ongoing tensions between scholars who advocate for a return to the ethical roots of hospitality against those who emphasized the operational realities of modern business models (Olson, 2024).

Hospitality and Power Relations

Hospitality is not a neutral or benign practice. Critics have pointed out its embedded power relations, especially in colonial, postcolonial, and gendered contexts. Lynch *et al.* (2021) noted that the host's authority to grant or deny hospitality positions them as a gatekeeper of belonging, often reinforced social hierarchies. This dynamic is evident in immigration systems where asylum seekers and migrants are "welcomed" only under strict conditions and scrutiny.

Moreover, hospitality often masks dominance, where the host sets the terms and the guest is expected to show gratitude, compliance, and respect (see Zhang et al 2023, Wang 2026). This power asymmetry complicates the idea of hospitality as generous or benevolent, revealing it instead as a strategic or performative act in many contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The raging polemics around the concept of hospitality are not a case of semantic discord but reflect deeper ethical professional and economic disquiet about the hospitality industry. From Derrida's

philosophical paradox to the capitalist restructuring of human care, hospitality is revealed as a contested, dynamic concept that resists a singular definition. It is quite true that hospitality differs from a culture, gender, disposable income, space technology perspective therefore requires some semblance of a unifying scale. As scholars and practitioners continue to fuel these debates, a more nuanced, context-sensitive understanding of hospitality becomes essential for acknowledging its contradictions that attempt to generate a composite hospitality index. The index can be operationalized and used as a standard measure to assess hospitality, despite the differences in culture, race, and level of education or income. Indeed, the most rewarding route to take for the hospitality industry in this discourse is to investigate and come up with a hospitality index which accommodates all nuanced views and helps the industry to operationalize the concept in offering hospitality and also serves as a scorecard for hospitality practice.

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Community Empowerment and Sustainable Tourism: Leveraging Asset-Based Community Development in Botswana's context

Nthoi Olivia¹, Vumbunu Tonderai¹, Zengeni Nelson² & Mapara Jacob³

¹Botho University, Gaborone Campus, Department of Hospitality and Sustainable Tourism,
(Corresponding author: olivia.nthoi@gmail.com)

²Department of Hospitality and Tourism, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Chinhoyi,
Zimbabwe.

³Department of Language and Communication Studies, Chinhoyi University of Technology,
Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe.

Abstract

Botswana's tourism industry faces challenges of sustainability and economic diversification, particularly in rural areas where local communities possess untapped cultural and natural assets. This study examined how to leverage Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) principles to promote sustainable community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating qualitative interviews with twenty (20) key stakeholders and quantitative surveys administered to one hundred and fifty (150) event participants, local residents, and tourists, using a purposive and stratified random sampling method. The study focused on two case studies: the Annual Desert Bush Walk in Jwaneng and the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge, both grassroots initiatives supported by the CSI Concepts Foundation. Data collection involved focus group discussions, document analysis, structured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews to capture both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The findings revealed that ABCD effectively mobilised community assets, empowered local leadership's accountability in decision making, and fostered a sense of community service without compensation, while partnerships with external organisations complemented the local efforts without undermining the community's norms and beliefs. The survey results indicated that there was an active participant satisfaction, increased awareness of local heritage, and perceptions of economic benefits. The study underlines the potential of ABCD as a strategic framework for sustainable tourism development which advocates for

stakeholder collaboration, continuous monitoring, and a holistic active engagement with local resilient communities in order to diversify tourism offerings.

Key words: Asset Based Community Development, Community Based Tourism, Sport Events and Product Diversification.

Introduction

In the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, the global tourism industry experienced remarkable growth. The industry established itself as a crucial driver of economic development, particularly within the emerging economies (UNWTO, 2020). This upward trajectory was notably evident in the sub-Saharan Africa, where annual tourism expenditure by foreign visitors within a destination country surpassed US\$20 million, contributing approximately 6% to the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Mkwizu, 2025). By recognising tourism potential, many countries that include Botswana, adopted tourism as a strategic avenue for economic advancement. However, despite its impressive expansion, the sector has exhibited heightened vulnerability to global disruptions such as economic downturns, natural disasters, and health crises like SARS and COVID-19. Consequently, the promising diversification of tourism offerings got disrupted with no immediate strategic interventions.

In Botswana, tourism traditionally relied on its rich natural assets that included wildlife-based and high volume, low-volume nature based that focused on photographic and hunting safaris in the wilderness areas. This focus has led to increased calls for diversification, especially in the wake of the profound impacts brought by COVID-19 (Saarinen et al., 2014; Mbaiwa, 2020; Stone et al., 2017). Efforts to diversify have predominantly targeted Community-Based Tourism which emphasised on the promotion of cultural heritage and local customs as alternative tourism products (Mbaiwa & Sakuze, 2009; Keitumetse, 2016; Moswete, 2015). The development and promotion of cultural tourism elevate intangible cultural heritage, traditional practices, and local crafts, viewed as crucial components in broadening the Botswana's tourism packages. However, over the past three decades, progress in cultivating these alternative products has been impeded by various challenges that included limited capacity and resource constraints, despite persistent efforts (Centre for Applied Research, 2016; Stone et al., 2017; Mbaiwa, 2020). There remains a notable gap for comprehensive research which focuses on an effective product development strategy within cultural heritage tourism.

A promising approach to address these challenges emerged through the application of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) which is grounded in grassroots initiatives (Wu and Pearce, 2012). This methodology has increasingly been used to enhance capacity building, instil active community engagement, and empower marginalised populations. Nonetheless, the integration of ABCD principles within the tourism sector, and specifically within Botswana's cultural and community-based tourism initiatives, remains limited though underexplored.

Against this backdrop, this research aims to employ the Asset-Based Community Development framework, through the lens of event-based initiatives that critically evaluates sustainable community-based tourism development within her diversification of tourism products in Botswana. The study seeks to contribute to the empowerment of local communities and the promotion of culturally rooted tourism services. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. . To explore the perceptions of event organisers and community members on sustainable tourism development through the principles of Asset-Based Community Development.
2. To assess the impact of events such as the Desert Race and the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge on community-based tourism development, with an emphasis on cultural heritage preservation and promotion.
3. To propose strategies for applying the ABCD framework to facilitate the sustainable development and leveraging of community tourism products, particularly focusing on cultural heritage.

In essence, this research endeavours to harness the potential of cultural heritage and grassroots initiatives to foster sustainable tourism growth, ultimately empowering community resilience and well-being within Botswana's evolving tourism landscape. Consequently, the study seeks to examine the potential of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a strategic approach to fostering rural tourism which enhances product diversification within the framework of Community-Based Tourism (CBT). Through emphasising the identification and mobilisation of endogenous community assets, including cultural, social, and natural capital, the ABCD model offers a participatory and sustainable pathway for tourism development. Central to this approach is the active involvement of local communities in the planning and management of tourism initiatives, thereby strengthening local ownership, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting a more equitable distribution of tourism-related benefits. Through this

lens, the study aims to contribute to a more diversified, inclusive, and resilient tourism sector in Botswana.

Unpacking Asset-Based Community Development

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) holds significant relevance for the context of Botswana due to its potential to empower citizens, amplify community-driven initiatives, by upgrading sustainable development within the country. As emphasised by Lester, Ryakhovskaya, & Olorunnisola (2023) ABCD functions as a mechanism that stimulates community growth through the initiation, control, and managing projects at the local level. This approach is particularly pertinent for Botswana, given its socio-economic landscape in terms of developmental aspirations, and cultural richness.

Historically, Botswana, like many nations, has grappled with the limitations of traditional needs-based development frameworks, which often overlook local assets and capacities (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019). The emergence of an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) as a critical alternative offers a fresh perspective which is aligned with Botswana's goals for community-driven progress (Mkwizu et al., 2025). Notably, ABCD originated as a strategy to address the development needs of urban poor populations in the United State. However, Botswana found the model lucrative in promoting inclusive growth for her marginalised communities (Moswete et al., 2020).

The ABCD fundamentally differs from Community Based Tourism (CBT) models in its operational terms (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019). While (CBT) often focuses on direct benefits to the community, ABCD emphasises on local asset mapping vis viz the resources. This shift from a deficit-based to an asset-based approach fosters community resilience and self-determination (Moswete et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the versatility of ABCD, evident in its application across various disciplines such as health, social work, community development, and tourism, reflects its adaptability to Botswana's multifaceted development challenges (Kaul & Choudhury, 2021). The alignment of ABCD principles with community-based tourism (CBT), particularly its focus on asset mapping, cultural artifacts, and traditions, reinforces its potential to support Botswana's aspirations for a people-centred approach to tourism development.

In Botswana, where nature-based tourism has traditionally been the dominant economic driver, diversifying the tourism sector gains urgency, especially in the wake of disruptions caused by

the COVID-19 pandemic (George & van Niekerk, 2022; Vumbunu et al., 2022). The application of ABCD principles, which focus on identifying and leveraging local assets that include cultural heritage, natural resources, and community knowledge, offers a strategic pathway for re-imagining and revitalising the tourism industry. By engaging local citizens, the system accommodates local talent by instilling self-driven community development opportunities which may significantly contribute to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable tourism products (Stone et al., 2021).

Through mobilising community assets, including cultural traditions, historical sites, indigenous crafts, and local practices, ABCD encourages communities to take ownership of their development processes (George & van Niekerk, 2022). Such an approach is particularly beneficial for marginalised groups, including youth, the physically challenged, and elders who are often excluded from decision-making. Prioritising these groups ensures more equitable development and promotes social cohesion (Kaul & Choudhury, 2021).

In essence, the relevance of Asset-Based Community Development for Botswana lies in its ability to empower communities and harness local strengths, including cultural heritage, to support sustainable growth (Kaul & Choudhury, 2021). In the context of tourism, this approach facilitates the diversification and enrichment of tourism products by integrating cultural and heritage components, thereby promoting responsible, community-led tourism that respects and preserves Botswana's rich cultural identity. In fostering inclusive participation, leveraging local assets, and encouraging innovative, community-driven initiatives, ABCD aligns seamlessly with Botswana's developmental goals, ultimately catalysing a transition toward a vibrant, self-sustaining tourism sector built upon the foundation of cultural heritage and local capacities. A comparative summary of ABCD principles is presented in Table 1 below to provide clarity and facilitate easier comparison.

Table 1: Principles of Asset-Based Community Development

Authors & Year	Principles
Kretzmann & McKnight (1993)	• Asset-Based Community Development—starting with local community assets rather than needs • Community-led, internally focused development • Strengthening relational ties and social networks

Mathie & Cunningham (2005)	• Asset-based, community-driven development • Mapping assets, building relationships, shared vision • Mobilizing local resources toward common goals
Ennis & West (2010)	• Emphasis on social network analysis to elucidate social ties and community structure • Highlighting how relational networks support and evaluate development
Nel (2020)	• ABCD fosters self-motivated, asset-driven communities • Stakeholder involvement with shared power • Moving from needs-based dependency to asset-based self-reliance

Source: Authors' compilation

ABCD emphasises the significance of community potential, strengths, and assets, which aligns with the beneficiaries shared vision with regards to the tourism undertakings. The cornerstone of ABCD model is on involving local citizens who recognise the invested potential to drive development, a sentiment echoed by (Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016; Nel, 2020).

The sequence of steps or stages outlined in ABCD include the commonly referenced six stages that mirrors the approach detailed in the study. These stages comprise of;

1. The identification of the community asset mapping, which recognises the unique resources at their disposal.
2. The formation of local development cooperatives that, in turn, create institutions that enable community members to collaborate and drive initiatives.
3. The skills audit mapping- which documents the skills and resources within the community.
4. The formulation of community visions and strategies that facilitate the development of a shared understanding of community goals and actionable plans.
5. The mobilisation of assets which allows to achieve development objectives that leverage with the existing resources for example cultural and social capital.
6. The implementing of initiatives that utilise identified assets for sustainable community growth as a means of leveraging activities.

According to (Moswete et al., 2020) these stages align closely with the objectives of this study.

Moreover, ABCD's emphasis on community assets and strengths, as well as the identification and mapping of these resources, closely aligns with the study's narrative. The concept of recognising and harnessing the latent knowledge, skills, and competencies of community members, particularly marginalised groups, mirrors ABCD's core focus (Mkwizu, 2025). This study uses ABCD model to impact on rural development which demonstrates the framework's potential to empower all community members (George & van Niekerk, 2022).

Subsequently, the limited application of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) within Botswana's tourism sector underscores the relevance of this study's focused approach. ABCD emphasises leveraging local assets and community-driven efforts, aligning with the exploration of using cultural and heritage events from a local perspective to drive development (Nel, 2020).

In this study, the principles of ABCD significantly shaped both the data collection and interpretation processes. During fieldwork, researchers engaged local communities through the participatory methods which ensured that their collective voice was heard. This approach facilitated a more profound understanding of how cultural and heritage events serve as vital resources for development which allowed access for rich, context-specific data. Furthermore, the interpretation of the collected data was guided by the ABCD framework, which focused on strengths rather than weaknesses. This perspective encouraged researchers to acknowledge community initiatives, local knowledge among the existing cultural practices as key drivers of sustainable tourism development. By focusing on these assets, the study aligns with the principles of ABCD which emphasised on community empowerment and ownership over the development processes. In essence, the principles and concepts of Asset-Based Community Development closely align with the context and objectives described in this study that show a shared commitment to empowering communities.

Tourism development in Botswana

Current statistics from the Botswana Tourism Authority indicate that tourism contributed approximately 13.5% to her GDP in 2022, which was approximately 1.2 million international visitors who generated about \$1.5 billion (Botswana Tourism Authority (BTA), 2023). This shows the critical role of tourism but also underscores the urgent need for diversified approaches to ensure sustainable growth, particularly in light of recent challenges.

This growth has been predominantly underpinned by the country's extensive wildlife and wilderness resources, which constitute a significant portion of tourism. Recent statistics

indicate that Botswana welcomed a substantial number of international visitors, with tourism playing a vital role in the country's economic diversification and rural development (Vumbunu et al., 2023). The tourism sector continues to be a key driver of economic growth, with efforts to diversify tourism products and services underway which focuses on cultural tourism, eco-tourism, and community-based tourism initiatives (GlobalData, 2023).

The northern regions, particularly around Chobe National Park and the Okavango Delta, remain key areas for tourism development. According to recent visitor statistics, the sector is on a growth trajectory, with a notable increase in visitor arrivals (Tourism Statistics Report, 2023). To reconcile economic development with ecological sustainability, Botswana has adopted a 'High Value - Low Volume' (HVLV) tourism strategy. This policy targets a smaller number of high-spending visitors in order to minimise environmental degradation while maximising economic returns (Mlambo et al., 2022; Kgathi et al., 2021; Nthiga et al., 2023). While the HVLV model has facilitated certain economic and conservation outcomes, it has simultaneously reinforced a narrow reliance on wildlife-based tourism and limited the spatial distribution of tourism benefits. Critiques of the HVLV model highlight its equity limitations, particularly the exclusion of local actors from meaningful participation and benefit-sharing (Mbaiwa, 2020; Stone et al., 2021). Indigenous entrepreneurs and small to medium enterprises (SMEs) often face barriers to entry due to concessions being tied up for extended periods, restricting their ability to own permanent, high-end camps (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019). Moreover, the focus on high-end tourism can lead to "enclave tourism", where profits are repatriated by foreign-owned companies, limiting the economic benefits for local communities and reinforcing a dependence on international tourism (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2015). This approach can also price out domestic tourists, further marginalising local participation and sacrificing domestic tourism.

In recent years, there has been increasing advocacy for the diversification of tourism offerings, with particular emphasis on the development of cultural and heritage tourism as a means of stimulating inclusive growth in under-represented regions of the country (Mbaiwa, 2020). Botswana possesses a wealth of cultural heritage, including indigenous knowledge systems, historical sites, and traditional practices, which remain underutilised within the tourism economy. Although initiatives such as Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) have sought to promote community participation and equitable benefit-sharing, their impact on tourist arrivals and local income generation has remained marginal (Mkwizu, 2025).

Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) in relation to rural development

Botswana's rapid economic expansion, largely driven by diamond mining, has elevated the country to middle-income status. Nevertheless, the benefits of this growth have been unevenly distributed, with development efforts disproportionately focused on urban centres. As a result, approximately 21% of the population, predominantly in rural areas, continues to live below the poverty line (Sekwati, 2017; Besada & O'Bright, 2019). In response to these disparities, tourism has been positioned as a strategic instrument for rural development and economic diversification. By leveraging the country's abundant natural, cultural, and heritage resources, tourism offers considerable potential to enhance livelihoods and reduce rural poverty.

To support these objectives, the Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) model was introduced in the 1990s as a policy framework aimed at simultaneously conserving natural resources and empowering rural communities to manage and benefit from them (Mbaiwa, 2008, 2015; Moswete & Thapa, 2015). Although CBNRM encompasses various resource types, including historical sites, wilderness areas, and cultural landscapes, its practical implementation has been predominantly associated with tourism and wildlife-related activities. For the purposes of this study, the focus is confined to tourism-orientated initiatives under the CBNRM framework.

Central to the CBNRM model is the principle of community participation, operationalised through the establishment of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), often referred to in the literature as Community Trusts (CTs) (Mbaiwa, 2013; Centre for Applied Research, 2016). These entities serve as institutional mechanisms through which local residents can collectively manage natural resources and engage in tourism enterprises. While more than 100 CBOs have been registered across the country, fewer than 60 remain active, with the majority concentrated near high-value tourism areas such as the Okavango Delta and Chobe (Centre for Applied Research, 2016). Prior to the 2014 hunting moratorium, many CBOs generated significant revenue through the leasing of wildlife concessions to safari operators, with proceeds reinvested into community infrastructure, education, and health services.

The current situation regarding Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) in Botswana still grapples with similar challenges identified over a decade ago. Despite its potential, CBNRM's effectiveness is hindered by inadequate institutional frameworks, limited funding and resources, insufficient capacity building, and weak accountability and governance

(Muposhi et al., 2023; Kgathi et al., 2022). Recent studies by Muposhi et al. (2023) and Kgathi et al. (2022) suggest a number of reforms, including the promulgation of a CBNRM law and the establishment of a dedicated CBNRM institution. Furthermore, research by Motsholapheko (2024) emphasises the importance of improved community engagement and participation in CBNRM decision-making processes. These scholars underscore the necessity for change and improvement in CBNRM implementation to realise its transformative potential as a driver of rural development.

In contrast, the ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) framework may address some of the pitfalls encountered in CBNRM, such as donor dependence and elite capture. In focusing on existing community assets and strengths, ABCD empowers local communities to take charge of their development without heavy reliance on external funding. This self-sufficiency can reduce donor dependence while promoting equitable participation and benefit-sharing, thus mitigating elite capture. In fostering grassroots engagement, ABCD ensures that the benefits of tourism and resource management are distributed more broadly among community members, enhancing the overall impact on rural development.

Event management and community development

In the context of event management and community development, the Desert Bush Walk and the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge serve as empirically grounded examples of the application of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) principles. These events extend beyond the conventional aims of fundraising or promotional tourism, functioning instead as strategic, community-driven platforms aimed at fostering income-generating activities, enhancing local self-reliance, and contributing to the broader objectives of rural development and tourism diversification. Both initiatives are firmly rooted in the core theoretical foundations of ABCD, which emphasise the mobilisation of endogenous assets, capabilities, and social capital as the basis for sustainable development (Wu & Pearce, 2014; Dolezal & Burns, 2015). Unlike deficit-based models that prioritise external interventions, ABCD seeks to build on existing community strengths, be they cultural, environmental, or institutional, to achieve long-term, locally owned progress.

The Desert Bush Walk, established in 2014 by CSI-Concepts FOUNDATION, exemplifies the operationalisation of ABCD through a participatory and inclusive model of event planning and community engagement. The initiative directly involves local populations in the fundraising and organisational processes while simultaneously fostering partnerships with private sector

actors. Its explicit objective to support community-based projects, non-governmental organisations, and socially vulnerable groups aligns closely with ABCD's emphasis on internally driven change and community empowerment (Ennis & West, 2010). The Desert Bush Walk has evolved into one of Botswana's most prominent sport tourism events and has received national recognition, including collaboration with the Botswana Tourism Organisation. Furthermore, the event's organising committee has provided mentorship to other communities, notably the Tsodilo Hills community, thereby illustrating ABCD's capacity for knowledge transfer and cascading empowerment (Mengesha et al., 2017). Established in 2018, the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge represents a deliberate attempt to adapt and replicate the Desert Bush Walk model within a rural context of significant natural and cultural value. Tsodilo Hills, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is renowned for its archaeological, spiritual, and environmental significance. The Heritage Challenge was developed through a multi-stakeholder partnership involving the Tsodilo Community Development Trust, UNDP Botswana, relevant government agencies, and CSI-Concepts FOUNDATION. The event was designed as a benchmark exercise that drew on the Desert Bush Walk as a reference point to explore how similar ABCD strategies could be harnessed to unlock the socio-economic potential of the Tsodilo Hills region.

The event itself incorporates a range of culturally grounded and community-centred activities that include heritage walks, traditional performances, and cultural competitions. These elements serve to give importance to local traditions, promote community cohesion, and enhance the visibility of the region's tourism potential. Importantly, the event aligns with key ABCD principles such as shared vision, participatory decision-making through asset mobilisation (Mathie & Cunningham, 2005; Green & Haines, 2017; Nel, 2020). By fostering local ownership and cultural revitalisation, the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge contributes to both rural development and the diversification of Botswana's tourism offerings. One may observe that the Desert Bush Walk and the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge illustrate the practical impetus of Asset-Based Community Development in the context of tourism and community empowerment. Established in 2014 to 2018, respectively, these initiatives demonstrated how locally driven, culturally informed, and participatory strategies could serve as effective mechanisms for sustainable rural development. As such, they offer valuable models for integrating ABCD into national development frameworks, while simultaneously enriching Botswana's cultural and tourism landscape (Wu & Pearce, 2014; Dolezal & Burns, 2015).

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that integrated qualitative techniques, document analysis, and quantitative survey methods (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach was to provide a more comprehensive perspective on the application of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) principles in community-based tourism initiatives (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This approach allows for triangulation of data which provides stronger inferences than using either approach alone (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The study followed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, where qualitative data collection and analysis preceded quantitative surveys. This sequence was chosen because qualitative insights were critical in framing survey questions that could measure broader community perceptions. This design is particularly useful when quantitative results need further exploration or contextualisation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The population included local residents, tourists, and event participants. Purposive sampling identified 20 qualitative interviewees, while stratified random sampling was applied to select 150 survey respondents. The mixed-methods approach was adopted to triangulate findings and enhance validity by integrating numerical trends with contextual depth (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

In addition to qualitative research methods and document analysis, the study employed quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Quantitative data was collected through surveys and structured questionnaires administered to a broader group of participants, including event attendees, local residents, and tourists. This approach offered insights that supported and enriched the qualitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The surveys helped assess participants' perceptions, satisfaction levels, and the assessment and evaluations of the impact of the Desert Bush Walk and Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge on community development and tourism diversification. The questionnaire was designed to capture data on various dimensions that included the economic benefits generated by the events, participants' awareness of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, and their views on the events' roles in fostering community empowerment and sustainable tourism. Analysing this quantitative data allowed researchers to identify statistical patterns and relationships that may not have been visible through qualitative methods alone (Bryman, 2016). The use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches enhanced the

study's validity, credibility, and analytical depth, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the subject matter (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

For the quantitative phase, a survey was administered to a sample of one hundred and fifty (150) survey respondents that comprised of local residents, tourists, and event attendees. This sample used a stratified random sampling technique. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 23 (Pallant, 2020) which employed descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations to identify patterns and relationships (Bryman, 2016). Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the sample and the key variables of interest. Correlations were employed to examine the relationships between variables (Pallant, 2020).

The qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with twenty (20) key informants that included community leaders, tourism operators, and representatives from local organisations. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. The interviews explored participants' perceptions on the impact of tourism on community development, their experiences with the ABCD approach, and their suggestions on the sustainability of tourism initiatives.

The Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework has been successfully applied in community-based tourism research, for instance by Nel (2015) in South Africa and by Giampiccoli & Mtapuri (2020) in evaluating rural tourism initiatives. Their findings affirmed that ABCD empowered local community participation through its application in this study. In accordance with ethical research standards, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the data collection (BERA, 2018). Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, voluntary involvement, and in return were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2018).

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants which ensured that participants were fully aware of the study's purpose. Again, it was explicitly communicated on their right to withdraw at any time alongside the measures in place to protect the individual's anonymity and confidentiality. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Chinhoyi University of Technology Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Quantitative findings that included the thresholds of awareness of the ABCD model, satisfaction index on community events, and the perceptions towards economic benefits, are presented alongside the qualitative themes under the discussion section. This integration enabled meaningful comparisons as well as the convergence of data (Fetters, Curry & Creswell, 2013). The mixed method approach contributed valuable empirical evidence to ongoing discussions in the field on active sustainable community engagement tourism management growth (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Several researchers have successfully employed the ABCD approach in various community development contexts. For example, Mathie and Cunningham (2003) demonstrated the effectiveness of ABCD that promoted community-driven development in marginalised communities. Similarly, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) highlighted the role of ABCD in inclusive social cohesion through empowering the local residents. These studies provide valuable insights into the application of ABCD principles and their potential for promoting sustainable community development.

Participant Demographics

The study sampled a total of one hundred (150) participants that included local residents, regional visitors, and international tourists. Descriptive statistics revealed that 53.3% of participants were male (n = 80) and 46.7% were female (n = 70). The age demographic table comprised 20% aged 18–25 years, 30% aged 26–35 years, 26.7% aged 36–45 years, and 23.3% aged 46 years and above. The educational levels comprised 33.3% secondary education, 26.7% diploma, 33.3% degree, and 6.7% postgraduate qualifications.

Table 2

Participant Demographics (N = 150)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	80	53.3
	Female	70	46.7
Age (years)	18–25	30	20
	26–35	45	30
	36–45	40	26.7
	46+	35	23.3
Education Level	Secondary	50	33.3
	Diploma	40	26.7
	Degree	50	33.3
	Postgraduate	10	6.7
Participant Type	Local Residents	102	68
	Regional Visitors	33	22
	International Tourists	15	10

Application of Asset-Based Community Development in Community-Based Tourism

The ABCD model was applied to the case of the Desert Bush Walk and, to a lesser extent, the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge, both grassroots initiatives grounded in community participation and local asset mobilisation. While the Desert Bush Walk has been held annually since its inception in 2014, the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge was conducted once in 2018 before its interruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, both events exemplify ABCD's application to cultural and heritage tourism, particularly in rural contexts where tourism is increasingly considered a viable tool for economic diversification and cultural preservation. *In terms of participation, quantitative survey data revealed that approximately 68% of attendees were local residents, 22% regional visitors, and 10% international tourist which demonstrates that the events' ability to attract diverse groups and to expand rural tourism markets is possible.*

Identification of Community Strengths and Formation of Local Organizing Groups

A central tenet of the ABCD model is the recognition of existing community asset mapping in terms of human and social capital, as the fundamental for development. The findings revealed that the Desert Bush Walk was initiated and sustained by a group of six young volunteers who brought together expertise in event management, marketing, motivation, and leadership. This core group demonstrated a strong commitment to community empowerment, health promotion, and tourism development. Their shared vision and collaborative approach were instrumental in the event's success and scalability.

Quantitative results indicated that 74% of surveyed participants agreed that the events enhanced community cohesion and promoted volunteerism, while 62% highlighted improvements in local leadership capacity. Similarly, the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge was grounded in a community-based approach that emphasised volunteerism, inclusion, and the strategic use of cultural heritage to stimulate rural tourism. *Survey results revealed that 59% of respondents identified cultural preservation as the most significant benefit of the event, while 41% emphasised its economic potential.* Both initiatives focused on sustainability, income generation, community wellbeing, and the promotion of cultural identity objectives closely aligned with the ABCD framework and the broader goals of heritage-based tourism.

Mapping Community Capacities, Vision, and Strategy

The mapping of community assets played a critical role in shaping a coherent vision and strategy for tourism development. To guide this process, the study adopted Emery and Flora's (2006) Community Capital Framework (CCF), which identified seven interrelated forms of capital that is cultural, social, human, political, financial and natural landscape. This framework allowed for a multidimensional analysis of the resources available within the communities and highlighted the interconnections necessary for holistic development. *Quantitative analysis showed that 65% of respondents were aware of at least three forms of community capital mobilised through the events, with human and social capital most frequently mentioned.*

Application of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

The ABCD model was applied to both the Desert Bush Walk and the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge. Approximately 68% of attendees were local residents, 22% regional visitors, and

10% international tourists. The survey results showed that 74% of participants agreed the events that enhanced community cohesion, while 62% envisaged improvements in local leadership engagement. For the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge, 59% highlighted cultural preservation as the main benefit, and 41% emphasised on economic potential.

Asset Mapping, Mobilization, and Partnerships

Using the Community Capital Framework, respondents identified seven forms of capital: cultural, social, human, political, financial, natural, and built. About 65% were aware of at least three forms of capital mobilised. Both events demonstrated effective leveraging of partnerships with local and external stakeholders that included the Botswana Tourism Organisation and UNDP. Survey data confirmed 71% believed partnerships enhanced sustainability, and 54% reported increased access to funding and technical expertise.

Correlations Between Key Variables

Table 3

Correlations Among Key Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Event Participation	1				
2. Perceived Economic Benefits	0.54**	1			
3. Cultural Preservation Awareness	0.48**	0.37*	1		
4. Volunteer Engagement	0.41*	0.29*	0.51**	1	
5. Community Cohesion & Leadership Capacity	0.44*	0.39*	0.35*	0.46**	1

Note. $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$

These correlations indicate that higher participation and awareness of ABCD principles were associated with stronger perceptions of economic benefits, cultural preservation, volunteer engagement, and community leadership.

Asset Mobilization and Leveraging of Partnerships and Activities

After identifying and mapping the assets, both case studies illustrated how asset mobilisation activates and utilises community resources to initiate and sustain tourism activities.

In the Desert Bush Walk, this process was evident through the strategic engagement of local volunteers, private sector stakeholders, and public institutions. Financial and human capital were mobilised to support event logistics, marketing, and broader community outreach. This contributed to the event's sustainability and enabled reinvestment into community-based projects that supported education, health, and vulnerable populations. The organising team also successfully leveraged institutional partnerships with organisations such as the Botswana Tourism Organisation and local businesses, illustrating how external collaborations can enhance local efforts without undermining community agency. Importantly, these partnerships did not override community leadership but instead complemented locally driven initiatives—an essential feature of the ABCD model, which values endogenous growth and participatory governance.

Survey data confirmed that 71% of respondents believed partnerships with external institutions enhanced the sustainability of events, while 54% indicated that partnerships increased access to funding and technical expertise.

In the case of the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge, similar efforts were made to activate local cultural, social, and natural assets. Although held only once before being interrupted by the pandemic, the event was established through collaborative planning that involved the Tsodilo Community Development Trust, CSI-Concepts FOUNDATION, UNDP Botswana, and various government departments. These partnerships were crucial in mobilising the necessary technical, financial, and logistical support while maintaining local leadership at the core of the event management.

Asset Mobilisation and Leveraging of Activities

According to the findings, Jwaneng and its surrounding areas were identified as key physical assets for hosting community-based tourism events. This strategic selection aimed to position the region as an emerging tourism destination, thereby contributing to the broader goal of diversifying Botswana's tourism offerings beyond the established hubs of the Okavango Delta

and Chobe. Similarly, the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge capitalised on the unique cultural and natural significance of the Tsodilo Hills, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to promote historical, cultural, and event-based tourism.

The community members involved in the Tsodilo Community Development Trust (TCDT) played an active role in organising the event. However, due to the complexity and logistical demands of the event, the community required external technical support to achieve its objectives. The Jwaneng-based Desert Bush Walk Local Organising Committee provided mentorship and technical assistance in event planning.

Asset Mobilisation

In the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework, assets are understood as access to tangible and intangible resources that contribute to sustainable livelihoods (George, R., & van Niekerk, 2022). The study revealed that both internal and external resources were effectively harnessed through an articulation of the events' visions and objectives. Community members formed the core of internal resources who served as volunteer marketing teams. For instance, one participant was engaged in sponsoring outreach activities in order to secure funding for local development initiatives.

To attract external support, event objectives such as promoting healthy lifestyles and expanding tourism offerings were communicated through strategic media partnerships. Collaborations were established with organisations such as DUMA FM, Botswana Guardian, and the Sunday Standard which resulted in extensive publicity through free advertising, radio segments, and interviews. This media coverage significantly increased participation, with pre-COVID print media circulation exceeding 50,000 copies. Survey findings further indicated that 64% of respondents learnt about the events through media publicity which highlighted the importance of communications in asset mobilisation.

The distribution networks like Webtickets facilitated nationwide ticket sales and promotional awareness, while a local signage and printing company donated branded materials. Social media platforms that included Facebook and Twitter, were used to engage audiences in real time because the streamed event graced global visibility. Strategic partnerships also included the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO), which featured the events on its official calendar.

A Board of Trustees was formed that comprised professionals and local leaders who among other roles guided the event's execution. Since its formal registration in 2015, the CSI-Concepts Foundation has managed the Desert Bush Walk through the Local Organising Committee and has remained instrumental in fundraising through community outreach programmes. The Tsodilo Hills Challenge, though held only once before COVID-19 disruptions, was organised through a partnership between the (TCDT) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with technical guidance from the Desert Bush Walk committee.

Leveraging Activities

Some leveraging activities involved the integration of multiple stakeholders who were aligned to diverse resources so as to achieve community-driven aspirations. The Desert Bush Walk successfully expanded its reach over time and attracted approximately 3,000 participants annually from across Botswana, the Southern African region, and from countries such as Australia, the United States, and Germany. Despite its international appeal, the event has remained grounded in the Jwaneng-Mabutsane community, which continues to play a central role in planning and implementation.

The quantitative feedback showed that 82% of participants rated the Desert Bush Walk as “very satisfactory” in terms of organisation, while 66% agreed that it contributed positively to local economic development.

Likewise, the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge was conceived as a locally organised initiative which focused on cultural heritage tourism. Event activities included a cultural night featuring performances by local ethnic groups who showcased traditional dance, poetry, and music, thereby enhancing community participation and cultural valorisation. *Survey responses indicated that 72% of attendees highlighted “cultural pride” as the key benefit of the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge, with 58% also recognising its potential to generate rural income.*

The event was aptly themed "Walk for Rural Development", which aligned with the broader objectives of ABCD to stimulate sustainable community-led initiatives.

Discussion

Overall, the findings demonstrated that while both the Desert Bush Walk (DBW) and the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge (THHC) applied principles of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), their outcomes varied in terms of sustainability and empowerment. The quantitative data showed that 74% of participants linked the initiatives to stronger community cohesion, while 62% highlighted improvements in local leadership potential. Findings that align with the research emphasised the role of social capital in community-driven tourism (Green & Haines, 2017; George & van Niekerk, 2022).

The DBW illustrated both the unlimitedness and limitations of the ABCD application. The early years were highly successful in mobilising local assets, such as youth voluntary brigades and partnerships which led tangible benefits like launch of an educational infrastructure. Since its inception in 2014, the Desert Bush Walk has raised over BWP3 million, with proceeds invested in funding the construction of carpentry workshop in Sese village, a school library and the acquisition of a mobile resource centre. However, a notable shift was observed in 2018 and 2019, where revenue increasingly supported donations rather than self-sustaining, income-generating projects. In 2018, BWP 200,000 funded the construction of a reception class, while in 2019, BWP 375,000 was distributed across various national initiatives that included centres for the blind, school donations, and the COVID-19 relief fund.

While such contributions are commendable, they reflect a departure from the ABCD principle of long-term community empowerment. This aligns with the findings of scholars like Stone et al. (2021), who argue that reliance on external funding can undermine local agency. A key challenge lied in ensuring that development projects are sustainable and driven by community members equipped with adequate management skills. Indeed, several initiatives reportedly declined once external funding ceased which echoed concerns raised by Meyer (2019) with regards to the sustainability of community-driven projects. Similar challenges have been noted in South African heritage tourism projects, where community benefits often become diluted when initiatives over-rely on external donor agendas (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2019).

In the case of the (THHC), the findings suggest a promising alignment with ABCD, particularly given that 72% of participants reported enhanced cultural pride. Reinvestment of proceeds into healthcare and campsite upgrades illustrated a localised impact consistent with what Mathie & Cunningham (2020) identified as “catalytic asset activation”. Yet, the event’s

short lifespan due to the pandemic highlighted vulnerability, underscoring Mkwizu's (2025) caution that ABCD initiatives must build resilience mechanisms in order to survive from external shocks. This outcome resonated with similar findings in other ABCD cases in Southern Africa, where local re-investment proved effective in the promotion of community well-being (Meyer, 2019).

Comparatively, both cases confirmed that endogenous leadership is vital. The DBW's youth-led Local Organising Committee mirrored successful models in Namibia's conservancy-based tourism, where local governance structures drove decision-making and resource re-investment (Novelli & Gebhardt, 2018). However, tensions around the marginalisation of local vendors in the DBW also revealed gaps in inclusivity, an issue echoed in the Zimbabwean community-based tourism projects, where external actors sometimes overshadow local entrepreneurs (Muchapondwa & Stage, 2015). To ensure preferential access to these opportunities for local entrepreneurs remains critical. This observation is supported by Tosun (2000), who emphasised on the importance of local involvement in community tourism in order to enhance economic resilience and ownership.

From a global perspective, our findings resonated with the broader literature that advocated for ABCD in cultural and heritage tourism. While ABCD encouraged local ownership, its success depended on balancing external support with internal leadership. As Kaul & Choudhury (2021) argued sustainable outcomes emerge when partnerships enhance rather than replace local agencies, a dynamic that (DBW) partially achieved whilst (THHC) excelled satisfactorily despite its short duration.

In conclusion, both the Desert Bush Walk and Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge illustrated the tangible benefits of asset-based approaches in cultural and heritage tourism development. However, to ensure long-term impact, future efforts must focus on capacitating communities in event management, ABCD principles, and the valorisation of cultural heritage assets to enhance economic sustainability and local ownership. This call for a more integrated approach is echoed in recent studies which suggests that continuous support and capacity building are essential for the success of community tourism initiatives (Mkwizu, 2025). Our study, therefore, contributed by showing that, while Botswana's initiatives embody key ABCD values, their long-term sustainability will depend on deliberate investment in leadership, inclusivity, and heritage valorisation.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the transformative potential of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework as a strategic approach to strengthening Community-Based Tourism (CBT) which fosters the diversification of tourism products in Botswana. By critically examining the Desert Bush Walk and the Tsodilo Hills Heritage Challenge, the research provided compelling empirical evidence of how ABCD principles centred on community strengths, participatory decision-making, and local ownership can be operationalised to achieve sustainable tourism development in rural contexts.

The findings demonstrated that these event-based initiatives not only mobilise local cultural and natural assets but also promoted inclusive community empowerment that align with broader national development goals. Notably, the emphasis on engaging marginalised groups such as youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities represents a departure from conventional (CBT) models that often treat communities as homogenous entities. In doing so, the ABCD approach offers a holistic and equitable framework for tourism development, one that acknowledges intra-community diversity and seeks to broaden participation in the benefits derived from tourism.

Despite the successes achieved, the study also identifies critical challenges, that included over-reliance on external funding, limited technical competencies, and inconsistent community participation. These factors emphasised the value of building long-term institutional and managerial capacities within local communities that ensured the sustainability and scalability of ABCD-inspired initiatives. Moreover, the research highlighted the need for continuous monitoring, strategic partnerships, and preferential access for local entrepreneurs to maximise economic and social returns from tourism events.

Consequently, this research directly addressed the study's objectives by affirming that when rooted in local capacities and cultural heritage, ABCD can serve as a catalyst for rural development, tourism diversification, and community resilience. Future research should explore the applicability of the ABCD model across different tourism settings in Botswana and beyond, thereby enriching comparative insights and informing policy frameworks that prioritise inclusive, community-led tourism development.

Recommendations

The impending community-based tourism initiatives should prioritise capacity building for local residents by investing in training programmes focused on event management, financial management, and ABCD principles, thereby enhancing sustainability and reducing reliance on external support. Strengthening local partnerships among institutions, NGOs, and businesses is essential for collaborative planning that leverages resources while ensuring community leadership, with a particular emphasis on skill transfer to promote long-term local empowerment. Additionally, inclusive community participation in event planning and implementation should be prioritised to ensure equitable involvement of all members that include women, youth, and the marginalised groups. That way it fosters social cohesion and shared ownership. Finally, communities should develop sustainable funding strategies that emphasise income-generating projects linked to tourism events, rather than relying solely on donations. Local tourism initiatives ought to align with ABCD principles in order to ensure continuity even in the absence of external funding. Future initiatives should also integrate cultural and natural heritage assets into tourism offerings which emphasises local identity, cultural pride, and economic opportunities.

Limitations of the Study

The study had a relatively small sample size, which may limit the representativeness of the findings. This limitation was mitigated by using purposive and stratified random sampling to ensure diverse perspectives from local residents, tourists, and event participants. That way the research enhanced the depth and credibility of the data. Data collection occurred at a specific point in time, limiting long-term trend analysis. To address this, document analysis and historical records of past events were incorporated to provide context and supplement current survey and interview data. Self-reported data may include social desirability bias. Triangulation with qualitative interviews, observations, and document reviews was used to validate survey responses which reduced the impact of potential bias. The focus on two case studies in Jwaneng and Tsodilo Hills limited generalisability to other community-based tourism initiatives. This limitation was mitigated by selecting case studies with diverse community characteristics and incorporated comparisons across the two initiatives to offer more details about the ABCD application.

Future Studies

Future studies on ABCD-based tourism initiatives should include longitudinal research to track their long-term impact on community development, which will reveal sustainability and evolution over time. Additionally, expanding the geographic scope to other regions of Botswana and Southern Africa would allow for comparisons of ABCD applications across diverse community contexts. Quantitative impact assessments using advanced statistical modelling could enhance the accuracy of measuring the economic, social, and cultural impacts of community-based tourism initiatives. Lastly, research should focus on exploring how national tourism and development policies can better support ABCD principles and empower local communities in the realm of community-based tourism.

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Transformational Leadership through Indigenous Systems: Unlocking the *Harurwa* Value Chain for Economic Growth and Innovation in *Bikita* District

Rangarirai Musiza

Bindura University of Science Education,

(Corresponding author: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1689-3057> email: rmusiza@gmail.com)

Abstract

This study explores how transformational leadership, when rooted in indigenous systems, can unlock the economic and innovative potential of the harurwa (edible stinkbug) value chain in Bikita District under Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. The harurwa, a culturally significant delicacy with nutritional and economic value, has traditionally been harvested and consumed within local communities but remains underutilized in broader market value chains. Drawing on the principles of transformational leadership vision, inclusivity, capacity-building, and innovation the paper examines how community leaders, traditional institutions, and local entrepreneurs can work together to enhance production, processing, and commercialization of harurwa. The research employed a qualitative case study design to explore how transformational leadership within indigenous knowledge system s(IKS) can unlock the harurwa value chain for economic growth and innovation in Bikita District. Anchored in a constructivist paradigm, it recognized the co-creation of knowledge through interaction between the researcher and participants who value indigenous knowledge systems. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders, local entrepreneurs, and government officials, focus group discussions with harvesters and traders, and participant observation during the harvesting season, supplemented by secondary data analysis. The targeted population included individuals knowledgeable about harurwa harvesting, leadership structures, and value chain dynamics, comprising traditional leaders, harvesters, traders, youth, and relevant officials. A total of forty (40) participants were selected using purposive sampling and refined through snowball sampling to ensure diverse representation and access to knowledgeable informants. The integration of indigenous knowledge with modern value chain management provides opportunities for employment creation, food

security, and rural industrialization. The findings suggest that embracing indigenous governance structures, promoting collective ownership, and fostering innovation-driven practices can position *harurwa* not only as a local resource but also as a strategic contributor to national economic growth. The paper argues that a hybrid leadership model that respects cultural heritage while driving market-oriented innovation can transform the livelihoods of Bikita residents and serve as a blueprint for other indigenous resource-based economies in Africa.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Indigenous systems, *Harurwa* value chain, Economic growth, Innovation

Introduction

The pursuit of sustainable economic growth and innovation in rural Africa has increasingly highlighted the significant potential inherent in indigenous knowledge systems and locally available resources. In *Zimbabwe*, where rural livelihoods often depend on natural resources, traditional practices and indigenous food systems provide both survival strategies and opportunities for entrepreneurial development. One such resource is *harurwa*, the edible stinkbug (*Encosternum delegorguei*), which has long formed part of local diets in *Bikita* District. Its use extends beyond *Bikita* to other parts of the southeastern *Zimbabwe*, with oral traditions among the *VaRemba* and other *Karanga*-speaking communities indicating that the practice dates back to the precolonial era (Maviya, 2015). Ethno-entomological studies indicate that insects like *harurwa* were part of indigenous food systems in Southern Africa long before European settlement (van Huis, 2013). Missionaries and early colonial settlers in the late 19th century also documented insect consumption as an integral part of local diets, though they often misunderstood its cultural significance (van Huis et al., 2013).

In *Zimbabwe*, the harvesting of *harurwa* in the *Norumedzo* Sacred Valley of *Bikita* is regarded as a cultural practice closely linked to spirituality, totemic beliefs, and environmental stewardship, and it has been transmitted across generations. Oral histories from elders in *Bikita* point to *harurwa* being valued both as a nutritious seasonal delicacy and a ritual food, with traditions possibly dating back to the late Iron Age (1600s–1800s) (Nyamadzawo, 2014). However, formal written records of *harurwa* consumption only appear in the early 20th century ethnographies on *Zimbabwean* indigenous diets (van Huis, 2013).

Customarily, harvested during specific seasons, *harurwa* is not only a delicacy however also a source of income generation, nutrition, and cultural identity. Despite its significance, the *harurwa*

value chain remains largely informal, underdeveloped, and disconnected from broader markets, limiting its economic contribution.

To address this developmental gap, this paper argues for the application of transformational leadership through indigenous systems as a mechanism to unlock the full potential of the *harurwa* value chain. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013), is essential for mobilizing communities for them to foster innovation. By incorporating indigenous knowledge systems that guide harvesting, processing, and distribution, leaders can drive the modernization of the *harurwa* sector while still safeguarding cultural values. This blended leadership approach recognises the strength and resilience of indigenous knowledge while also aligning it with modern strategies for economic development and growth.

Harurwa in Bikita District: Cultural and Economic Significance

Bikita District is located in *Masvingo* Province and is widely known as the cultural homeland of *harurwa*. Oral traditions indicate that the edible insect has been a dietary staple in the community's diets for centuries. Its seasonal arrival is often celebrated as a blessing from ancestral spirits. *Harurwa* is typically harvested by shaking host trees early in the morning, then collected in large sacks for household consumption or sale at local markets. Beyond its role as a food source, *harurwa* carries strong cultural significance, symbolizing deep-rooted traditions and often being linked to ecological balance and spiritual harmony.

Economically, *harurwa* has long served as an important income-generating resource, particularly for women and youth who dominate both the harvesting and vending. The trade in *harurwa* is highly seasonal, with prices fluctuating depending on their availability. During the harvesting season, a cup of *harurwa* typically sells for about US\$1, making it relatively affordable for local consumers. However, when the insects are out of season, their scarcity drives up demand, and prices often double to around US\$2 per cup. This seasonal variation often creates the dynamic markets that not only sustain livelihoods in *Bikita* but attract traders as well as buyers from neighboring districts and towns surrounding *Bikita*. However, the lack of structured post-harvest practices such as drying technologies, hygienic packaging, and branding has limited the growth of the *harurwa* value chain. This situation reflects a wider pattern across Africa, where indigenous

foods like mopane worms in Botswana and baobab products in Malawi have been successfully transformed into export commodities through well-organized value chain systems.

Problem Statement

Despite its cultural and nutritional significance, the harurwa value chain in Bikita District remains largely underdeveloped. Existing practices are disjointed, heavily dependent on seasonal availability, and highly exposed to ecological and market fluctuations. Local communities lack access to modern processing facilities, food safety certification, and consistent markets. Furthermore, leadership in the sector is often informal who rely heavily on family or community elders without broader strategic stakeholder engagement. As a result, the potential of *harurwa* to contribute meaningfully to rural industrialization, food security, and innovation is undermined. This paper proposes that the transformational leadership anchored in indigenous governance systems can provide a solution to these challenges. Transformational leaders are capable of inspiring communities with a shared vision by mobilizing resources which excite and foster innovation (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). When applied to the *harurwa* value chain, such leadership can promote collective organization, encourage sustainable harvesting practices, and stimulate local entrepreneurship. Moreover, investing in these strategies within the indigenous cultural roots potentially ensure our own knowledge legitimacy, community ownership, and long-term sustainability.

Research Justification

The justification for this study lies in the urgent need to diversify *Zimbabwe's* rural economies in the wake of climate change, unemployment, and economic volatility. Edible insects have been recognized globally by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2013) as a sustainable source of protein and a potential contributor to food security. In the *Zimbabwean context*, policy frameworks have mostly unnoticed the sector by treating it as peripheral than a strategic venture capital initiative. By focusing on the *harurwa* case, this study contributes to filling this policy and scholarly gap by providing insights into how indigenous resources can capacity build and transform the village business enterprises.

Objectives

The main research objective of this article is to explore how transformational leadership, informed by indigenous knowledge systems, can unlock the *harurwa* value chain for economic growth and innovation in *Bikita* District.

Sub Objectives for this the study seeks to:

- To scrutinize the cultural significance of *harurwa* in *Bikita* District.
- To measure the economic significance of *harurwa* in *Bikita* District.
- To assess how transformational leadership influences indigenous value chain development.
- To identify opportunities for innovation within the *harurwa* sector.
- To examine how indigenous systems can be integrated into rural industrialization strategies.

Research Questions

- How can transformational leadership contribute to enhancing indigenous management of the *harurwa* value chain?
- What are the main challenges constraining *harurwa* innovation and commercialization?
- What potential for value addition or innovation is there in the *harurwa* industry?
- How can indigenous systems be leveraged to generate inclusive economic growth in *Bikita* District?

Literature Review

Cultural Significance of *Harurwa* in *Bikita* District

The *harurwa* cultural value chain in *Bikita* District is deeply rooted in the local people's traditional practices and lifestyles. Traditional leaders play an important role in safeguarding cultural heritage, including practices related to the harvesting and sharing of natural resources such as *harurwa*. The edible stinkbug is often linked to communal celebrations and rituals that reflect values of sharing, unity, and collective identity within the community.

Harurwa also serves as an important source of identity for the people of Bikita. Indigenous knowledge systems support the continuity of culture by embedding traditional practices into everyday life. The taboos and celebrations surrounding the harvesting of *harurwa* strengthen social cohesion and community solidarity, while also helping to keep younger generations connected to their cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the importance of *harurwa* goes beyond its role as a food source. Indigenous resources such as *harurwa* are often closely tied to religious beliefs and cultural practices, with many communities attributing protective and healing properties to them. This spiritual connection enhances its cultural significance, elevating *harurwa* beyond mere consumption. The cultural narratives that surround *harurwa* are a key aspect of making it such an important resource. Oral tradition and storytelling play a vital role in sharing knowledge about the uses and importance of edible insects. These narratives not only guide communities on how to harvest *harurwa* sustainably, but also foster a sense of pride in local heritage and cultural identity.

Lastly, awareness of the cultural significance of *harurwa* informs its utilization in community-based development initiatives. Northouse (2016) identifies that transformational leadership is capable of harnessing cultural resources in a bid to mobilize community engagement and collective action. By identifying and amplifying the cultural significance of *harurwa*, leaders are in a position to mobilize support for viable activities that benefit the community and the environment.

Economic Significance of *Harurwa* in Bikita District

The economic significance of *harurwa* in Bikita District is diversified and includes subsistence, trade, and the potential for market development. Natural resources can be drivers of economic growth, and *harurwa* is not excluded. It provides an important source of income for the majority of families, especially during the peak harvest time when families work together to harvest and prepare the insects.

Transformational leadership is capable of increasing economic opportunities associated with *harurwa*. As argued by Bass and Riggio (2006), motivating leaders can readily mobilize development resources. By stimulating the commercial value of *harurwa*, community leaders are able to impact on an investment in the processing facilities and marketing thus increase the insect worth.

The informal nature of the *harurwa* trade is both a challenge and an opportunity. Humphrey and Navas-Alemán (2010) observed that rural value chains are primarily disarticulated which prevents economic benefits from penetration. The integration of *harurwa* into formal value chains, can trigger efficiency in harvesting and visibility to the global markets. Such transformation requires the engagement of transformational leaders who are capable of confronting the challenges of market integration.

Additionally, *harurwa* has economic significance due to its contribution to food security. Traditional foods more broadly are known to enhance nutritional diversity and strengthen resilience. By promoting the use and trade of *harurwa*, communities can improve household food security while also generating income, making it an important asset within the local economy.

Finally, the economic value of *harurwa* can be harnessed to inform rural development policies. Berkes (2012) also called for the significance of community-based resource management, which can be utilized to facilitate sustainable economic growth. Economic policies can be streamlined and more responsive by making them compliant with the cultural practices surrounding *harurwa*.

Transformational Leadership and Indigenous Value Chain Development

Transformational leadership plays a central role in leading indigenous value chain development, particularly under the *harurwa* context. Transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend self-interest for common goals. For *Bikita*, traditional leaders can rally people through village opinion leaders into action to enhance the value chain pertaining to *harurwa*, linking individual aspiration and communal benefits.

Developing an enthralling vision for the *harurwa* sector is one of the critical roles for transformational leaders. According to Avolio and Yammarino (2013), such leaders can mobilize stakeholders as well as resources through their clear vision. The vision in *Bikita* could be formulated around ways of sustainable *harurwa* harvesting and expanding formal *harurwa* markets, which would enhance the economic benefits to the inhabitants.

Besides, transformational leaders are able to encourage innovation within the value chain. Intellectual stimulation is highlighted by Bass and Riggio (2006) as a key factor in transformational leadership. By encouraging a culture of innovation, leaders have the ability to

challenge members in the community to pursue new ways of processing, packaging, and marketing that could advance the positioning of *harurwa* into the domestic and global markets.

By collaborating indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) with transformational leadership the value chain envisaged can be enhanced. It is contested that application of local knowledge in decision-making will warrant development projects are relevant and culturally acceptable. With this approach, more sustainable practices in the *harurwa* value chain will be realized, which will positively impact the environment and economy.

Lastly, considering the dynamics between transformational leadership and reservoirs of indigenous knowledge value chain systems, the importance of community participation cannot be over looked. Northouse (2016) asserts that effective leadership involves building cooperation and inclusiveness. With the participation of the community individuals in the *harurwa* value chain evolution, transformational leaders will build trust through mutualizing gains.

Opportunities for Innovation within the *Harurwa* Sector

Innovation opportunities within the *harurwa* industry need to be tapped in order to facilitate its growth and sustainability. The global food market is increasingly valuing unique and native products, and this becomes a low hanging opportunity for *harurwa* to gain global recognition. Van Huis et al. (2013) stated that entomophagy and indigenous foods are increasingly at the forefront of sustainable food value chains, and this allows room for the growth of the markets.

Transformational leadership can catalyze innovation since it has the ability to inspire members of society to discover new uses for *harurwa*. Rumpold and Schlüter (2013) pointed out that it is possible to diversify food products, such as making snacks, juices, or supplements from *harurwa*. By instilling a culture of innovation, leaders can encourage entrepreneurs to develop new products that appeals to both the local and international markets.

Research and development are essential for unlocking the full potential of *harurwa*. Scientific inquiry plays a key role in improving the nutritional value and preservation methods of indigenous foods. By fostering collaboration between academic institutions and research organisations, transformational leaders can mobilise knowledge and resources to drive innovation in the processing and value addition of *harurwa*.

Furthermore, integration of technology can foster innovation in *harurwa*'s value chain. Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark (2011) stated that the technological advancement can improve on the processing, packaging, and distribution methods, thereby making the entire value chain efficient. Transformational leaders can advocate for the application of such technologies in an effort to enhance the sector's competitiveness.

Last but not least, forging partnerships with external stakeholders can open up new prospects for innovation. Berkes (2012) emphasized on the role of partnership initiatives in resource management. By engaging with NGOs, government agencies, and private sector actors, transformational leaders can leverage funding and expertise to enable innovative initiatives in the *harurwa* sector, thereby inducing economic growth and sustainability.

Integrating Indigenous Systems into Rural Industrialization Strategies

Integrating local systems into rural industrialization policy is important to make *Bikita* develop sustainably. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) offer an important foundation for understanding local contexts and practices, which can be leveraged to inform industrialization. They are inherently resilient and context-specific, making them highly valuable for guiding sustainable development initiatives.

Transformational leadership can facilitate the integration of IKS into industrialization strategies through strengthening collaboration among stakeholders in the community. Leaders who integrate indigenous practices are able to develop inclusive development plans that respect local traditions while remaining open to new innovations. This approach helps ensure that industrialization initiatives are both culturally relevant and socially accepted within communities.

Further, such identification of the roles of traditional leaders in governing can render industrialization policies more efficient. Matsiliza, (2024) observes that traditional leaders have a tendency to enable decisions regarding the running of resources, providing a bridge between modern and traditional practices. Through their involvement in industrialization initiatives, individuals are able to harness their power and legitimacy to enhance cooperation and collective action.

Incorporating IKS in rural industrialization can also enhance sustainability. As Berkes (2012) recognized that local management interventions can lead to environmental stewardship coupled

with economic growth. Through combining industrialization with sustainable approaches based on local traditional knowledge, communities can establish durable economies.

Finally, an understanding of indigenous systems can inform rural industrialization policy designs. Northouse (2016) emphasized on the need for inclusive leadership in crafting policies that are appropriate for the community values and needs. By integrating indigenous systems into policy translated into the native language, transformational leaders can advocate for mechanisms that increases both economic development and cultural conservation in *Bikita*.

Conceptual Framework

The study is informed by an integrated conceptual framework that places Transformational Leadership as the catalytic factor that itself aligns and mobilizes Indigenous Systems and Value Chain Evolutions to achieve sustainable sectoral growth. The framework posits that effective Transformational Leadership, with its vision, inclusiveness, and innovativeness, does not operate in isolation. It, rather, purposefully engages and intensifies the use of Indigenous Systems that provide the essential pillars of cultural legitimacy, customary governance, and ecological sustainability. Concurrently, it drives and institutionalizes Value Chain Development to build well-organized production, competitiveness, and market efficiency. Critically, the model demonstrates interdependence between Value Chain Development and Indigenous Systems: indigenous governance and knowledge provide the rules and setting for culturally appropriate and sustainable value chain management, and the economic benefits derived from a developed value chain strengthen and support maintaining the indigenous systems. Interaction among the three pillars generates targeted opportunities for innovation in terms of processing, technology, and the access to markets. It is the strategic advantage of such innovations that allows it to be integrated into Rural Industrialization strategies. Therefore, the path to economic growth in the *harurwa* niche sector is not linear but cyclical, where leadership, culture, and commerce are intertwined. This view ensures development is not only economically sustainable but also culturally owned and sustainable, which in turn produces valuable *Harurwa* Sector Outcomes within *Bikita* District.

Independent Variables: Transformational Leadership, Indigenous Systems, Value Chain Development.

Dependent Variables: Opportunities for Innovations, Economic Growth, Sustainable Sectoral Outcomes.

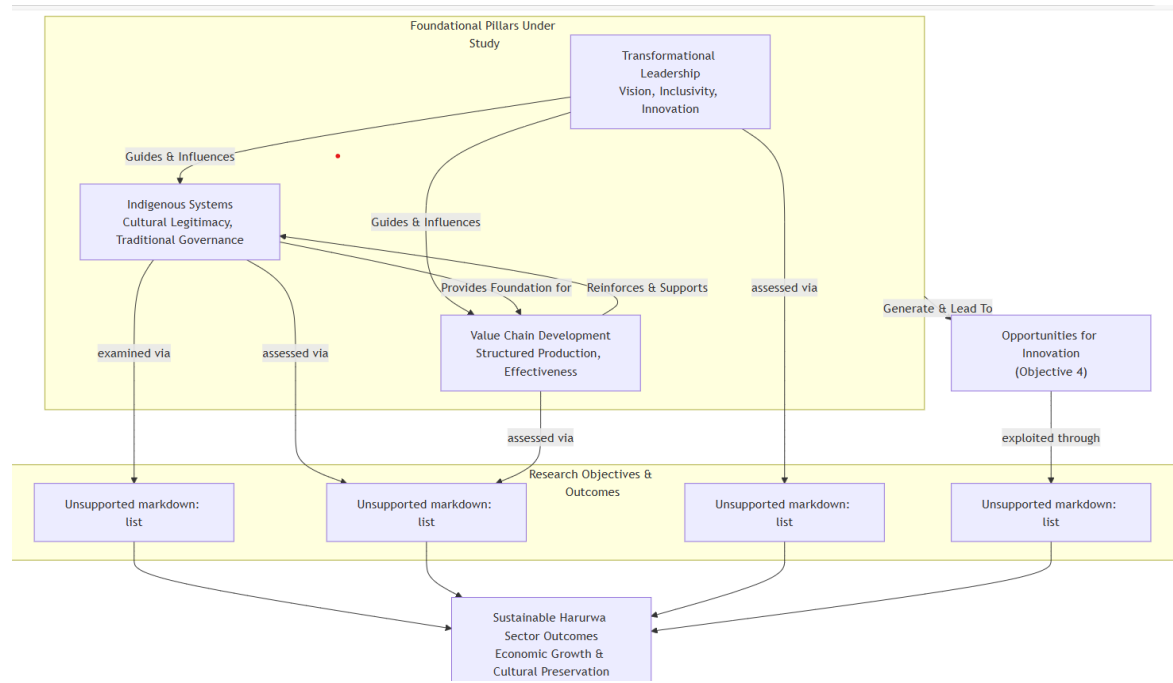


Figure 1: Diagrammatic Illustration of conceptual framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how transformational leadership within indigenous systems can unlock the *harurwa* value chain for economic growth and innovation in *Bikita* District. A case study approach was chosen because it enables in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). The *harurwa* value chain is deeply immersed in the local culture, traditions, and community governance, making the case study design suitable for capturing the nuances of indigenous systems. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow for the exploration of perceptions, values, and lived experiences of local actors, which are central to understanding the dynamics of leadership and innovation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research design was anchored on a constructivist paradigm, which assumes that knowledge is co-created through interaction between the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This paradigm aligns with the study's focus on indigenous knowledge systems, as it respects local voices and recognizes the legitimacy of non-Western epistemologies (Chilisa, 2012). By integrating transformational leadership theory with indigenous governance systems, the study aligns with a decolonial research approach that prioritizes cultural authenticity and local empowerment.

Study Area

Bikita district is located in *Masvingo* Province of *Zimbabwe*, was selected as the study area because it is the cultural hub of *harurwa* harvesting. Communities in *Bikita* like in *Nerumedzo* have developed unique practices around the collection, preparation, and consumption of *harurwa*, making the district an ideal site for investigating indigenous value chains. The district is predominantly rural, with livelihoods based on subsistence farming, small-scale trading, and natural resource utilization (ZimStat, 2022). *Harurwa* is harvested seasonally, often between May to July, when host trees like *musasa* yield the insects in abundance. The Local markets in *Nyika* Growth Point, *Rhoyi* as well as other trading centers have become the hotspots of *harurwa* trade, attracting both the indigenous and external buyers.

Sampling Techniques

There is clear distinction here between the population of interest and the sample. The population of interest, refers to the broad group of interest for generalization, consisted of all individuals in *Bikita* District with an ample experience of *harurwa* harvesting, its leadership structure, and its value chain dynamics. This population included, but not limited to, traditional leaders in the terms of chiefs, headmen, and village elders, both male and female harvesters, local shopkeepers, youth who vend, and rural district council officials. The sample size, however, is the precise, slightly lower number of individuals taken from this broader population actually to participate in the research; this was established at a hoped-for total of forty(40) participants. It was strategically sampled using purposive sampling to ensure it was representative of the diversified voices within the community, and then filtered using snowball methods of sampling for access to out-of-the-way networks, thus being able to obtain data that could be from informants with the depth required in order to advance the purposes of the study.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods employed in this study utilized a qualitative research methodology to gain an in-depth insight into the dynamics of transformational leadership, indigenous systems, and the *harurwa* value chain. This approach included semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders, entrepreneurs, and government officials, which provided rich, contextualized perspectives. Focus group discussions with harvesters and traders further captured collective views and experiences, while participant observation during the harvesting season offered firsthand insights into practices and governance. Additionally, secondary data analysis complemented the qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the context and themes relevant to the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observation.

- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with traditional leaders, local entrepreneurs, and government officials to understand leadership dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and potential for commercialization. Interviews allowed participants to express their perspectives freely while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper insights (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).
- **Focus group discussions** were held with harvesters and traders, grouped by gender and age, to capture collective views on challenges, opportunities, and innovations in the *harurwa* sector. FGDs were particularly useful in surfacing community narratives and cultural beliefs surrounding *harurwa* (Morgan, 1997).
- **Participant observation** was employed during the *harurwa* harvesting season i.e May to July 2025 to capture practices, rituals, and market dynamics. Observation provided firsthand insights into indigenous governance mechanisms, such as how harvesting rights are allocated and how conflicts are resolved.

Additionally, secondary data such as government reports, policy documents, and academic literature were analyzed to contextualize findings and triangulate primary data sources.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach. Interview and focus group transcripts were transcribed verbatim and organized into themes related to transformational leadership, indigenous governance, and value chain development.

Themes were then interpreted within the broader theoretical framework of transformational leadership and indigenous systems. For example, narratives of chiefs mobilizing communities were analyzed in relation to idealized influence and inspirational motivation, while traders' innovations in packaging were linked to intellectual stimulation. The integration of indigenous rituals with leadership practices was examined as evidence of hybrid leadership models.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the traditional leadership in *Bikita*. The study adhered to principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity (Israel & Hay, 2006). Participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used in reporting to protect identities. Importantly, the researcher engaged with traditional leaders to seek community entry and approval, respecting indigenous protocols before commencing fieldwork. This decolonial ethical stance ensured the research process was both respectful and legitimate (Chilisa, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

While the qualitative case study design provided deep insights, it also posed limitations. The findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to all edible insect value chains in Zimbabwe. Seasonal constraints also meant that data collection was limited to the *harurwa* harvesting period, potentially excluding off-season dynamics. Furthermore, some participants were hesitant to discuss commercial practices in detail due to fears of regulation or taxation. Despite these limitations, triangulation of methods and sources enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Findings Aligned with Research Objectives

Cultural Significance of *Harurwa* in *Bikita* District

The findings confirm that the cultural significance of *harurwa* is profound and multifaceted, serving as more than just a food source. It is deeply embedded in the spiritual and social fabric of the community. The study revealed that harvesting begins with community rituals to seek ancestral blessings, reflecting a spiritual dimension that governs resource management and reinforces social cohesion. Indigenous knowledge systems dictate the timing of harvesting and methods for minimizing ecological harm, ensuring practices are sustainable and culturally sanctioned. The allocation of harvesting rights by traditional leaders and the enforcement of customary rules through fines and penalties further demonstrate how *harurwa* is central to traditional governance structures. Participants noted that this cultural legitimacy is what sustains the practice and grants it enduring social acceptance. It reflects the broader role of indigenous knowledge in shaping community identity, values, and social order.

Economic Significance of *Harurwa* in *Bikita* District

The economic significance of *harurwa* is substantial yet under-optimized, functioning primarily within an informal, subsistence-oriented framework. The study found that *harurwa* provides critical household income and food security for harvesters, traders, and their families. Local traders and youth involved in vending are active participants in this informal economy. However, participants highlighted that the economic potential is constrained by seasonality, climate variability, and a reliance on informal market networks, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation by middlemen. The current economic activities, such as sun-drying and basic packaging, though informal, add value and extend the product's shelf life for local trade. The overwhelming consensus among participants was that with improved packaging, market access, and formal recognition, *harurwa* could transition from a local food source to a significant commercial "business," tapping into urban and international markets as a high-protein, culturally authentic product, a potential previously identified by van Huis et al. (2013).

The Influence of Transformational Leadership on Indigenous Value Chain Development

The findings provide clear evidence that transformational leadership is the critical catalyst that influences and mobilizes the indigenous value chain towards development. Traditional leader's chiefs, headmen, and elders exemplify this leadership by providing vision, mentorship, and intellectual stimulation. They coordinate activities, regulate resources, and inspire the community to transcend subsistence harvesting by engaging in value addition like drying and packaging for market-oriented objectives. As one leader stated, this shift in mindset is crucial: from viewing *harurwa* solely as tradition to recognizing its market value. This leadership style fosters inclusivity by actively encouraging youth participation, thereby bridging generational gaps and injecting innovation into the value chain. These actions reflect the ideas of Bass and Riggio, who highlight how leaders inspire and motivate followers toward shared goals. They also support the view that effective leadership in Africa brings together cultural legitimacy and flexible, adaptive innovation in order to promote development.

Opportunities for Innovation within the *Harurwa* Sector

The study identified significant, community-identified opportunities for innovation that span the entire value chain. Key areas for improvement include:

- **Technology & Processing:** Advanced solar drying technologies and hygienic, branded packaging to reduce spoilage, improve quality, and access formal markets.
- **Product Development:** Processing *harurwa* into derivative products such as powders, snacks, or supplements to increase its value and appeal, aligning with global trends in edible insect consumption (Rumpold & Schlüter, 2013).
- **Market Innovation:** Developing formal market linkages to urban centers and potentially for export, moving beyond informal local networks. This includes leveraging its unique selling propositions as an organic, sustainable, and culturally authentic product.
- **Sectoral Linkages:** Innovating by linking the *harurwa* value chain to other sectors such as tourism (as a cultural experience or authentic souvenir) and the bio-economy. Transformational leaders were found to be key in fostering this innovative mindset through community workshops and mentorship without undermining traditional values.

Integration of Indigenous Systems into Rural Industrialization Strategies

The findings demonstrate that indigenous systems are not a barrier but rather the essential foundation for any successful rural industrialization strategy for the *harurwa* sector. The study reveals that effective integration would involve a hybrid model:

- **Governance:** Formal policies and external interventions must recognize and build upon existing indigenous governance structures, such as the conflict resolution and resource allocation mechanisms managed by traditional leaders. This ensures equity, sustainability, and community buy-in, as supported by Berkes (2012).
- **Knowledge:** Industrialization strategies must incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) regarding sustainable harvesting times and methods to ensure ecological sustainability is maintained even at a larger scale.
- **Cultural Legitimacy:** For rural industrialization to be successful, it must respect the cultural and spiritual protocols surrounding *harurwa*. As the findings show, leaders navigate tensions by introducing incremental technological and market improvements that do not violate core traditional values. This method guarantees that industrialization improves rather than eroding the cultural legitimacy that gives the produce its unique market value thereby ensuring its social acceptance.

Challenges Facing the *Harurwa* Value Chain

Despite these opportunities, several challenges constrain the development of the *harurwa* value chain. Seasonality limits continuous supply, making it difficult for traders to maintain consistent markets. Participants noted that climate variability affects the abundance of host trees and, consequently, *harurwa* availability. Market access remains a barrier, as traders rely on informal networks and lack connections to urban or export markets.

Policy and regulatory gaps also emerged as significant constraints. *Harurwa* is not formally recognized in Zimbabwe's food and agricultural policies, which affects food safety certification and commercialization. Participants pointed out that the lack of government support exposes harvesters and traders to exploitation by middlemen. Comparable challenges have also been

observed in other African edible insect value chains, including those involving mopane worms in Botswana and Zambia.

Cultural factors, while largely beneficial, sometimes hinder innovation. Some community members resist changes perceived as violating traditional protocols, such as mechanized processing or off-season harvesting. Transformational leaders address these tensions by finding a balance that respects traditional customs while gradually introducing practical improvements. At the same time, infrastructural constraints such as poor road networks, inadequate cold storage facilities, and limited access to financing continue to limit the growth potential of the harurwa sector.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the study demonstrates that transformational leadership within indigenous systems creates a unique platform for unlocking the *harurwa* value chain. Leaders mobilize communities, stimulate innovation, and integrate cultural practices with market-oriented strategies. Indigenous governance ensures sustainability, equitable resource access, and social legitimacy. Opportunities exist in packaging, branding, and market expansion, but challenges such as seasonality, policy gaps, and infrastructural limitations must be addressed. The findings indicate that hybrid leadership models, which integrate transformational principles with indigenous knowledge, can play a significant role in promoting rural economic growth and innovation in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Discussion

Integrating Transformational Leadership with Indigenous Systems

The study demonstrates how transformational leadership is a key driver in realizing potential in the *harurwa* value chain. The leaders of *Bikita* District do not merely impose regulations; they inspire, encourage, and intellectually stimulate communities to envision *harurwa* as something more than an ordinary dish. This aligns with the view that transformational leaders elevate a sense of shared purpose and motivate others to commit to collective goals. In *Bikita*, integrating transformational leadership with local governance structures allows leaders to maintain cultural legitimacy while driving economic innovation.

The traditional systems provide the platform for transformational leadership to operate on. Leaders follow local rituals, procedures, and government systems such that innovation does not destroy cultural values. For example, customary harvesting ceremonies are preserved while adding improved processing and packaging techniques. The hybrid model subscribes to Wiredu (2004), who maintains that the African epistemologies must be wedded with the contemporary organizational tenets in order to achieve sustainable development.

The study, therefore, confirms that transformational leadership is most effective when culturally grounded, specifying a harmony between theory and indigenous practice. This connectivity between leadership and indigenous authenticity not only encourages community involvement but also generates ownership among indigenous people. In enabling participatory decision-making, leaders enable locals to contribute to the success of the *harurwa* value chain without compromising their own culture.

***Harurwa* Value Chain as a Model of Rural Innovation**

The findings of the study reveal the way the *harurwa* value chain as a model for rural innovation in Zimbabwe can be employed. Through utilization of indigenous knowledge to manage resources and transformational leadership models, the community is able to escape subsistence into organized, market-oriented systems. This is facilitated by innovative strategies such as the use of altered traditional drying methods and hygiene improvement, enhancing product value and marketability.

Harurwa innovation is a showcase of not only economic potential but also environmental and social sustainability. Native knowledge that is adapted into modern practices allows for the production of products that appeal both at the local and international levels. The practices make the value chain profitable as well as sustainable, as shown in broader research on edible insects as a driver for the bio-economy.

These findings support the FAO (2013) and van Huis et al. (2013) conclusions that insects provide an environmentally friendly, high-protein food source that can be integrated into rural economies. The success of community-led innovation in *harurwa* processing reveals how local resources can be transformed into commodities for generating income without losing cultural integrity,

duplicating successful examples in Southern Africa where similar methods have improved livelihoods.

Leadership and Community Mobilization

Transformational *Bikita* leaders play a central role in mobilizing people around shared goals. They plan harvesting seasons, allocate rights of collection, and advise women and youths on processing practices. This indicates that leadership is not only about power but also encompasses mentoring, inspiring, and capacity building (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013). Through collaboration culture, leaders induce members of the community to work together, which increases the overall effectiveness of the *harurwa* value chain.

The study identifies that mobilization is most effective when leadership is incorporated within the domestic systems of governance. The convergence of legitimacy and direction gives an arena where the people in the community feel valued and respected. By adopting practices and customs of the locals, the leaders generate trust and facilitate collective action among the community members that is required for the achievement of goals they share.

Moreover, evidence shows that leadership can reverse generational and gender differences in obtaining resources. Transformational leaders, by directly engaging youth and women, enhance equity and inclusiveness, a precondition for sustainable value chain transformation. Through the involvement of more people in innovation, inclusive leadership prevents genius creators from monopolizing innovation and spreading it throughout society, producing a multiplier effect on local economic growth.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Despite these successes, the study identifies significant challenges that could limit the growth of the *harurwa* value chain. Seasonal fluctuations, market access limitations, and policy gaps constrain commercialization, creating barriers that can hinder progress. These findings align with Humphrey and Navas-Alemán (2010), who argue that rural value chains often face structural and institutional barriers that must be addressed to facilitate growth.

Transformational leadership, however, can mitigate some of these challenges by fostering collective problem-solving, strategic planning, and advocacy for supportive policies. Leaders can

organize cooperatives to stabilize supply, negotiate better prices, and access government support, ensuring that communities can weather fluctuations in demand and supply. This proactive approach empowers communities to take charge of their economic futures while navigating external challenges.

Additionally, by promoting incremental innovation in processing and packaging, leaders can create a more resilient value chain that withstands seasonal variability. These strategies echo lessons from Kenya and Botswana, where community-based leadership has facilitated successful integration of indigenous resources into formal markets. By learning from these examples, *Bikita* leaders can adapt and implement similar strategies to overcome local challenges effectively.

Implications for Rural Industrialization and Policy

The study underscores the potential of indigenous resource-based value chains as vehicles for rural industrialization. By combining transformational leadership with local governance, communities can enhance productivity, create employment, and stimulate local economies. The *harurwa* case shows that leadership models rooted in culture can encourage innovation while still preserving traditional values, which is an important factor for sustainable development in Africa.

Policy implications are significant. *Zimbabwean* policymakers should recognize edible insects as strategic resources, providing technical support, access to finance, and regulatory frameworks that ensure food safety and market expansion. This recognition can lead to a more favorable environment for the development of the *harurwa* value chain, enabling communities to capitalize on their indigenous resources.

Integrating community-led leadership with formal policy structures can create a conducive environment for scaling up the *harurwa* value chain. By fostering collaboration between local leaders and policymakers, *Zimbabwe* can enhance food security and economic diversification while promoting sustainable practices that respect cultural heritage and community values.

Comparative Insights

A comparison of *Bikita's harurwa* value chain with other edible insect value chains across Africa reveals similar trends. In Botswana, for example, mopane worm cooperatives have utilized strong

leadership and indigenous knowledge to access regional markets while still upholding sustainable harvesting practices.

These successful models illustrate the power of combining traditional practices with innovative strategies to enhance market access and community livelihoods.

The Malawian context now represents, baobab value chains integration with traditional collection practices as well as modern processing to supply both local and international markets. This approach highlights the versatility of indigenous resources and the potential for rural communities to engage in diverse markets. Such comparisons reinforce the notion that effective leadership and respect for indigenous systems can drive rural innovation across different contexts.

The *harurwa* case in *Bikita* extends these lessons by emphasizing the centrality of cultural legitimacy in leadership. Unlike purely commercial approaches, hybrid leadership ensures that community values, rituals, and governance structures are preserved while fostering innovation. This supports the view that rural development in Africa should be grounded in local culture, led by communities, and focused on innovation.

Synthesis

In sum, the discussion confirms that transformational leadership within indigenous systems provides a robust mechanism for unlocking rural value chains. The *harurwa* sector exemplifies how cultural resources, when strategically mobilized, can contribute to economic growth, food security, and innovation. Challenges exist; however, the leadership, community mobilization, and hybrid governance offer pathways to overcome them which emphasizes acceptance by the rural communities.

The findings contribute to scholarly debates on leadership, indigenous knowledge, and rural industrialization and offers a replicable model for other indigenous resource-based value chains in Africa. By demonstrating the effectiveness of culturally contextualized leadership, the study highlights the importance of integrating local practices with contemporary strategies for sustainable development.

Ultimately, the research underscores the potential for indigenous value chains to drive economic and social change. By unlocking the full potential of resources like *harurwa* through innovative leadership and community engagement, rural areas can achieve greater resilience and prosperity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study explored how transformational leadership, embedded within indigenous systems, can unlock the *harurwa* value chain for economic growth and innovation in *Bikita District, Zimbabwe*. The findings demonstrate that traditional leaders, including chiefs and village elders, act as transformational agents by inspiring communities, facilitating knowledge transfer, and promoting innovation while respecting cultural norms. Through mentorship, vision-casting, and collective mobilization, leaders encourage harvesters, traders, and youth to engage in value addition activities, thereby enhancing the productivity and sustainability of the *harurwa* sector.

Indigenous knowledge systems form the foundation of governance and operational practices within the *harurwa* value chain. Rituals, taboos, and community-based rules help ensure sustainable harvesting, fair access, and strong social cohesion. When transformational leadership principles are combined with these indigenous systems, communities are able to modernize practices, improve hygiene in processing, and pursue market-driven innovations without losing cultural legitimacy. This blended approach demonstrates the value of culturally grounded leadership in promoting rural economic development in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa.

The study also identified significant opportunities for value addition and innovation. Packaging, branding, drying technologies, and market expansion were cited as potential areas for improving the *harurwa* sector's competitiveness. By leveraging these opportunities, communities can transform *harurwa* from a seasonal delicacy into a strategic resource that contributes to rural livelihoods, food security, and broader economic growth. These findings align with global literature on edible insects as sustainable, high-value food sources and as components of the emerging bio-economy (FAO, 2013; van Huis et al., 2013; Rumpold & Schlüter, 2013).

Despite the potential, the *harurwa* value chain faces challenges such as seasonality, limited market access, infrastructural constraints, and policy gaps. Cultural resistance to certain innovations and the informal nature of the sector further constrain commercialization. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that transformational leadership within indigenous systems can mitigate these

challenges by fostering collective problem-solving, capacity building, and strategic engagement with external stakeholders that include government agencies and market actors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

1. **Policy Recognition and Support:** Policymakers in Zimbabwe should formally acknowledge edible insects, including *harurwa*, as important strategic resources for both food security and economic development. There is a need for policies that offer technical assistance, establish food safety standards, and support market access in order to better integrate indigenous value chains into national and regional economies.
2. **Capacity Building and Leadership Development:** Training programmes should be established to strengthen transformational leadership skills among traditional leaders and community champions. Emphasis should be placed on integrating innovation, entrepreneurship, and inclusive community mobilization within indigenous governance frameworks (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013).
3. **Value Addition and Market Expansion:** Communities should be supported to improve processing, packaging, and branding of *harurwa*. Investment in drying technologies, cold storage facilities, and quality assurance can increase market access and reduce post-harvest losses. Partnerships with urban traders and e-commerce platforms could expand domestic and international markets.
4. **Sustainable Resource Management:** Indigenous harvesting practices should be preserved to ensure ecological sustainability. Community-based monitoring systems and rotational harvesting schedules can prevent overexploitation of host trees while maintaining cultural rituals and social cohesion (Berkes, 2012).
5. **Research and Innovation:** Further studies should explore product diversification, nutritional analysis, and potential applications of *harurwa* in processed foods, pharmaceuticals, and animal feed. Action research involving communities can promote incremental innovation while respecting cultural norms (Matiza Ruzengwe et al, 2022).

6. **Community Cooperatives and Collective Action:** Establishing cooperatives can enhance bargaining power, stabilize supply, and facilitate access to finance. Cooperatives can also serve as platforms for knowledge exchange, mentorship, and training, reinforcing the transformational leadership model at the community level.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

The study contributes to theory by demonstrating that transformational leadership, when embedded within indigenous systems, provides a culturally informed and contextually relevant model for rural economic development. It also enriches the literature on edible insects and bio-economy by presenting a case where traditional knowledge and leadership intersect with innovation and market-oriented strategies.

From a practical perspective, the study offers actionable insights for community leaders, policymakers, and development practitioners seeking to leverage indigenous resources for economic growth. By adopting hybrid leadership models, rural communities can balance cultural preservation with innovation, creating sustainable value chains that enhance livelihoods and contribute to national development goals.

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Silver Economy Start-Ups: Exploring the Motivations, Barriers, and Support Needs of Elderly Entrepreneurs in the Informal Sector of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Moyo Jabez

Lupane State University, Department of Business Management. (Corresponding author:
jamoyo@lsu.ac.zw)

Abstract

This study explored the emerging phenomenon of elderly entrepreneurship within the informal sector of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, through the lens of the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach. Anchored in the context of the silver economy, the research investigates the motivations, barriers, and support needs of entrepreneurs aged fifty (50) years and above who engage in small-scale, informal business ventures. Using purposive sampling, thirty (30) elderly entrepreneurs were selected for an in-depth semi-structured interviews to elicit rich, subjective insights into their lived experiences. The interpretivist stance guided the inquiry towards understanding how personal histories, social networks, and contextual realities shape the entrepreneurial behaviour of older adults in a developing economy. The findings revealed that motivations are largely driven by necessity, social inclusion, and a desire for self-reliance, while barriers include limited access to finance, declining health, and age-related discrimination. Despite these challenges, many participants demonstrated resilience and creativity, leveraging on social capital and accumulated experience to sustain their ventures. The study underscores the need for policy frameworks and support mechanisms that recognise the economic and social contributions of older entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe's informal sector. By illuminating the nuanced meanings elderly individuals attach to entrepreneurship, this research contributes to an expanding discourse on ageing, economic participation, and inclusive development within the African urban contexts.

Keywords: interpretivism, elderly entrepreneurship, silver economy, informal sector, Bulawayo

Introduction

There is a noticeable shift toward a "silver economy" whereby older adults aged fifty engage in economic activities beyond traditional retirement. Masuku, Nkala and Benhura (2025) pointed out that this has attracted growing scholarly and policy interest. Mujeyi & Sadomba

(2019) noted that in Zimbabwe, populations aged fifty-five (55) and above increasingly turn to the informal sector for a livelihood, driven by inadequate pensions, weak social protections, and limited formal employment. This pattern holds especially true in Bulawayo, a deindustrialised urban centre once renowned as Zimbabwe's industrial hub (Gumbo & Geyer, 2011). As formal sector job losses accompanied economic decline, the city's informal economy expanded, with older adults among the newly emerged entrepreneurs (Pankomera & Greunen, 2020)

The ageing population in Zimbabwe is growing, with more individuals aged sixty (60) and above turning to informal entrepreneurship as a means of survival and social inclusion amid eroding pension packages, the shrinking formal employment, and the rising cost of living (Masuku et al., 2025; Ndlovu, 2025). In Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, the deindustrialisation of the economy has exacerbated unemployment and poverty which has prompted older adults especially those without reliable retirement savings accounts to enter the informal trading spaces (Gumbo & Geyer, 2011). Yet, despite their increasing economic participation, elderly entrepreneurs remain largely invisible in academic discourse and policy frameworks related to the informal economy and ageing.

Empirical research from other studies in cities such as Harare and Gweru revealed that elder entrepreneurs faced numerous constraints such as limited access to finance, digital exclusion, physical health challenges, and exclusion from formal business support systems (Matsongoni & Mutambara, 2021; Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013). In support Maphosa (2025) pointed out that more than sixty percent (60%) of informal vendors in Bulawayo are elderly women, many above the age of sixty (60) operating in precarious environments.

Problem Statement

Existing studies on informal entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe tend to focus on youth and women, leaving a significant research gap with regards to the experiences, motivations, and needs of older vendors (Ndiweni & Verhoeven, 2013; Matsongoni & Mutambara, 2021). Moreover, the limited empirical research that does exist often overlooks at the unique structural and social barriers faced by elderly entrepreneurs, such as declining physical health, digital illiteracy, age-related financial exclusion, and limited access to support services that are tailored to their circumstances (Tarupiwa, 2020). This absence of targeted data makes it difficult for local authorities and development practitioners to formulate effective, age-responsive interventions for the informal sector.

Thus, there is a pressing need to investigate how elderly entrepreneurs navigate structural limitations, what motivates their continued participation in economic life, and what forms of support (formal or informal) can enhance their resilience and well-being. Therefore, this study addressed this critical gap by exploring the motivations, barriers, and support needs of elderly entrepreneurs in Bulawayo's informal sector. It sought to generate insights that can inform inclusive local economic development strategies, enhance social protection systems, and promote the dignity and productivity of older adults in Zimbabwe's urban economy.

Research Objectives

- To explore the socio-economic motivations driving elderly individuals (aged sixty and above) to engage in informal entrepreneurship in Bulawayo.
- To identify the key barriers such as economic, technological, health-related, and institutional support, faced by the elderly entrepreneurs.
- To examine the formal and informal support systems that enable or constrain elderly entrepreneurial activity in the informal sector.
- To assess the extent to which local policies and development programs address the unique needs of elderly entrepreneurs.
- To propose recommendations for enhancing the participation and sustainability of elderly entrepreneurs in the informal economy.

Research Questions

- What motivates elderly individuals in Bulawayo to start and operate informal businesses in later life?
- What are the main barriers that elderly entrepreneurs face in the informal sector?
- What support mechanisms: family, community, financial, or institutional are available to elderly informal entrepreneurs?
- How do current local policies and development initiatives address or neglect the needs of elderly entrepreneurs?
- What strategies can be implemented to improve the inclusion, productivity, and well-being of elderly entrepreneurs in Bulawayo?

Significance of the study

This study contributes to the growing discourse on productive ageing and informal entrepreneurship by shedding light on a neglected segment of the population who are the

elderly entrepreneurs in the Zimbabwean informal sector This research contributes to inclusive economic development by positioning older informal vendors as active economic agents whose knowledge, resilience, and resourcefulness are vital to Zimbabwe's urban informal economy. The study also enriches the literature on the "silver economy" and ageing in developing economies by exploring how economic participation in later life is shaped by necessity, institutional constraints, and social resilience mechanisms (Bojanić, Erceg & Damoska, 2024). Practically, the research will provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and municipal authorities on how to support elderly entrepreneurs in Bulawayo and other related urban spaces. The study also holds social significance, as it amplifies the voices and experiences of older entrepreneurs who are often an overlooked society in both gerontology and economic development planning.

Study Area

The research was conducted in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, known for its declining industrial base versus her growing informal economy (Gumbo & Geyer, 2011). The city provided a relevant setting to study late-life entrepreneurship in response to economic hardship, urban poverty, and a weak social security net.

Limitations and mitigation

Potential limitations

- There is a likelihood of coverage bias since no complete frame of elderly informal entrepreneurs exists.
- Self-report bias in income and performance measures.

Mitigation

- The study employed the use of purposive sampling across multiple sampling sources and stratification to accommodate representation.
- The interview employed the use of categorical revenue bands instead of exact income to reduce misreporting.

Literature Review

The Informal Sector and Elderly Economic Participation

Sebele-Mpofu and Moyo (2021) deductively pointed out that the Zimbabwe's informal sector is a cornerstone of economic survival, encompassing over sixty percent (60%) of Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) and provides sustainable livelihoods to approximately ninety percent (90%) of the workforce. Despite its growth, the sector remains not recognized in policy frameworks, leading to exclusion from social protections such as pensions, healthcare, and formal financial advisory services. As the state retreats from welfare provision, older adults especially those beyond sixty (60) are increasingly compelled to engage in informal economic ventures that maintain financial security and social worth (Tarupiwa, 2020).

Silver Economy and Senior Entrepreneurship

Though their study was premised on Spain, del Olmo-García, Domínguez-Fabián, Crecente-Romero, & del Val-Núñez (2023) pointed out that globally, the fifty (50) years age group also known by the term senior entrepreneurs, are gaining attention as potential contributors to economic resilience and active ageing. Though this is a new trend existing literature however shows through, empirical data that senior entrepreneurship has low prevalence after age of sixty-five (65) in high-income countries mostly due to health, psychological, and financial constraints. (Nyoko, Hanafiah, Hamid, & Jamaludin, 2025). Despite these trends, targeted studies that explores entrepreneurship in later life within developing economies particularly in the informal contexts are scarce but critical, given the lack of formal retirement security valve nets.

Motivations: Push vs Pull

The push factors include but are not limited to inadequate pension provisions, dependency ratios, and economic insecurity. These are invariably often the primary motivators for elderly individuals to envisage to enter the informal economy (Masuku et al., 2025). Pull factors, include but are not limited to the desire for autonomy, purpose, and social inclusion. Perenyi, Zolin & Maritz (2018) further argued that these factors play critical roles but are less studied in low-income countries. Much of the existing entrepreneurship literature contrasts necessity-based cases with opportunity-driven motivations that may influence younger or resource-endowed individuals.

Theoretical Foundations

Theoretical frameworks such as Push–Pull Theory suggest necessity-driven "silver economy" entrepreneurship emerges prominently in resource-poor settings (Baumol, 1996; Bojanić et al., 2024), while Institutional Theory highlights how structural factors such as weak formal institutions and reliance on social networks shape older entrepreneurs' strategies (Ndiweni &

Verhoeven, 2013; Matsongoni & Mutambara, 2021). Yet empirical case studies remain scarce, particularly in Bulawayo's distinct context of economic decay, demographic shifts, and informal sector growth.

Empirical Review

Overview of empirical work on “silver” / older entrepreneurship

Empirical research on entrepreneurship among older adults now often described as silver entrepreneurship or senior entrepreneurship has expanded and gained prominence in recent years. Cross-national quantitative work, documents higher self-employment rates for older age cohorts compared with youths in many contexts, but also shows that policy attention and entrepreneurship support tend to focus on the youth (GEM Consortium, 2020). The qualitative and mixed-methods studies have sought to explain this apparent paradox by exploring the lived experience that reveals that many older people engage in small enterprises for survival and psychosocial reasons (Römer-Paakkanen, and Suonpää, 2023; Salvi, Belz, and Bacq, 2023).

Motivations: necessity, identity and psychosocial drivers

There is a consistent empirical finding seemingly common across developing and developed countries which is the dual character of motivation among older entrepreneurs. Large-scale surveys identify necessity-driven entrepreneurship (post-retirement income needs, lack of pensions) as prominent in low-income contexts (Othman, Marthandan, and Ab. Aziz, 2022; GEM Consortium, 2020). Complementary qualitative studies that include countries and community case studies, emphasised on identity, meaning, social inclusion, and purposeful venture capital as important motivators for people aged fifty years (50) and more (Römer-Paakkanen et al., 2023; Dzingirai, Ndofirepi, 2024). Dzingirai and Ndofirepi (2024) points out that qualitative interviews with “grey” entrepreneurs often unpack narratives of restored dignity and social status that accompany income generation.

Common barriers documented empirically

Empirical studies converge on several barriers that disproportionately affect older informal entrepreneurs:

Financial exclusion.

Multiple empirical reports show that age is a perceived risk factor for formal finance lenders to cushion older entrepreneurs. Therefore, the elderly vendors depend on savings clubs, family

remittances, and informal credit allowances (Frimpong & Mensah, 2020); Othman et al., 2022). The Zimbabwe-specific informal work highlights acute difficulties and opportunities for the elderly vendors to access formal finance support (Magidi, 2024).

Health and physical constraints.

Qualitative interviews repeatedly document how frail health, mobility problems and care needs reduce work hours and capacity thus impacting negatively on the scale and continuity of operations (Matsongoni and Mutambara, 2021).

Market and technological disadvantage.

The empirical work found that older vendors frequently lost customers to younger, digitally-savvy technopreneurs who explored to reach to newer markets. (Salvi et al, 2023).

Regulatory harassment and insecurity.

Several case studies from Zimbabwe and other African cities notably from the works of Chigwenya, Chigara, & Simbanegavi, (2020) and Magidi, (2024) report punitive urban regulatory frameworks in terms of forced evictions, confiscation when found defaulting on rent payments. The practice destabilises the informal livelihoods but more so, leaving older vendors vulnerable.

Ageism and social stigma.

The empirical interviews revealed experiences of disrespect or marginalisation that undermine confidence and access to networks (Oteng, Amoah, & Huang, 2024).; Dzingirai, Ndofirepi, 2024).

Support mechanisms: informal safety nets and sparse formal programmes

There is heavy reliance on informal support structures such as family, religious groups, income generated on rotating group savings, and neighbours as pragmatic coping strategies (Naudé, 2013; Putnam, 2000). Where empirical studies identify formal support, these are often generic Small Medium Enterprises(SME) or youth schemes that poorly satisfy elderly needs (Gunhidzirai, 2024).

Methodological patterns in the empirical literature

Empirical studies that interrogate older entrepreneurship commonly use qualitative or mixed methods that use semi-structured interviews, focus groups and case studies.

Purposive/judgemental sampling of a small, information-rich samples of about ten to forty participants is a standard sample that reveals on the lived experiences that may capture the heterogeneity of older entrepreneurs (Dzingirai, Ndofirepi, 2024; Römer-Paakkanen et al., 2023). Thematic analysis and narrative approaches predominate, consistent with interpretivist aims to uncover subjective meanings.

Empirical evidence on policy and institutional gaps

Empirical reviews and case studies show that national and municipal policies frequently fail to recognise elderly entrepreneurs in policy regulatory frameworks. Studies in Zimbabwe indicate a policy emphasis on youth employment initiatives, while social protection for older adults is weak thus creating an empirical case for age-mainstreaming in SME and informal sector policies (Nyabeze, Chikoko& Nyabeze, 2025; Gunhidzirai, 2024; Magidi, 2024).

Interventions supported by empirical work

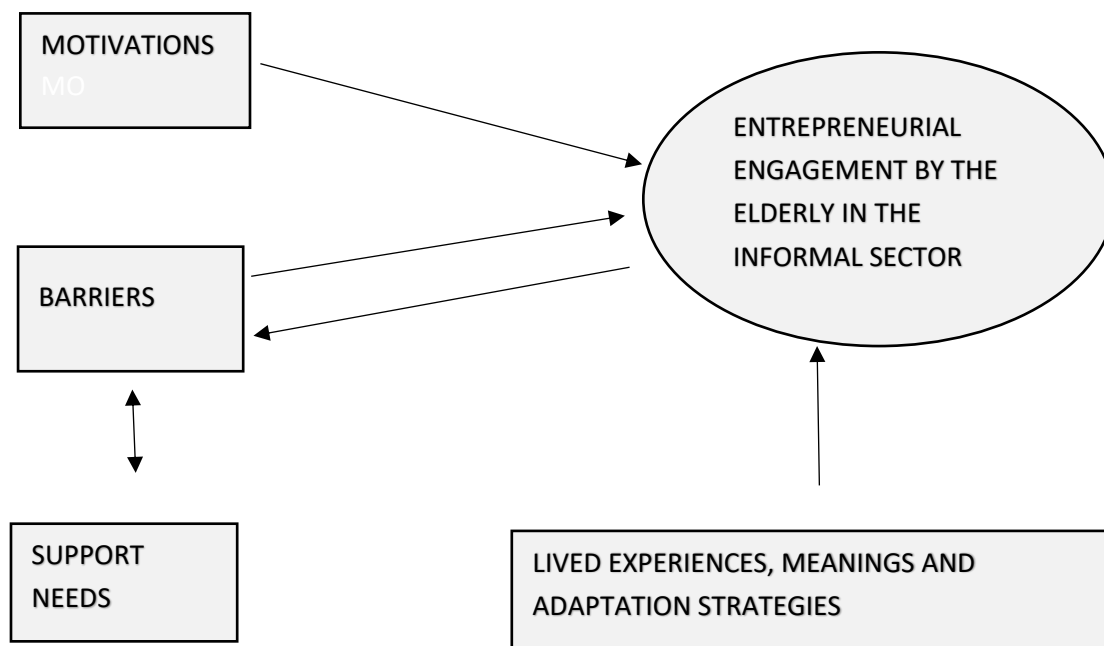
Field experiments and programme evaluations mainly from outside Zimbabwe but transferable show that tailored microfinance and flexible credit products may empower the elderly vendors through the launch of training workshops. Again, the formation of cooperatives and intergenerational mentorship produce gains in income stability and wellbeing for the older entrepreneurs. (Frimpong & Mensah, 2020). Empirical work also emphasises the importance of holistic interventions in terms of provision of finance, health support and infrastructure needs for older vendors.

Research Gap

This study sought to fill the research gap on geriatric entrepreneurship by exploring elderly-led informal enterprises in Bulawayo. Central questions include: What motivates individuals aged fifty years and above to embark on the informal ventures? The study determines the empirical prevalence of barriers such as financial, health-related and regulatory. Through surveys this qualitative study among Bulawayo's silver economy entrepreneurs seeks to inform age-responsive informal sector policies and interventions.

Through qualitative analysis, the study contributes to gerontology (scientific study of geriatric behaviour or old age), entrepreneurship, and urban development scholarship. It also offers localized evidence to guide municipal and national stakeholders seeking to bolster the economic resilience and dignity of older citizens in Zimbabwe's shifting economic landscape.

Conceptual Framework



Methodology

Research Philosophy

The philosophical orientation of a research study provides the foundation for understanding how knowledge is constructed, validated, and applied (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). This study adopted the interpretivist paradigm, which is rooted in the belief that social reality is subjective, context-dependent, and socially constructed (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivism seeks to understand human experiences from the participants' perspectives, which emphasises meaning rather than measurement. This philosophical slant aligns with the study's aim, which envisages to unpack the lived nuances, perceptions, and values of the elderly entrepreneurs operating in Bulawayo's informal economy.

Ontological Assumptions

Ontology concerns the nature of reality. From an interpretivist standpoint, reality is viewed as multiple, fluid, and constructed through human interaction (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the lived realities of elderly entrepreneurs are not objective facts but individual interpretations shaped by personal histories, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms. Each respondent's entrepreneurial journey is thus seen as a unique construction of meaning that is influenced by social context and individual agency.

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology relates to how knowledge is acquired and understood. In interpretivism, knowledge emerges through interaction between the researcher and participants (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). The study acknowledges that understanding elderly entrepreneurship requires empathy, dialogue, and interpretation rather than detached observation. The researcher thus acted as a co-creator of meaning by engaging deeply with participants through semi-structured interviews that captured elderly vendors' motivations, challenges, and perceptions.

Axiological Assumptions

Axiology addresses the role of values in research. Interpretivist research recognises that values and subjectivity are integral to the research process (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). The researcher's respect for the lived experiences of elderly participants was a central ethical consideration, and ethical sensitivity is upheld throughout the study. The researcher upheld ethical tenets and values such as empathy, respect for ageing, and belief in social inclusion and these variables informed on how data collection and interpretation was done on the backdrop of honouring the participants' voices.

Methodological Assumptions

The interpretivist paradigm supports qualitative, inductive methodologies that prioritise depth of understanding over generalisation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, this study employed a qualitative approach using purposive sampling of thirty (30) entrepreneurs aged fifty (50) years and above in Bulawayo's informal sector. Data was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to narrate their entrepreneurial experiences in real time. The thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns, motivations, and support needs. This method facilitated the co-creation of knowledge that captures the complex realities of ageing and entrepreneurship within Zimbabwe's socio-economic context.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, exploratory research design to investigate how elderly entrepreneurs perceive and experience their involvement in informal business activities. Qualitative research was deemed suitable for understanding social phenomena from participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design is flexible and allows for in-depth exploration of the motivations, barriers, and support needs of individuals aged fifty years

and above. Thus, the exploratory nature helped uncover new insights into the silver economy which is a relatively under-researched area in Zimbabwe (Saunders, et al, 2019).

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of elderly entrepreneurs aged fifty years and above operating within Bulawayo's informal economy. These included small-scale traders, home-based producers, and service providers who engage in entrepreneurial activities without formal business registration. A purposive sampling technique was used to select thirty (30) participants who met specific inclusion criteria that benchmarked on a minimum age of above fifty, active engagement in the informal entrepreneurship for at least one year, and willingness to participate. Purposive sampling was considered consistent with interpretivist research due to its capacity to allow the researcher to intentionally select information-rich participants who have the capacity to provide deep insights (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide designed to elicit detailed narratives from participants. The guide consisted of open-ended questions that explored personal motivations for entrepreneurship, challenges, coping mechanisms, and perceived support needs. Semi-structured interviews provided both structure and flexibility, which enabled participants to express their experiences freely (Bryman, 2016). Interviews were conducted in English, Ndebele, or Shona languages as per the participant's preference. That ensured comfort and authenticity of responses.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was done over six weeks in Bulawayo. After obtaining ethical clearance and informed consent, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews at locations convenient for participants, such as market stalls, home workshops, or community centres. Each interview lasted between forty-five (45) and sixty (60) minutes. There was no audio recording as the respondents felt it was a breach of anonymity. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details. To ensure confidentiality, the questionnaires had no names ascribed. The questionnaires were locked for safety and also for future use should an incidental study arise. On the field the consent form was read aloud and the verbal affirmation was considered as consent leading to the granting of the questionnaire.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are conceptualised as trustworthiness, encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where participants reviewed interview summaries to verify the accuracy of interpretation. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of context and participant characteristics. Dependability was achieved by maintaining a clear audit trail of all research procedures and decisions. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexivity, with the researcher acknowledging personal biases and their potential influence on data interpretation. Triangulation of perspectives across different participants also added to the robustness of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis and Presentation

Given that the study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach, data analysis focused on understanding the subjective meanings and lived experiences of elderly entrepreneurs in Bulawayo's informal sector. The goal was not a statistical generalisation but generated rich, in-depth insights into the motivations, barriers, and support needs of individuals aged fifty and above.

The analysis followed the principles of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which provides a systematic yet flexible framework for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data.

Data Preparation

All interviews were conducted in either English, Ndebele or Shona language, depending on participant preference. All the responses were carefully noted down in the questionnaire. No audio recordings were done as respondents felt it was a breach of anonymity. The researcher anonymized the data by assigning each respondent a numerical pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Thematic Analysis Process

The analysis proceeded through six iterative stages of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017):

Step	Description	Activity Undertaken
Step 1	Familiarisation with the Data	The researcher repeatedly read all the completed questionnaires to immerse fully in the participants' narratives.
Step 2	Generating Initial Codes	Meaningful statements or phrases related to the research questions were coded manually using open coding
Step 3	Searching for Themes	Codes with similar meanings were grouped together into broader categories and themes
Step 4	Reviewing Themes	Themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the data set. Overlapping or redundant categories were merged.
Step 5	Defining and Naming Themes	Each theme was clearly defined and supported by direct responses from the questionnaire to illustrate meaning.
Step 6	Producing the Report	Findings were presented through thematic narratives supported by direct response quotes

Data Presentation

Data were presented using narrative and thematic approaches, consistent with qualitative traditions.

Narrative Presentation

Findings were organised according to the five research questions:

- Motivations for entrepreneurship.
- Challenges and barriers.
- Support mechanisms.
- Policy and institutional environment.
- Strategies for inclusion and well-being.

Ethical considerations

The study conforms to the ethical guidelines as expounded by the Lupane State University Institutional Ethics Review Board and the Bulawayo Informal Traders Association who granted permission letters. The respondents were informed of the research purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality and the right to withdraw. Though the instrument was drafted in English, the interviews were carried out in the language of choice of the respondents. The data for the research has been stored in an anonymized format that also have password-protected files with limited access. All possible personally identifying data were removed from analysis datasets. All sensitive questions, such as income and health were handled respectfully.

Results

The data were analysed thematically, guided by the interpretivist paradigm, which captured the subjective meanings participants attached to their entrepreneurial ventures. Five major themes emerged from the analysis namely motivations for entrepreneurship, barriers, support mechanisms, policy and institutional environment, and strategies for inclusion and well-being.

Motivations for Entrepreneurship

Most participants indicated that their entry into informal entrepreneurship was primarily necessity-driven rather than opportunity-based. Out of the thirty(30) respondents, twenty-two(22) noted that they turned to business after retirement, retrenchment, or due to lack of social security nets. This represented 73.33% of the respondents. Common motivators included economic survival, independence, and support to the extended families. An interviewee had this to say:

“After my husband passed away, I realised that I could not rely on my children. I started selling vegetables to have my own income,” (Female, 63, vegetable vendor, Mpopoma).

A few respondents numbering eight(8) highlighted intrinsic and opportunity-based motivations, such as pursuing lifelong skills and social interaction. These individuals viewed entrepreneurship as a way to stay active and valued in society. This represented 26.67% of the respondents. This was supported by statements like:

“I used to be a tailor when I was young. Now that I am older, I still enjoy sewing and making uniforms for schools. It keeps me busy and respected,” (Male, 67, tailor, Pumula).

Social motivations also featured prominently. Many elderly participants reported that running a business enhanced their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Entrepreneurship was viewed as a dignified alternative to dependency which provided both financial and psychological empowerment.

Barriers

All participants reported facing multiple constraints in operating their businesses. The most significant barriers were financial exclusion, frail health, and lack of national regulatory support. This represented 100 % of the respondents.

Limited Access to Finance

The majority of respondents numbering twenty-six (26) of the thirty(30)cited difficulties in accessing loans and credit facilities. Formal banks were viewed as age-discriminatory and risk-averse. This represented 86.67 % of the respondents. A respondent had this to say:

“Banks say we are too old to repay loans. They prefer younger people who can work for many years,” (Female, 71, cross-border trader).

As a result, most participants relied on little savings, family contributions, or informal income generated from rotational support savings cohorts. However, these were often insufficient for business expansion.

Health and Physical Limitations

Elderly entrepreneurs experienced challenges linked to frail health, fatigue, and reduced mobility. This cluster consisted of twenty-four (24) respondents. This represented 80 % of the respondents. This was supported by statements like:

“Sometimes I miss work when my back pains or when I have to go to the clinic. There is no one to run the stall for me,” (Male, 72, cobbler, Nkulumane).

Such physical constraints reduced productivity and affected consistency in operations.

Market Competition and Economic Instability

Respondents mentioned stiff competition from younger entrepreneurs and unstable economic inflation and fluctuating exchange rates. These factors eroded profits and created uncertainty. This was expressed by twenty-one (21) traders representing 70 % of the respondents. A respondent had this to say:

“Young people sell faster because they use social media and know how to attract customers. We only wait for walk-in buyers,” (Female, 58, food vendor, Magwegwe North).

Age-related Stigma

Some participants expressed feelings of social exclusion and disrespect from both customers and officials. This was expressed by nineteen (19) traders representing 63.33 % of the respondents. An interviewee mentioned thus:

“Sometimes people laugh and say old people should rest. They forget that we also need to eat,” (Female, 65, flea market trader, Sekusile, Nkulumane).

Support Mechanisms

The data revealed a combination of informal and limited formal support structures available to elderly entrepreneurs. This was expressed by seventeen (17) traders representing 56.67 % of the respondents. A respondent had this to say:

“Our Church once brought in Empretec Zimbabwe officials to make presentations on managing our businesses.” (Male, 58, Tin Smith, Cowdray Park).

Family and Community Support

Eighteen (18) respondents representing 60% reported receiving some form of family support, such as financial assistance, labour, or emotional support. Adult children sometimes helped with digital marketing or stock purchases. However, others noted that their families viewed their businesses as signs of poverty or failure. An interviewee mentioned thus:

“My daughter helps me advertise on WhatsApp, but some relatives laugh and say an old woman should not be hustling,” (Female, 61, home-based caterer, Emakhandeni).

Financial and Institutional Support

Only 6 respondents representing 20% reported any contact with microfinance institutions or NGOs, and none had accessed government-backed financial schemes. Many participants expressed frustration at the lack of programmes tailored to elderly entrepreneurs. A respondent had this to say:

“We hear of youth empowerment funds, women’s funds, but never old people’s funds,” (Male, 70, second-hand clothes seller, Entumbane).

Policy and Institutional Environment

A recurrent theme across interviews was the perceived neglect of elderly entrepreneurs in local and national policies. None of the respondents were aware of any specific policies supporting older informal traders. Most felt invisible in the national development plans dominated by youth empowerment and gender equality agendas. This was expressed by a majority numbering twenty-seven(27) traders representing 90 % of the respondents. An interviewee had this to say:

“Government talks about youth projects every day, but never about us. Yet we are also contributing,” (Female, 68, street vendor, Old Magwegwe).

Respondents perceived local authorities as unsupportive and sometimes punitive, especially regarding vending space regulations, harassment by municipal officers, and arbitrary confiscation of goods even if you have been allocated space officially. This was expressed by 20 traders representing 66.67 % of the respondents. A respondent had this to say:

“We are chased from pavements as if we are criminals, but this is how we survive,” (Male, 56, shoe repairer, CBD).

Strategies for Inclusion and Well-being

Participants proposed several strategies to improve the inclusion and productivity of elderly entrepreneurs in Bulawayo’s informal economy.

Access to Finance and Tailored Support

All the participants advocated for dedicated microfinance schemes and revolving funds for older entrepreneurs, with flexible repayment conditions and age-sensitive lending criteria. A respondent had this to say:

“If we had small loans without collateral, we could grow our businesses and even employ others,” (Male, 60, motor spares trader, Luveve).

Training and Capacity Building

Respondents highlighted the need for training in digital marketing, bookkeeping, and product diversification, adapted to elderly learners. Some suggested partnerships with local colleges or NGOs to deliver short, practical workshops. This was expressed by twenty-four (24) traders representing 80 % of the respondents. An interviewee had this to say:

“In my rural home Plumtree, the NGO World Vision conducts business trainings for women community clubs. They should do the same here in the towns,” (Female, 63, Vegetable Vendor, Nguboyenja)

Recognition and Policy Inclusion

Several participants emphasised the importance of policy recognition. They proposed the establishment of an Elderly Entrepreneurship Support Policy within Bulawayo City Council and national frameworks. This was expressed by twenty-one (21) traders representing 70% of the respondents. A respondent had this to say:

“We want the government to recognise us just like they recognise youths. Even small grants or market spaces for the elderly would help,” (Female, 73, herbal trader, Makokoba).

Community Empowerment and Intergenerational Collaboration

A few respondents suggested forming elderly cooperatives and mentorship linkages with younger entrepreneurs to share experience while gaining digital and marketing skills. This was expressed by twelve (12) traders representing 40 % of the respondents. An interviewee had this to say:

“We have wisdom, they have technology. If we work together, both will benefit,” (Male, 66, carpenter, Makokoba).

Discussion

Motivations for Elderly Entrepreneurship

The findings revealed that most elderly entrepreneurs in Bulawayo are necessity-driven rather than opportunity-driven. This aligns with the necessity-opportunity dichotomy proposed by Reynolds et al. (2001), where individuals engage in entrepreneurship primarily to survive rather than exploit market opportunities. Many respondents cited lack of pensions, unemployment after retirement, and the need to support dependents as key drivers, a pattern consistent with evidence from developing contexts (Isele & Rogoff, 2014; Agarwal, 2021).

This economic compulsion reflects Zimbabwe’s weak social protection net and high post-retirement poverty rates (Nyabeze, Chikoko & Nyabeze, 2025). However, the findings also highlighted intrinsic and psychosocial motivations such as self-worth, dignity, and social engagement. Similar insights have been observed in studies of the “silver economy” in Africa,

where entrepreneurship serves as a source of identity and purpose for older adults. (Rabczun, & Talouni ,2025.).

Thus, from an interpretivist standpoint, elderly entrepreneurship in Bulawayo represents more than an economic activity, rather it is a socially meaningful endeavour that enable older adults to negotiate independence and agency within an unstable economic context.

Barriers

The study found that elderly entrepreneurs face multiple, intersecting barriers, notably financial exclusion, health constraints, market competition, and age-related stigma. These findings are consistent with literature documenting how older entrepreneurs in developing economies are often marginalised from mainstream business ecosystems (Squire, 2020; Sternberg, 2019).

Financial Exclusion

The pervasive difficulty in accessing credit underscores the age bias in financial systems, where formal institutions perceive elderly clients as high-risk (Alonso, Gargallo, López-Escolano, Miguel, & Salvador,2023). This exclusion perpetuates economic vulnerability and limits the potential of elderly-owned enterprises. As suggested by Naudé (2013), informal savings groups and family contributions remain the main financing sources, yet they offer limited scalability.

Health and Ageing Constraints

Declining health and physical stamina were recurrent issues, affecting consistency and productivity. This reflects the biopsychosocial model of ageing, which posits that physical limitations interact with social and economic environments to shape later-life experiences (Mousa, Arslan, & Pahlevan Sharif, 2025). Despite such constraints, respondents displayed remarkable resilience a feature consistent with findings by Matsongoni and Mutambara (2021), who describe elderly entrepreneurs as adaptive problem-solvers who navigate resource scarcity through creativity and persistence.

Ageism and Informal Sector Marginalisation

Instances of disrespect or exclusion due to age highlight the persistence of ageism in entrepreneurship. According to Oteng et al et al. (2024), stereotypes portraying older adults as less capable undermine their access to support and market visibility. In Bulawayo's informal sector, such bias is compounded by the precarious economy and municipal harassment, demonstrating how institutional structures can exacerbate social vulnerability.

Support Mechanisms

The study revealed that informal support systems inclusive of family, community, and religious networks play a greater role than formal institutional structures. Family assistance, particularly from adult children, was crucial for digital marketing, capital, and emotional support. However, not all respondents had such networks, leading to varied resilience levels.

The near absence of structured support for elderly entrepreneurs from government or NGOs indicates a policy vacuum in Zimbabwe's entrepreneurship ecosystem. Previous research similarly noted that small business policies often target youth and women while excluding older adults (Chigunta, 2017; Gunhidzirai, 2024). From an interpretivist perspective, this exclusion communicates societal values around productivity and ageing which suggests that the elderly is viewed as dependents rather than active participants to the economy.

Nevertheless, community-based and faith-based organisations such as the Church, emerged as alternative spaces of solidarity that reinforced social capital theory's argument that network relationships serve as informal safety nets in resource-constrained contexts (Putnam, 2000).

Policy and Institutional Environment

The participants' near-total unawareness of policy support for elderly entrepreneurs confirms what Kaseke (2019) calls "policy invisibility" on older adults in Zimbabwe's socio-economic planning. Local authorities, particularly the Bulawayo City Council, were perceived as punitive rather than facilitative. Studies done in Masvingo show how informal traders often face harassment and eviction under urban management policies (Chigwenya et al. 2020).

This lack of policy recognition contradicts the principles of active ageing promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2015), which advocate for continued participation of older adults in economic and social life. Instead, the elderly informal entrepreneurs of Bulawayo are operating in a policy vacuum, excluded from national development strategies and deprived of supportive infrastructure. Such neglect undermines the potential of the silver economy, which globally has been recognised as a growing sector that leverages the productive capacity of older populations (OECD, 2019). Without inclusionary policies, Zimbabwe risks losing this untapped potential.

Strategies for Inclusion and Well-being

The participants suggested strategies such as tailored microfinance, training, cooperative models, and intergenerational mentorship. This suggestion aligns closely with global recommendations for inclusive entrepreneurship (Niemczyk et al, 2023).

Financial Inclusion and Microcredit Schemes

Creating elderly-sensitive financial products with flexible repayment structures would address one of the core structural barriers identified. Microfinance institutions in Kenya and Ghana have piloted similar initiatives successfully as pointed out by Frimpong & Mensah, (2020) giving an applicable Afrocentric precedent.

Training and Capacity Development

Respondents' call for practical, localised entrepreneurship training supports the human capital perspective, which argues that continued learning in later life enhances productivity and self-efficacy (Beckett & Hager, 2018). Such programmes could be delivered through NGOs, vocational centres, or partnerships with local Universities such as Lupane State University.

Policy Recognition and Advocacy

Participants' desire for recognition and formal inclusion reflects a need for age-mainstreaming in policy. Integrating elderly entrepreneurship within Zimbabwe's National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) would align with Sustainable Development Goal eight (8) (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Intergenerational Collaboration

Finally, the proposed collaboration between younger and older entrepreneurs resonates with lifelong learning and social cohesion theories, which stress mutual value exchange across generations (Biggs, 2017). Such collaboration could modernize elderly-owned businesses while transmitting the wisdom and traditional business ethics to younger generations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings reinforced the interpretivist assumption that reality is socially constructed. Elderly entrepreneurship in Bulawayo is not a uniform economic category but a set of lived experiences shaped by socio-economic instability, cultural expectations, and individual resilience. The

study demonstrated how older adults reconstruct their identities through entrepreneurial activity, challenging societal narratives of decline.

Practically, the research highlights the urgent need for:

- Targeted elderly entrepreneurship funds and training programmes;
- Policy frameworks that recognise the silver economy as part of Zimbabwe's development agenda; and
- Community-based mentorship and intergenerational networks to sustain elderly participation in informal economies.

Economic Necessity and Adaptive Resilience

The study concluded that elderly entrepreneurship in Bulawayo's informal sector is largely driven by economic necessity but sustained through personal resilience and social resourcefulness. Older adults turn to entrepreneurship as a means to secure livelihoods and maintain autonomy in an environment with limited formal retirement security nets. This underscores the resilience and agency of the elderly population amid economic adversity.

Structural Exclusion and Policy Neglect

Elderly entrepreneurs operate in a policy and institutional vacuum. Existing frameworks such as the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and SME Policy Framework primarily target youth and women, leaving out the ageing population. Consequently, the elderly are marginalised in access to finance, training, and market support, despite contributing meaningfully to the informal economy.

Informal Support Networks as Safety Nets

Given the lack of formal institutional support, elderly entrepreneurs depend heavily on informal networks. These though not exhaustive include family, friends, and religious groups. While these networks provide crucial emotional and financial aid, they are unsustainable and inconsistent. Formalising support structures for elderly entrepreneurs would reduce dependence on informal safety nets and promote equitable development.

Untapped Potential of the Silver Economy

The findings reveal an emerging but underdeveloped silver economy in Zimbabwe. The experience, skills, and motivation of elderly entrepreneurs present an opportunity for inclusive economic growth if properly supported. Leveraging this potential aligns with the World Health

Organization's Active Ageing Framework (2015) and global trends promoting lifelong economic participation.

Interpretivist Insights

From an interpretivist perspective, this study concludes that elderly entrepreneurship is a social act imbued with meaning and identity. Beyond income generation, it represents continuity, purpose, and dignity. Understanding these subjective experiences is essential for developing policies that humanise economic planning and recognise ageing as a stage of potential, not decline.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

There is need to integrate elderly entrepreneurship into National Policy Frameworks. This is possible if the Government of Zimbabwe explicitly includes the elderly entrepreneurs in SME Development, Social Protection, and Ageing Policies. Also line Ministries such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development should adopt an Elderly Entrepreneurship Policy that recognise older adults as active economic agents.

Inclusion in Urban Informal Economy Regulations

The Bulawayo City Council should review informal trading regulations to provide age-friendly spaces, charge waivers, and health-supportive infrastructure for older vendors. The local authority should designate senior-friendly trading stalls with seating, shelter, and sanitary facilities which promotes dignity and safety.

Age-Mainstreaming in Development Planning

Policymakers should adopt age-mainstreaming principles that ensures that all economic development policies consider the needs and capacities of older adults.

Financial and Institutional Support

The financiers or lenders should establish microfinance products tailored to older entrepreneurs with flexible repayment terms, low collateral requirements, and insurance-linked savings.

Partnerships with Development Agencies

Development partners such as UNDP, ILO, and Help Age International could support capacity-building programmes focused on sustainable elderly entrepreneurship.

Capacity Building and Lifelong Learning

There must be entrepreneurial skills training for older adults and Universities and technical colleges, should develop short courses on small business management, digital literacy, and financial literacy for elderly entrepreneurs. In addition, community training centres can deliver peer-learning workshops using participatory methods suitable for older learners.

There is need to encourage collaboration between younger and older entrepreneurs through mentorship, innovation hubs, and cooperatives. Such partnerships foster knowledge exchange, technology transfer, and social cohesion.

Social and Community Support

There is need for campaigns that strengthen church, residents' association, and community groups to offer psychosocial support, business advice, and collective bargaining platforms for elderly entrepreneurs. The awareness campaigns should also challenge stereotypes that portray older adults as economically inactive and vulnerable. Finally, the campaigns must promote positive narratives of elderly entrepreneurship through media, exhibitions, and city fairs.

Further Research

Comparative Studies Across Cities and Generations

Future research should compare elderly entrepreneurship experiences across other cities such as Harare and Mutare, or between younger and older informal traders in order to understand the intergenerational vending dynamics.

Mixed Methods Studies on the Silver Economy's Economic Impact

Future studies could use mixed methods to measure the contribution of elderly entrepreneurship to Zimbabwe's GDP and urban employment. A mixed methods design would integrate quantitative surveys across a larger, more representative sample of elderly informal entrepreneurs in Bulawayo and potentially other Zimbabwean cities. It will also enable triangulation, where qualitative and quantitative data converge to provide a more complete picture.

Gendered Analysis of Elderly Entrepreneurship

Future researches must focus on differences between elderly men and women in the informal sector which may illuminate intersectional barriers and inform on gender-sensitive policy designs.

Conclusion

This study contributed to the growing body of knowledge on ageing and entrepreneurship in Africa by illuminating the lived experiences of elderly informal entrepreneurs in Bulawayo. It highlights the paradox of resilience amid neglect: while the elderly continue to drive economic survival through informal entrepreneurship, they remain excluded from policy recognition and institutional support.

Recognising elderly entrepreneurs as vital contributors to the Zimbabwe's silver economy is both an economic and moral tribute. Building age-inclusive systems that integrate financial inclusion, policy recognition, and community support will not only improve the well-being of older adults but also strengthen the resilience of Zimbabwe's informal economy. In essence, promoting elderly entrepreneurship is not charity but it is an investment in intergenerational sustainability, social dignity, and inclusive national development.

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A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Zimbabwe's Domestic Tourism Promotion and Growth Strategy on Domestic Tourism Performance: The Case of the ZIMBHO Campaign

Nelson Zengeni¹ and Gillian Munjoma²

¹School of Hospitality and Tourism, Chinhoyi University of Technology (Corresponding Author: nzengeni@cut.ac.zw – ORCID - <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6270-1975?lang=en>)

²Zimbabwe Tourism Authority

Abstract

The tourism sector in Zimbabwe contributes significantly to the country's Gross Domestic Product. It comes third after mining and agriculture. However, tourism performance in Zimbabwe is largely anchored on international tourist arrivals and expenditure. Whilst Zimbabwe possesses abundant natural attractions, its domestic tourism is performing below its potential. In order to improve the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority embarked on a domestic tourism promotion and growth campaign called 'ZIMBHO'. The ZIMBHO campaign was launched in 2020 as a way to improve domestic tourism performance of the nation and drive economic growth. However, stakeholders' perceptions on the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign on the performance of the domestic tourism in Zimbabwe have not been fully explored. This study therefore explored stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign on the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in Kariba resort town. Specifically, the study sought to establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign; establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign; assess the challenges faced by the stakeholders in implementing the objectives of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba and suggest strategies for optimizing the contribution of the ZIMBHO campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. This study employed qualitative research methodology, through the use of structured interviews and observations to collect data from a sample size of twenty purposefully chosen respondents. The population of the study comprised of domestic tourists, tourism and hospitality operators and Ministry of

Tourism and Hospitality Industry and Zimbabwe Tourism Authority officials. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings from the study indicated that the ZIMBHO marketing campaign contributed positively towards the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, which was evidenced by an increase in domestic tourists' occupancy and travellers to Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign. The study recommended that more support systems for domestic tourists be initiated, that domestic tourists pay less for services, and that the road infrastructure to tourist resorts be improved to enhance easy accessibility.

Key Words: ZIMBHO, domestic tourism, domestic tourism performance, tourist arrivals, tourist expenditure

Introduction

Statistics from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) show that tourist arrivals to Zimbabwe rose by 174 percent in 2022 (from 380,820 tourists in 2021 to 1,043,781 in 2022), due to the recovery in overseas markets following the end of COVID-19 lockdowns (ZTA, 2022). Despite the notable increase in tourist traffic, Zimbabwe is not ready to rely on domestic tourists because they are low income earners that cannot economically support tourism in Zimbabwe (ZTA, 2024). In order to boost the performance of the domestic tourism market, the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) implemented various interventions to stimulate domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. Some of the key strategies include the 3-tier pricing system which aimed at making tourism more affordable for Zimbabweans, encouraging them to explore their own country. As argued by Gössling and Hall (2006) affordability is important in promoting domestic tourism, particularly in developing countries. The ZTA also organized roadshows in major Zimbabwean cities to raise awareness about domestic tourism destinations and packages (ZTA, 2022). These events often involve travel agencies, hotels and other tourism stakeholders showcasing their offerings. Another strategy adopted by the ZTA is the use of celebrity endorsements, which, according to van der Veen (2008), can enhance the credibility and effectiveness of tourism promotional campaigns. The ZTA has therefore appointed prominent Zimbabwean figures as domestic tourism ambassadors to leverage their influence and promote domestic travel. These ambassadors participate in promotional campaigns and raise awareness about Zimbabwe's tourism potential.

The Zimbabwe Tourism Authority established a dedicated domestic tourism unit to focus specifically on developing and promoting domestic tourism initiatives in Zimbabwe. This unit works with stakeholders to create attractive packages, address challenges faced by domestic

tourists and conduct research on domestic tourism trends. The ZIMBHO campaign is a strategy of reviving domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe (Guvamombe, 2020). However, stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign have not been fully explored, hence the need for this study.

Background of the Study

Domestic tourism can be described as tourism involving residents of one country travelling within their own country. It does not involve the crossing of international borders at entry points (Choo, 2016). According to the Polaris Market Research (2023), the global domestic tourism market was valued at USD 1,670.34 billion in 2022 and was expected to grow at a rate of 16.9% by 2023. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (2021) argues that domestic tourism is the key driver of the tourism sector globally. Domestic travel is essential to the domestic economy since it retains financial resources in the country. The financial resources may be employed to modernize the community's services and infrastructure and enhance the quality of life of its residents (Kachniewska, 2015). According to the Polaris Market Research (2023), China has been extraordinarily successful in promoting domestic tourism, beating other countries in domestic expenditure growth. China launched a three-year programme to boost domestic tourism in 2023 which included initiatives to enhance domestic tourism, offer high-quality travel options, enhance the overall travel experience and elevate the quality of public service in the tourism sector (Xijia, 2023). According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, China, the total number of domestic tourist trips in China reached 3.674 billion, which shows a 75% increase from 1.58 billion in 2022. WTTC (2021) recorded that China and USA account for over 40% of the world's total domestic spending. Europe, being the home for most of the well-known countries and cities in the world, many with fascinating history and magnificent natural settings, has the highest levels of domestic arrivals. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the temporary suspension of international travelling, hence increased need for domestic tourism worldwide.

Understanding stakeholders' perceptions of promotional campaigns to enhance domestic tourism performance is crucial for Zimbabwe as a tourist destination. Stakeholders' perceptions can reveal unexpected consequences of the campaign, both positive and negative. Higgins-Desbiollens (2020) posit that governments view domestic tourism as a way to diversify tourism portfolios, reduce reliance on international travel, especially during pandemics like COVID-

19, and foster national pride. Kabote, Mashiri and Vengesayi (2014) argue that domestic businesses perceive domestic tourism as a more stable and predictable source of revenue compared to international travel. However, this can be affected by seasonal fluctuations in demand. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) advocate for responsible domestic tourism practices that minimize negative environmental and social impacts while promoting cultural preservation and community involvement (Scheyvens, 1999). Governments perceive domestic tourism as a source of economic growth, job creation and national identity. According to Tsviliy and Matviienko (2024), tourism businesses perceive domestic tourism as a way to reduce reliance on international markets and diversification of customer base; whilst Hall (2014) argues that NGOs perceive domestic tourism as a means to community empowerment, cultural preservation and responsible tourism practices. Therefore, by acknowledging diverse perspectives and working collaboratively, stakeholders can maximize the benefits of domestic tourism for local economies, communities and environments.

Jorden (2023) argues that visa travel delays have resulted in Africans visiting local destinations and promoting domestic tourism. For example, lengthy visa waits to travel to Europe have driven Indian travellers to visit destinations closer to home. According to Brophy (2023), African travel executives believe the continent's growing middle class can boost tourism, in particular, domestic tourism. South Africa has seen a 41% surge in domestic tourism in the first four months of 2023 (Brophy, 2023), even exceeding pre-pandemic levels (Chilamphuma, 2025). Christie, Fernandes, Messerli, and Twining-Ward (2014). argue that domestic tourism is on the rise in Africa, driven by a growing middle class, increasing disposable income and urbanization. Kenya is also a popular destination for domestic tourism due to its famous safaris, beaches and stunning scenery (Muchapondwa & Stage, 2013). Among other countries is Morocco, a home for rich culture, beautiful cities and stunning scenery. Nigeria is famous for beautiful beaches, rainforests and vibrant cities whilst Ethiopia has ancient ruins and beautiful scenery (Brown & Hall, 2008). Domestic tourism has become a growing trend in Africa and has a positive impact on the continent's economy, communities and environment.

According to the Nicula (2024), tourism across Africa is on the rebound, following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an increase to 96% in international arrivals compared to the pre-pandemic levels. Nicula (2024) revealed that North Africa is performing stronger with an 8% increase between January and July 2023 as compared to 2019. Countries like Ethiopia

increased their arrivals by 28%, Tanzania 19%, and Morocco 15%, during the same period (Nicula, 2024). In 2021, domestic visitors spent 67 billion U.S. dollars in Africa. This was an increase of 39.4% percent from the year before. In 2020, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic highly affected the tourism industry. Despite the most recent improvement, domestic visitor spending remained below the level recorded in 2019 (Statista, 2025). This shows that domestic tourism in Africa is a growing phenomenon, with lower arrivals as compared to the international arrivals. Therefore, understanding the various stakeholder perspectives is crucial for maximizing benefits and mitigating potential drawbacks. Muchapondwa and Stage (2013) argue that many communities in Africa see domestic tourism as an engine for economic growth. It creates jobs and increases demand for local goods and services, benefiting businesses and artisans. South Africa has implemented strategies and frameworks to grow domestic tourism, such as the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) which focuses on the development of a competitive domestic tourism market that contributes to the growing economy as well as the tourism Capacity Development and Promotion Support policy (Nyikana & Bama, 2023). These strategies focus on marketing and branding domestic tourism destinations in South Africa. Domestic tourism is rising in South Africa due to strategies like the “Black Friday of Tourism” where stakeholders offer discounts of up to 50% (Chilamphuma, 2025).

Issues of affordability and access to destinations remain a challenge for domestic tourists in Africa. Governments in Africa perceive domestic tourism as a contributing factor to increased tax revenue, supporting infrastructure development and social programs (Brown & Hall, 2008). Moreover, responsible domestic tourism can foster appreciation for natural and cultural heritage encouraging conservation efforts and promoting sustainable practices. Therefore, the impact of domestic tourism is not uniform across all stakeholders. This highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement since dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders is crucial for addressing concerns and ensuring sustainable development of domestic tourism in Africa.

Mutana and Zinyemba (2013) argued that Zimbabwe is not ready to rely on domestic tourism since most Zimbabweans are low-income earners that cannot economically support tourism in Zimbabwe. Kabote, Mamimine and Muranda (2019) supported this sentiment by highlighting that Zimbabwe struggles to increase domestic tourism due to reasons like poor marketing of tourism to local people. The subdued economic performance in Zimbabwe also negatively

affects domestic tourism as local people have lower disposable incomes for them to visit local leisure facilities. These studies revealed the major driving factors in the development of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe. However, these factors cannot be fully unearthed without looking into the stakeholder perceptions regarding domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Domestic tourism performance refers to the health and growth of tourism activities within a country, where tourists travel within their own national borders (Choo, 2016). Tourism performance is measured using household surveys which gather data on residents' travel habits within the country, including frequency, duration and expenditure (UNWTO, 2024). Tracking hotel occupancy rates, particularly during off-peak seasons, can indicate domestic tourist activity while analysing domestic flight bookings, car rentals and public transportation usage provides insights into domestic travel patterns. The key performance indicators used to assess domestic tourism performance include domestic tourist arrivals and the total number of domestic trips taken within the country during a specific period (ZTA, 2018).

Kabote *et al.* (2019) argue that the total amount of money spent by domestic tourists on travel-related expenses like accommodation, transportation, food and activities is another key performance indicator used to assess domestic tourism performance. The average percentage of hotel rooms occupied by domestic tourists throughout a period, the average duration of domestic tourist trips, indicating the depth of engagement with destinations, and the percentage of total tourism accounted for by domestic tourist activity are some of the KPIs of domestic tourism (UNWTO, 2024). This provides a sense of the relative importance of domestic tourism within the country's tourism sector.

According to the Statistics Research Department (2023), the total number of domestic tourists staying in hotels in Zimbabwe amounted to 343 000 in 2015, 510 000 in 2018 and decreased to 216 000 in 2020. Chibaya and Mushoorwa (2025) argue that the Zimbabwe tourism industry experienced a harsh two years of pounding by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving the sector virtually on the jaws of death, but was saved by domestic tourists who drove business. Hotel occupation in 2020 averaged around 23% outside cities, and 32% in cities which was largely driven by government and private sector workshops (Chibaya & Mushoorwa, 2025). Despite the growing domestic tourism business, pricing remained unaffordable to average families in Zimbabwe. Businesses in the tourism sector raised prices in order to meet their expenses since the tourist arrivals had declined by 40% due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Kabote *et al.*, 2019).

The continued efforts by the ZTA through campaigns like “URIPI?” suggest a continued push to revitalize this sector. Moreover, as a way to revive the sector, the government implemented a recovery and growth strategy named the “ZIMBHO Campaign” launched in 2020 seeking to grow the industry to US\$5 billion by 2025 (Chibaya & Mushoorwa, 2025) due to the recognition that domestic tourism is of crucial importance in the Zimbabwean economy.

According to Guvamombe (2020), the ZIMBHO campaign was part of the Zimbabwe government and the ZTA’s broader strategy to stimulate domestic tourism amid the COVID-19 pandemic challenges. This campaign was set to change the lifestyle of many people as it opened floodgates for all Zimbabweans to tour and enjoy their country (Guvamombe, 2022). Under the ZIMBHO campaign, the government removed Value Added Tax on all local tourists to enable the industry to reduce prices. It is argued that the ZIMBHO campaign was meant to bring Gross National Happiness through visiting tourist attractions at lower prices (Musasa & Mago, 2014). During the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba, the Minister of Environment, Climate, Tourism and Hospitality Industry urged all suppliers of tourism and hospitality services to lower their prices to increase affordability by the majority of citizens to ensure the success of the ZIMBHO Campaign (Guvamombe, 2020). The ZIMBHO campaign is a marketing strategy that touches upon various aspects of the marketing mix. The ZIMBHO Campaign promotes the idea of Zimbabwe as a tourist destination highlighting its diverse offerings including adventure, wildlife, cultural experiences, historical sites and stunning natural beauty (Guvamombe, 2022). Moreover, the campaign leverages tax breaks to encourage affordable prices. As highlighted by Guvamombe (2022), the Zimbabwean government removed Value Added Tax (VAT) on local tourism packages thus making them more affordable for domestic tourists.

According to Ruzvidzo (2023), ZIMBHO does not focus on a specific location but rather aims to spread awareness across the entire country, thus encouraging exploration of various destinations within Zimbabwe. The campaign uses a catchy name and slogan “**ZIMBHO – Zimbabwe, a world of wonders**” to create a memorable brand (Tshuma, 2020). The government has also collaborated with the local private sector for special packages. According to Ruzvidzo (2023), ZIMBHO targets Zimbabwean citizens and the diaspora, aiming to cultivate a sense of national pride and encourage them to explore their country. ZIMBHO does not directly handle the booking process, but, by promoting domestic tourism, it aims to

streamline the overall process which can lead to improved infrastructure and services within the tourism sector (Chibaya & Mushoorwa, 2025). ZIMBHO relies on the beauty and experiences Zimbabwe offers as its physical evidence. Moreover, successful campaigns may lead to positive reviews and testimonials from domestic tourists, further strengthening the campaign. Therefore, focus on these elements creates a comprehensive marketing strategy for the ZIMBHO Campaign to promote domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

The ZIMBHO campaign was launched with the objective to create awareness among locals of all attractions within Zimbabwe, develop a culture of travel among Zimbabweans, increase domestic travel and increase the contribution of domestic tourism to the community (Musasa & Mago, 2014). However, its impact as perceived by stakeholders like tourists, travel agencies, tourism operators, ZTA, hotels, local government officials and local communities in the tourism sector has not been fully explored, hence the need for this study.

Problem Statement

Stakeholder perceptions of the contribution of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Zimbabwe have not been fully explored. While Zimbabwe possesses abundant natural attractions, its domestic tourism sector underperforms compared to its potential (ZTA, 2022). Domestic tourist arrivals, as measured by their entry into national parks and museums, were 626 118, or 28% of the total arrivals in 2022 (ZTA, 2022), significantly lower than the regional average of 50% (UNWTO, 2023). Whilst the ZIMBHO campaign aims to increase domestic tourism performance, stakeholders' perceptions of its impact have not been fully explored. Ignorance of stakeholder perceptions on the campaign's impact hinders strategic resource allocation and improvement opportunities for the campaign. This may lead to misalignment with stakeholders' needs which can limit the campaign's potential to revitalize domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe. This study employed a qualitative methodology to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the contributions of the ZIMBHO marketing campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, specifically Kariba. Findings of the study may inform evidence based policy interventions as well as effective resource allocation for better performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Research Objectives

Main Research Objective

This study sought to assess the stakeholders' perceptions of the contributions of the ZIMBHO marketing campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Specific Research Objectives

Specifically, the study sought to:

- Establish stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign,
- Establish stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign,
- Assess the challenges faced by stakeholders in implementing the objectives of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba, and
- Suggest strategies for optimizing the contribution of the ZIMBHO campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Literature Review

ZIMBHO Campaign

According to Guvamombe (2020), the ZIMBHO campaign was part of the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority's broader strategy to stimulate domestic tourism performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. This campaign was set to change the travelling culture of many Zimbabweans to tour and enjoy their country (Guvamombe, 2022). Under the ZIMBHO campaign, the government removed Value Added Tax on all local tourists to enable the industry to reduce prices. The ZIMBHO campaign was launched with the objectives to create awareness among locals of all attractions within Zimbabwe, develop a travelling culture among Zimbabweans, increase domestic travel and increase the contribution of domestic tourism to the community (Musasa & Mago, 2014). The campaign was meant to bring Gross National Happiness as it manifests itself through visiting tourist attractions at lower prices (Musasa & Mago, 2014). Tourism Operators were urged to lower their prices to increase affordability by the majority of citizens to ensure the success of the ZIMBHO campaign (Guvamombe, 2020).

Domestic Tourism Performance in Zimbabwe

Whilst domestic tourism has become increasingly important in Europe, understanding stakeholder perceptions of its performance is not widely studied. The Nyaupane and Paris (2020) define domestic tourism as tourism involving residents of one country traveling only within that country. This excludes inbound tourism involving non-residents traveling within the reporting country. The reasons for travel can include many tourism-related aspects such as visiting friends and relatives, leisure and holidays, business, and internal conferences and events. While studies exist on the specific aspects of domestic tourism, a comprehensive analysis of stakeholder viewpoints across various stakeholder groups seems missing. Studies like the one carried by Murray, Elliot, Simmonds, Madeley and Taller (2017) in Canada demonstrates stakeholder considerations for human resource impacts but does not directly address domestic tourism.

Rasoolimanesh and Jaafar (2017) discovered differences in tourists' perceptions of sustainable tourism development between the three stakeholder groups which includes the government, local residents and private entrepreneurs. However, stakeholders like tourism businesses, local communities and tourists themselves, are likely to hold distinct perceptions on performance. Murray, Elliot, Simmonds, Madeley and Taller (2017) argued that the definition of performance in domestic tourism can vary; hence economic indicators, socio-cultural impacts and environmental sustainability are all relevant. Therefore, stakeholder perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism can be a complex area of study globally.

Domestic tourism holds immense potential for economic growth and regional development in Africa. Therefore, understanding stakeholder perceptions of domestic tourism performance in Africa helps to develop effective strategies for its growth. However, as compared to developed regions, research on domestic tourism in Africa is scarce. Sánchez-Cañizares *et al.* (2016) studied the perceptions of tourism stakeholders regarding the effects of tourism development in Cape Verde focusing on tourists, residents and business owners. Some studies like Morupisi and Mokgalo (2017) focused on the challenges faced in the development of domestic tourism in Botswana. However, these studies failed to delve deeper into the diverse perspectives of stakeholders including governments, local communities and domestic tourists themselves.

A study conducted by Pretorius (2020) measured the stakeholder perceptions of responsible tourism development in Sanparks, South Africa. This study aimed at determining stakeholder

perceptions of responsible tourism development. Patricia *et al.* (2019) studied the role of stakeholder's participation on tourism performance in West Pokot and not necessarily their perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism in the country. These studies have addressed variables such as stakeholder perceptions of responsible tourism, the role of stakeholder participation in tourism performance and not the perceptions of stakeholders on the performance of domestic tourism. Rumukumba (2019), analysed tourism stakeholder's perceptions of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the garden route as a tourist destination. This study focused on the perceptions of the key stakeholders in a tourism destination whilst relating to the destination attractiveness and competitiveness. However, very few studies, if any at all, have been done focusing on assessing stakeholder perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Africa.

Studies like Ahokas (2017) focused on the safety concerns, particularly for female travellers, which can be a deterrent to domestic tourism. However, in depth analysis is required to understand the stakeholder perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism in Africa in order to understand the social and cultural impacts of domestic tourism on local communities, encompassing both positive aspects and potential negatives.

There is scarce dedicated research on stakeholder perceptions of domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe. Existing literature focuses on broader tourism topics or specific stakeholder groups. For instance, studies like Moyo (2016) acknowledge domestic tourism's potential for job creation and economic growth but highlight lack of data on its actual contribution. Before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, most studies focused on broader tourism topics and in as much as the stakeholder perceptions were studied, focus was on sustainability of tourism attractions. For example, Kabote *et al.* (2019) emphasized the stakeholder views on the sustainability of tourism taking place in Zimbabwe with emphasis on the nature of attractions. Studies like Zengeni and Zengeni (2014) focused on the perceptions of stakeholders on tourism turn-around strategies in Zimbabwe. In as much as stakeholder perceptions have been studied, a gap still exists in that there is lack of research on stakeholder's perceptions on the performance of domestic tourism in Zimbabwe.

Makoni and Tichaawa (2018) studied the stakeholder views on tourism whilst focusing on the stakeholders' assessments of tourism policy and product development in Zimbabwe. Studies like Bonga and Sithole (2020) emphasized the need for improved infrastructure to facilitate

domestic tourism growth. Chigora and Hoque (2018) identified a gap in marketing domestic tourism destinations in Zimbabwe. However, a gap still exists in exploring diverse perspectives of stakeholders in Zimbabwe including government, tourism businesses and domestic travellers, to assess domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe.

Domestic Tourism Performance in Kariba after the Launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

There seems to be a scarcity of published research specifically focusing on stakeholder perceptions of domestic tourism performance in Kariba following the ZIMBHO campaign launch. Some studies offer insights into broader trends on tourism in Kariba, and can be used to infer stakeholder perceptions. Before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, Basera (2018) studied tourism marketing strategies and domestic tourism demand in Kariba. This study sought to explore tourism marketing strategies that can be used to optimise domestic tourism in Kariba. According to Mutingwende (2024), there are positive results recorded from the ZIMBHO campaign in boosting the country's tourism sectors as a number of visitors to local resorts grew significantly, especially during festive seasons. It is argued that the launch of the domestic tourism festive season campaign drew a crowd of about 28000 local people from across Zimbabwe (Mutingwende, 2024). Ruzvidzo (2023) argued that these high numbers were an indication that local people were eager to explore the rich cultural and natural heritage of their homeland.

There has been an increase in hotel occupancy in Zimbabwe with locals being the biggest block of occupants. This was fuelled by the meet and greet campaign under the ZIMBHO campaign during the 2023 festive season in which the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality collaborated with the ZTA and other stakeholders to increase domestic tourism (Mutingwende, 2024). Beitbridge and Victoria Falls had an increase in occupancies. According to Mutingwende (2024), the high occupancy in resort areas like Victoria Falls reflect a growing interest in local travel destinations.

Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in Implementing the Objectives of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Kariba

While the ZIMBHO campaign has been successful in driving domestic tourism in Zimbabwe, there are still challenges stakeholders face in fully achieving its objectives. Here are some potential roadblocks. Despite VAT removal, travel costs like accommodation, activities, and even gas prices, might still be a hurdle for some locals. According to Musasa and Mago (2014),

tourism operations were no longer making profit from the reduced prices of their packages in as much as they wanted to attract more domestic tourists.

Looking at Kariba resort, travelling to Kariba especially from remote areas, can be time-consuming and expensive due to limited public transport options. The campaign needs to engage stakeholders and collaborate with transport companies to offer affordable travel packages or explore public-private partnerships to improve bus routes as a way to improve the campaign's impact and effectiveness.

Whilst the ZIMBHO campaign has gained traction (Guvamombe, 2022), there is still a challenge in ensuring everyone in Zimbabwe is aware of the benefits of domestic tourism, particularly in Kariba. Seemingly, the ZIMBHO campaign has not been effectively publicized especially among local tourists. Stakeholders could benefit from continued publicity efforts, and leveraging local influencers as well as community leaders to spread the word. While Kariba offers stunning scenery, tourists still seek more diverse activities. Therefore, the ZIMBHO campaign can put more effort in promoting cultural experiences, adventure tourism options, or even creating themed events to keep visitors engaged for longer stays in Kariba (Musasa and Mago, 2014).

Methods and Materials

This study adopted an interpretive research philosophy and qualitative research methodology in order to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign on domestic tourism performance in Kariba. Interpretivism and qualitative methodology also enabled the study to deeply comprehend respondents' social cultural context and to probe the interviewee's thoughts and perceptions by utilizing the key approach of interactive interviews (Buissink-Smith & McIntosh, 1999). As argued by Bhattacharjee (2012), interpretivism is nomothetic, anti-positive, voluntarist and ideographic. It uses subjective first-hand knowledge. A case study research design was adopted for this study. The population for the study comprised of tourists, local residents, government agents, transport providers and accommodation providers in Kariba. A purposive sample of eighteen stakeholders was selected, comprising of three hotel managers, two government officials, two members from the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority and six community members. Five domestic tourists were conveniently selected for triangulation purposes. Data was collected through interviews and observations. Thematic data analysis was utilised to analyse the data.

Findings and Discussion

The following were the findings from the study; as guided by the specific objectives:

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Performance of Domestic Tourism in Kariba Before the Launch of ZIMBHO Campaign

The first specific objective of the study was to establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

Volume of the domestic tourists before the ZIMBHO campaign

The study sought to establish the volume of the domestic tourists visiting Kariba in the years prior to the ZIMBHO campaign. Respondents expressed mixed perceptions with some evaluating domestic tourism performance as low whilst others argued that it was average before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

Respondent 1,

The market was mainly from South Africa prior the ZIMBHO campaign launch.

This is in support of Makoni, Chikobvu and Sigauke (2021) who claimed that 80% of tourism activity in Zimbabwe before the COVID-19 pandemic was attributed to international tourist arrivals. This means that domestic tourism in Kariba was relatively lower than desired as it was mainly dominated by the international tourism market.

Respondent 7 said:

The industry declined so much during the COVID-19 pandemic since most international tourists were restricted from travelling, the seasonal trend was noticeable from a few domestic tourists during public and school holidays.

This concurs with Shava and Shava (2023)'s findings who opined that the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the travel and tourism industry in Zimbabwe. Therefore, tourism was generally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and only a few domestic tourists were received in Kariba during holidays. However, one of the tourists indicated that they know nothing about the ZIMBHO campaign. This shows that the campaign is still new to some of the tourists and requires a lot of publicity. This strategy is informed by Chaudhuri, Chatterjee and Vrontis (2024) who emphasized how branding can create a distinct identity for a destination which makes it more appealing to domestic tourists seeking unique experiences within their own country. Moreover, Mapingure *et al.* (2019) also argued that deliberate efforts to design products which match the motivations of tourists can increase satisfaction among

domestic tourists in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the ZIMBHO campaign should be highly publicized to all Zimbabweans, coupled with the design of more activities that attract more volumes of domestic tourists to local destinations such as Kariba.

Factors which influenced domestic tourists' visits to resorts before the launch of the ZIMBHO Campaign

Findings indicate that factors like the people's overall interest in domestic travel and holidays, the love for travel and the availability of middle-class families, amongst others, influenced domestic tourists' travel patterns before the ZIMBHO campaign was launched. Respondents argued that most domestic tourists who visited Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign did so during holidays and these were from middle class families with discretionary income available for leisure travel.

According to Respondent 3:

We usually travel with my family during holidays as a way to get from our daily routine of work and school. Kariba has been one of our best destinations and we don't regret coming back again and again. Travelling gives us the opportunity to rest and relax whilst we explore new places and new experiences.

The findings are consistent with Mapingure *et al.* (2019)'s findings who opine that one of the motivating factors of domestic tourists in Zimbabwe is escape and relaxation whereby tourists get an opportunity to travel with friends and relatives, enjoy local cuisine and meet new people with similar interests. However, Kabote *et al.* (2019) posit that destination preference is the main factor that influences the number of domestic tourists visiting Kariba. This is as a result of most domestic tourists wanting to experience life at the most popular destinations of the country, which helps in boosting their self-esteem.

Respondent 8 said,

One of the factors that influenced domestic tourists to visit Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign was their love for travel. Tourists had an inherent desire to explore new places which can be exciting and rejuvenating.

These sentiments concur with ZTA's (2022) Zimbabwe Tourism Market Analysis Report which reported that the love to travel hugely influences domestic tourist travel in Zimbabwe.

The effectiveness of the marketing and promotional efforts directed towards attracting domestic tourists to Kariba prior to the ZIMBHO campaign launch.

The study also assessed the effectiveness of the marketing and promotional efforts directed towards attracting domestic tourists to Kariba before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign. The respondents argued that these efforts were not effective since there were a few domestic tourist arrivals as compared to international arrivals.

According to Respondent 13,

The efforts were not so effective because of less activities and the destination was on the decline.

These findings concur with Basera and Nyahunzwi (2019) who opined that the ZTA website fell short in giving information about entertainment, restaurant, travel packages and activities about Kariba, hence limiting domestic travellers' interest in the destination. Generally, the marketing and promotional efforts used before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign were not effective enough to bring more domestic tourists to Kariba.

Respondent 15 observed that,

Some of the efforts by the ZTA which include the Kariba Regional Tourism Development and Marketing strategy were not effective enough to bring more domestic tourists to Kariba resort.

These findings disagree with Basera and Kuranga (2019) who claimed that the ZTA uses effective online marketing strategies like its website which is effective in terms of communication. However, the ZTA website looks inferior if compared with the South Africa Tourism (SAT) website which has more advanced features used to influence more domestic travel (Basera & Nyahunzwi, 2019). Marketing and promotional efforts directed towards attracting domestic tourists need to be advanced in a way that brings more domestic tourism to different destinations in the country.

The level of engagement and support from local stakeholders for domestic tourism initiatives in Kariba prior to 2021

The study also assessed the level of engagement and support from local stakeholders for domestic initiatives in Kariba before the Launch of the ZIMBHO campaign. Findings indicate

that there was lack of engagement from stakeholders for domestic tourism initiatives in Kariba before the ZIMBHO campaign. According to Respondent 17, *Domestic tourism in Kariba has been largely influenced by political and economic challenges and this did not give stakeholders the room to support and engage in domestic tourism initiatives.*

This points to the observation that Kariba, as a resort destination, is adversely affected by lack of stakeholder engagement in the marketing of the destination to the Zimbabwean tourist market (Basera, 2018). The results also concur with Muzapu and Sibanda (2017) who observed that the tourism sector in Zimbabwe face political related challenges which limit the potential of the sector to significantly contribute to the wealth creation in the nation.

The importance of domestic tourism to the overall economic and social well-being of the Kariba resort area before 2021 and how it compares to international tourism

Findings indicate that in as much as domestic tourism was underdeveloped before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, it played a significant role in the economic and social well-being of the Kariba resort. Benefits included job creation, revenue generation, reduced seasonality, community and infrastructural development and entrepreneurship.

According to Respondent 1,

Domestic tourism in Kariba, which is characterized by hotels, lodges, restaurants and crafts markets helps to create job opportunities for the local residents in the hospitality sectors.

The same respondent also argued that an increase in domestic tourism in Kariba would improve revenue generation whereby local businesses benefiting from local tourists can contribute to government revenue through taxes as well as creating opportunities for incentivized investment in local infrastructure like roads and public transportation. This is in line with the notion brought forward by Moyo (2016) who argue that domestic tourism has so much potential for job creation and economic growth but highlight lack of data on its actual contribution.

Domestic tourism in Kariba has always been important as it created employment and boosted revenue generation. This was supported by Respondent 13 (resident) who said,

Domestic tourism in Kariba is important the same way as international tourism since it helps to create employment opportunities for us.

Respondent 18 said,

Domestic tourism before 2021 in Kariba helped to mitigate the impact of seasonal fluctuations in international tourism, although it was very low before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, it helped to fill in the gap when international tourism was low.

These findings concur with Muzapu and Sibanda (2017) who also acknowledged that the tourism sector in Zimbabwe has been contributing to the various macro-economic aggregates in the country and has a greatest potential to create wealth for the players and the country as a whole. This shows that although domestic tourism was slow before the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign, it was important to the overall economic and social well-being of the Kariba destination.

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Performance of Domestic Tourism in Kariba after the Launch of the ZIMBHO Campaign

The second objective of the study was to establish the stakeholders' perceptions of the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign.

The Volume of Domestic Tourists after the Launch of the ZIMBHO Campaign

Findings indicate that there was a significant increase in domestic tourists visiting the Kariba resort, especially during festive seasons and public holidays. As highlighted by Respondent 18:

Domestic tourists are now visiting especially during holidays. For example, during 2023's festive season, domestic tourists' arrivals doubled as compared to 2022.

According to Respondent 5 (a transport provider):

There was a significant increase in people travelling to Kariba during the festive season and the New Year's Eve.

Respondent 2 concurred and observed that:

Local tourism has increased due to the impact of the ZIMBHO campaign and we have noticed an increase in domestic travel expenditures like accommodation bookings and occupancy rates.

These findings are in agreement with Woyo (2021) who found that there was an increase in domestic tourism after the launch of the ZIMBHO campaign as evidenced by high occupancy rates during festive seasons in the resort towns of Kariba, Masvingo and Victoria Falls. Mutingwende (2024) also claimed that there were positive results recorded from the ZIMBHO campaign in boosting the country's tourism sectors as the number of visitors to local resorts grew significantly. Ruzvidzo (2023) added that these high volumes were an indication that domestic tourists were now eager to explore the rich cultural and natural heritage of their homeland. These findings seem to indicate that the ZIMBHO campaign has had a positive impact on domestic tourism in Zimbabwe through ensuring a significant increase in domestic tourist arrivals in Kariba.

Awareness by the Domestic Tourists of the ZIMBHO Campaign and how it has Influenced Their Decisions to Visit Kariba Resort

Findings indicate that the ZIMBHO campaign has influenced a number of travellers to visit Kariba.

Respondent 1 (a ZTA Provincial Official) said,

Tourists who visit Kariba resort are fully aware of the ZIMBHO campaign as indicated by their numerous enquiries about the ZIMBHO campaign.

This therefore indicates a direct link with the goals of the ZIMBHO campaign as stipulated by Ruzvidzo (2023) that the campaign aims to promote local tourism and instil a culture of travelling among Zimbabweans to explore wonders of their own nation. If tourists are aware (Heintz, 2021) of the ZIMBHO campaign, more domestic travellers can explore Kariba and other local resorts, which drives economic growth of the nation.

However, some tourists highlighted that they were not aware of the ZIMBHO campaign at all whilst others mentioned that the campaign does not offer any special discounts since most of the prices remained the same. Therefore, low-income could not afford to visit Kariba or any other tourist resort. Respondent 11 (Tourist) said,

Yes, we are aware of the ZIMBHO campaign but the campaign has no special offers, the prices remained the same and some people couldn't afford.

This contradicts Tshuma (2020) who claims that the ZIMBHO campaign was highly publicised to Zimbabweans, both in the country and to those in the diaspora.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Attracting Domestic Tourists to Kariba Resort

The stakeholders indicated that the ZIMBHO campaign's strengths included increased awareness of the need to travel by domestic tourists and targeting a specific audience.

Respondent 2 said,

People are now aware that visiting Kariba is not for international tourists only.

Respondent 15 mentioned that,

The ZIMBHO campaign instils the culture of travel among Zimbabweans.

These sentiments concur with Ndeleva, Kiriimi and Nyaga (2025) who claimed that domestic tourism campaign is a means of spreading awareness about domestic tourism. The ZIMBHO campaign seeks to dispel the long-held perception that tourism is for the elites and foreigners only. The ZIMBHO campaign has thus been effective in motivating domestic tourists to visit Kariba resort. The ZIMBHO campaign managed to portray Kariba as a domestic tourism destination to the wider Zimbabwean audience.

The major weakness of the ZIMBHO campaign was its inability to address the affordability barrier. According to Respondent 11,

The campaign has no special offers for local people yet domestic tourists need discounts.

This means that the ZIMBHO campaign should consider offering more discounts as a way to attract more domestic tourists to visit Kariba resort. Kabote *et al.* (2014) posits that domestic tourists are in favour of least pricing, discount pricing, differentiated pricing and price bundling.

One accommodation provider indicated that the weakness that is limiting the ZIMBHO campaign from bringing more tourists to Kariba is that most people believe tourism is for the rich and those with low income never prioritize tourism. However, this is against the ZIMBHO

campaign objectives which emphasize that tourism is not for the perceived rich only, but for every Zimbabwean, and people need to take local holidays.

Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in Implementing the Objectives of the ZIMBHO Campaign in Kariba

The third objective assessed the challenges faced by stakeholders in implementing the objectives of the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba.

Challenges in communicating the objectives and benefits of the ZIMBHO campaign to local communities and businesses in Kariba

The study identified challenges in communicating the objectives and benefits of the ZIMBHO campaign to local communities and businesses in Kariba. The respondents mainly argued that there was no engagement since the campaign was mistakenly taken for a political campaign.

Respondent 4 said,

“The major challenge was that the campaigns were wrongly perceived as political rallies and most of the local people did not show up.”

Respondent 1 (a government official) supported this sentiment when he said,

There was no stakeholder involvement since the campaign was mistakenly taken for a political campaign.

The effectiveness of the collaboration and the coordination of the stakeholders' efforts in implementing the ZIMBHO campaign

Some of the respondents argued that the collaboration between the government and the ZTA was successful in implementing the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba as well as attracting domestic tourists. Respondent 15 claimed that,

The government successfully collaborated with the ZTA and the tourism industry to implement the campaign in a way to attract more domestic tourists to Kariba.

Tshuma (2020) observed that the Zimbabwean government (through the Ministry of Hospitality and Tourism Industry) collaborated with the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority in

coming up with the ZIMBHO campaign, and encouraged locals to travel. The government and the ZTA removed Value Added Tax on tourism related transactions for domestic travellers to enable affordability. The move to remove VAT by the Ministry of Hospitality and Tourism Industry and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority made a positive impact on the success of the ZIMBHO campaign as domestic travel became more affordable.

However, some respondents called for government-private sector collaboration so as to maximize the effectiveness of the ZIMBHO campaign.

Respondent 9 said,

Collaboration between transport providers in providing travel packages, restaurant owners in providing meal packages and accommodation providers is essential in a way to attract more domestic tourists to Kariba through offering package combos.

The same respondent mentioned that stakeholders should collaborate in marketing their products to customers at any point when services are needed.

Private sector participation and collaboration is another way that helps to achieve the goals of the ZIMBHO campaign. ZTA Tourism Market Analysis (2022) posits that the ZTA, along with the private sector and the government, should collaborate whilst investing more in domestic tourism promotions. Lack of stakeholder collaboration in Kariba adversely affected the performance of domestic tourism (Basera, 2018).

Limitations that hindered the stakeholder's ability to implement aspects of the ZIMBHO campaign

Respondents mentioned lack of resources as the major challenge that hindered their ability to implement aspects of the ZIMBHO campaign. One accommodation provider opined that they had no fuel to travel and to facilitate the campaign. Respondent 5 highlighted that:

Poor road networks to Kariba have always been a challenge since most tourists are not willing to use public transport.

Muzapu and Sibanda (2017) posit that most tourism centres in Zimbabwe are scattered all over the country which compromises the ability by tourists to access these resorts due to poor road networks, lack of domestic air connectivity and unreliable railway network.

According to Respondent 19,

The reduced prices on holiday packages has directly impacted our sales and business.

Findings concur with Musasa and Mago (2014) who observed that tourism operators were reluctant to participate in the ZIMBHO Campaign due to reduced profit margins as the government and the ZTA encouraged operators to reduce prices so as to motivate more domestic tourists to travel. However, Guvamombe (2022) observed that, although the ZIMBHO campaign has gained traction, there was still a challenge in ensuring everyone in Zimbabwe is aware of the benefits of domestic tourism, particularly the benefits of travelling to Kariba.

Challenges of reaching the intended target audience of domestic tourists with the ZIMBHO campaign in Kariba

Stakeholders pointed out the lack of access to the internet by the domestic travellers as a hindrance to the effective communication of the ZIMBHO campaign. Respondent 19 said,

The lack of understanding of domestic tourists' media consumption habits hindered the campaign from reaching the target audience since the campaign could miss some potential tourists on their preferred platforms.

Moreover, some audience had a misconception of the ZIMBHO campaign which they believed to be a political movement. Respondent 9 said,

Yes, challenges of avoidance were faced as local people perceived the campaign as associated with politics.

The ZIMBHO Campaign needs to re-strategize the awareness and audience targeting approach so that the proper communication channels can be utilised. However, Basera (2018) claims that lack of activities that appeal to the domestic market as well as poor customer service are the major challenges hampering domestic tourism performance in Zimbabwe.

Key Success Factors for the ZIMBHO Campaign

Different suggestions were proposed by the stakeholders including discounted holiday packages for domestic tourists, introduction of more exciting activities in Kariba, refurbishment of road networks and social media marketing. According Respondent 14:

The ZIMBHO campaign should also target refurbishment/rehabilitation of road networks to ensure that tourists can enjoy their rides to Kariba.

Respondent 3 suggested that the campaign should consider offering special promotions during the off-peak seasons to attract more domestic visitors when the destination is less crowded. Such promotions would include discounts on accommodation as well as bundled packages. Respondent 4 said,

The campaign should give away incentives and prizes on social media in a way to generate tourist's excitement for the campaign.

Respondent 17 highlighted that the campaign should promote Kariba as a destination and advertise heavily on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter) since most people are more active on these platforms. Respondent 20 said,

The campaign must use high-quality visuals on social media platforms to showcase Kariba's beauty, attractions and activities.

Respondent 15 emphasized the need to collaborate with local operators, hotels and restaurants to offer ZIMBHO campaign packages like special experiences and bundled discounts.

The study also suggested that appropriate channels of communication be utilised so as to effectively reach out to domestic tourists. Some of the channels mentioned by stakeholders are social media, radio, television (digital satellite television and terrestrial television), and newspapers (online and print media). According to Respondent 16,

The campaign should make use of digital channels like social media in a way to target the younger generation and instil the culture of travelling in them.

Respondent 13 (Resident) also supported this view when she mentioned that the campaign should make use of modern marketing strategies like targeted advertisements on Facebook, as a way to attract more domestic tourists. According to Respondent 19,

"The campaign should use Search Engine Optimisation tools on X (formerly Twitter), for example hashtags such as #ZIMBHO, #Visit Kariba, etc."

Some residents suggested that the campaign should also consider traditional channels like radio, newspapers and billboards. Some stakeholders also suggested that the ZIMBHO campaign managers should consider integrating mobile money platforms for easy booking and payment options within the ZIMBHO campaign for Kariba. The stakeholders also mentioned that the campaign should partner with local community groups in Kariba to promote their offerings through their existing communication channels.

Conclusion

The study sought to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the contributions of the ZIMBHO marketing campaign to the performance of domestic tourism in Kariba since 2019. From the foregoing, it is safe to conclude that the ZIMBHO campaign managed to raise awareness, interest and desire among Zimbabweans to travel to Kariba. Stakeholder perceptions indicate that the ZIMBHO campaign sparked interest in Zimbabweans to explore domestic tourism options. The ZIMBHO campaign encouraged locals to spend more money on domestic travel and experiences. However, due to economic challenges and poor road networks, the ZIMBHO campaign has failed to position Kariba at the pinnacle of tourist attractions in Zimbabwe as compared to other destinations such as Victoria Falls, Harare and the Eastern Highlands.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- The campaign should implement strategies to ensure it reaches a wider domestic audience, particularly in under-represented areas.
- The campaign should develop marketing initiatives which offer discounts and special packages for domestic tourists to reach a bigger audience as well as increase the numbers of domestic tourists in Zimbabwe.
- The transport providers should also promote travel packages and options that are accessible to domestic tourists to instil in them a culture of travel.
- Collaborate with local communities and stakeholders, giving them specific roles in the campaign's planning and programs to instil in them a sense of being in charge.
- The campaign should also establish a system to track the campaign's impact on domestic tourism arrivals across different destinations in Zimbabwe.

Limitations of the Study

The researchers acknowledge certain limitations of the study and suggest improvements that were made in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ZIMBHO campaign's effectiveness and contribution to domestic tourism growth in Zimbabwe. Firstly, the researchers did not have any control over the degree of honesty of the respondents and data restrictions. However, the use of purposive sampling assisted in choosing the right respondents for the study. Further, the study relied on stakeholder perceptions which can be subjective and influenced by individual experiences and biases. Therefore, the study included data on actual tourists' arrival statistics to strengthen the analysis.

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Disruptive Artificial Intelligence Technologies in Automated Self Service Digital Platforms: The use of Blockchain in the Banking Sector in Zimbabwe

Winji Lucia¹, Kashuware Brilliant², Chidoko Clainos³ & Magoso Mercy Nyasha¹

¹Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe (Corresponding author: lwinji@gzu.ac.zw)

²University ICT Department, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

³Department of Economics and Finance, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Abstract

The rapid advancement of AI capabilities has brought the disruptive potential of this technology into sharper focus in Zimbabwe. In the banking sector, disruptive AI is being used to automate a wide range of tasks, from trading decisions to fraud detection. The rapid progress of disruptive AI has also raised a number of ethical and societal concerns. In response to these concerns, policymakers and researchers have been working to develop ethical frameworks and governance structures to ensure that disruptive AI is developed and deployed in a responsible and equitable manner. The study explores the transformative role of the disruptive technology of AI and use of blockchain in Zimbabwe's digital banking sector, focusing on how automated self-service platforms can be shaped by these technologies in online transactions. It adopts a qualitative approach. Data was collected through online interviews with bank managers, and also through the use of literature and document analysis. The target population for the study consisted of 16 individual banks (both Commercial and Building Societies). The data collected from the primary sources was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The study found out that artificial intelligence technologies have profoundly reshaped the banking sector, ushering in a new era of automated, mobile-based self-service banking transactions. The conclusion of the study is that although disruptive AI and blockchain technologies have the potential to revolutionize Zimbabwe's banking industry by improving efficiency and accessibility, they also present considerable challenges, such as financial exclusion and cybersecurity threats. Tackling these issues

necessitates cooperative initiatives to create strong ethical frameworks that emphasize accountability and transparency.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Automation, Banks, Blockchain, Self-Service.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been a topic of intense fascination and speculation for decades, with visions ranging from utopian futures of abundance and leisure to dystopian nightmares of machines surpassing and enslaving humanity (Jobin, Ienca and Vayena, 2019). The rapid advancement of AI capabilities has brought the disruptive potential of this technology into sharper focus. Disruptive AI, defined as AI systems that fundamentally transform existing industries, practices, and social structures, is poised to be one of the defining technological forces of the 21st century (Florido-Benítez and del Alcázar Martínez, 2025). Disruptive artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the development and application of advanced AI systems that have the potential to significantly transform or disrupt existing industries, markets, and societal structures (Păvăloaia and Necula, 2023). These AI systems are characterised by their ability to rapidly learn, adapt, and make autonomous decisions in complex and unpredictable environments, often surpassing the capabilities of traditional human-driven processes and technologies (Filippucci *et al.*, 2024).

Blockchain technology is a decentralised, distributed ledger system that records transactions across multiple computers in such a way that the registered transactions cannot be altered retroactively without the alteration of all subsequent blocks and the consensus of the network (Crosby *et al.*, 2016). Blockchain enables secure and transparent peer-to-peer transactions by using cryptographic techniques and consensus algorithms, eliminating the need for a central authority (Yli-Huumo *et al.*, 2016). While initially designed for cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin, blockchain technology has evolved into a powerful tool across various sectors, including banking, supply chain management, healthcare, and government services (Tapscott and Tapscott, 2017).

The convergence of disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and blockchain is transforming the global banking sector, redefining service delivery through automated self-service digital platforms. These innovations have become increasingly vital in developing economies like

Zimbabwe, where the banking sector is under pressure to enhance efficiency, reduce operational costs, and rebuild public trust amid economic volatility (Nwoke, 2024). The integration of these technologies holds significant potential to address long-standing issues such as currency instability, payment delays, and data security in the country (Lloyd, Misheal and Tavonga, 2024).

The study aims to explore the transformative role of the disruptive technology of AI and use of blockchain in Zimbabwe's digital banking sector, focusing on how automated self-service platforms can be shaped by these technologies in online transactions. Zimbabwean banks and businesses, like many other countries, already manage several digital platforms and payments but are still to introduce and formalize the use of blockchain technology in banks.

Background of the Study

Disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and blockchain are reshaping the Global financial services landscape by enabling automation, enhancing operational efficiency, and improving customer experience. These innovations have transformed traditional banking models by supporting real-time data processing, intelligent customer service, fraud detection, and decentralized transaction systems (PWC, 2017; Tapscott and Tapscott, 2017). In developed economies, banks have integrated AI-driven chatbots, machine learning algorithms, and blockchain-based platforms into their core operations to increase transparency, reduce human error, and lower transaction costs (Derrouiche, 2022). As a result, financial institutions are becoming more agile and responsive to changing customer demands and competitive pressures.

The adoption of digital technologies in banking is gaining momentum in Africa, driven by the rapid penetration of mobile technology and the need to reach underserved populations. Fintech innovations, mobile money platforms, and digital banking services are increasingly integrating AI and blockchain to provide more secure, efficient, and inclusive financial solutions (OECD, 2021; UNCTAD, 2021). Countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa are leading in digital financial inclusion, with AI being used for credit scoring and customer engagement, and blockchain being explored for cross-border payments and identity verification (Kshetri and Voas, 2018).

The Zimbabwean banking sector is navigating a complex economic environment marked by currency volatility, trust deficits, and infrastructural limitations. Makore and Chikutuma (2025) assert that exchange rate instability has historically been a major challenge, negatively impacting bank profitability and economic planning. That was before the Zimbabwe Gold (ZiG) currency was ushered into the economy. The ZiG has relatively stabilised the exchange rate. Nyathi and Mutale (2025) add that, historical episodes of hyperinflation, currency reforms, and depositor losses have created a significant trust deficit in the formal banking system and the local currency. Furthermore, according to Sibanda, Ku-zakwacho, Moyo and Nhliziyo (2025), this has led to high levels of dollarisation and an increase in informal economy activity. Zimbabwe's infrastructure which includes power, transport and water, has suffered from a prolonged period of economic turmoil and underinvestment. These challenges have intensified the need for technological transformation. Zimbabwean banks are increasingly turning to self-service digital platforms such as mobile and internet banking to meet customer demands and enhance service delivery (Mudzingwa, Mbizi and Matowanyika, 2024). The introduction of AI technologies in these platforms such as virtual assistants, automated loan processing, and risk assessment, has begun to redefine how banks interact with clients. Simultaneously, blockchain is being explored for secure digital payments, anti-fraud measures, and decentralized ledger management, particularly in light of historical issues surrounding financial transparency and security (Lloyd, Misheal and Tavonga, 2024).

At the core of disruptive AI is the concept of machine learning, which enables AI systems to learn from data and experience, rather than being explicitly programmed with rules and instructions. These AI systems can use advanced algorithms and neural networks to identify patterns, make predictions, and generate novel solutions to complex problems (Berrell, 2020). As the field of AI continues to advance, the range of applications for disruptive AI has expanded dramatically, with the potential to transform industries such as healthcare, transportation, finance, banking and manufacturing (Makridakis, 2017). Disruptive AI is characterized by its ability to automate or augment a wide range of human tasks, from creative endeavors to high-stakes decision-making. This versatility allows disruptive AI to penetrate diverse sectors of the economy and society, triggering cascading effects that can profoundly reshape entire industries and social structures (Spencer, 2017).

One of the most prominent examples of disruptive AI is the rapid development of autonomous vehicles. Companies like Tesla, Waymo, and Uber, have been at the forefront of developing self-driving car technology, leveraging a combination of computer vision, sensor fusion, and deep learning algorithms to enable vehicles to navigate roads, avoid obstacles, and make real-time decisions without human intervention (Al-Hashedi and Magalingam, 2021). However, the development of these systems has also raised a number of ethical and regulatory concerns, as policymakers and the public grapple with issues such as liability, privacy, and the potential displacement of traditional jobs. Another area where disruptive AI is making significant strides is in the field of healthcare (Esteva *et al.*, 2017; Ting *et al.*, 2017).

In the financial sector in general, disruptive AI is being used to automate a wide range of tasks, from trading decisions, fraud detection, and personalized investment advisory services. This automation is transforming the industry, disrupting traditional business models and posing challenges for financial regulators (Frey and Osborne, 2017). Meanwhile, AI-powered fraud detection systems are becoming increasingly sophisticated, using machine learning techniques to identify patterns of suspicious activity and prevent financial crimes (Al-Hashedi and Magalingam, 2021).

The emergence of disruptive AI has also had significant implications for the labour market. As AI systems become capable of performing an ever-wider range of tasks, there is growing concern about the potential for widespread job displacement, particularly in fields such as manufacturing, customer service, and administrative work (Frey and Osborne, 2017). However, some experts argue that the rise of disruptive AI will also create new job opportunities, as the technology enables the development of entirely new industries and creates demand for specialized skills in areas such as AI development, data science, and human-machine interaction (Manyika *et al.*, 2017).

The rapid progress of disruptive AI has also raised a number of ethical and societal concerns. As AI systems become more autonomous and influential, there are questions about the accountability and transparency of their decision-making processes, as well as the potential for these systems to perpetuate or amplify existing biases and inequalities (Jobin, Ienca and Vayena, 2019).

Additionally, the increasing integration of AI into sensitive domains like healthcare and criminal justice has raised concerns about privacy, data security, and the potential for these systems to be used in harmful or unethical ways (Wang, Chen and Zghari-Sales, 2021).

In response to these challenges, policymakers and researchers have been working to develop ethical frameworks and governance structures to ensure that disruptive AI is developed and deployed in a responsible and equitable manner. This includes efforts to establish guidelines for the design and use of AI systems, as well as the development of mechanisms for public oversight and accountability (Cath et al., 2018).

The rise of disruptive AI represents both significant opportunities and significant challenges for individuals, organizations and society as a whole. As the technology continues to evolve, it will be crucial for stakeholders to work collaboratively to ensure that the benefits of disruptive AI are realized while mitigating its potential harms and unintended consequences.

The global rise of disruptive Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies is reshaping nearly every aspect of human interaction, business operation and governance. AI is being deployed globally in industries such as healthcare, finance, banking, education and transportation, offering unprecedented gains in efficiency, accuracy and scale (OECD, 2021). However, alongside these benefits come significant challenges including data privacy concerns, algorithmic bias, job displacement and ethical dilemmas surrounding decision making autonomy (Dalcher, 2022). The rapid pace of technological advancement has created regulatory gaps and raised questions about accountability and transparency in AI driven systems.

Many African nations are embracing AI driven solutions to address systemic issues such as limited access to services, low financial inclusion and administrative inefficiencies (UNESCO 2021). For example, AI powered mobile platforms are being used to expand banking services, offer real time language translation, and support remote medical diagnostics. Yet, the continent faces unique challenges including underdeveloped digital infrastructure, a shortage of AI expertise, and insufficient regulatory frameworks. The risk of technological dependency and the replication of global inequalities through biased AI models remain critical concerns. Regional collaboration and

capacity building efforts are thus essential to harness AI's potential in a manner that addresses Africa's specific socioeconomic needs.

In Zimbabwe, the emergence of AI technologies presents both a promising opportunity and a complex challenge for the banking sector and broader economy. AI is increasingly being integrated into automated self-service digital platforms, enabling banks to provide personalized customer interactions, detect fraud in real time, and automate credit risk assessments (Lloyd, Misheal and Tavonga, 2024). Such innovations are essential in a country grappling with economic instability, trust deficits in financial institutions, and limited access to formal banking services. However, Zimbabwe faces considerable barriers to effective AI adoption, including limited technical expertise, inconsistent electricity and internet connectivity, and policy gaps in data governance and digital ethics (Mbekezeli-Dabengwa, *et al.*, 2025)). Concerns about data privacy, unemployment due to automation, and the digital divide between urban and rural populations, further complicate the national AI landscape.

Digital Business Platforms Today

The proliferation of digital business platforms has dramatically reshaped how organizations conduct operations and interact with customers within the rapidly evolving digital environment (Cusumano, Gawer and Yoffie, 2019). These platforms function as virtual marketplaces, facilitating the exchange of products, services and information, while also enabling the seamless integration of diverse business activities and the leveraging of data-driven insights (Poniatowski *et al.*, 2022).

The impact of digital business platforms on organizations and industries has been profound. Digital business platforms have disrupted traditional business models, forcing organizations to rethink their strategies and adapt to the new competitive landscape (Kowalski, 2020). For instance, the rise of e-commerce platforms like Amazon and Alibaba has transformed the retail industry, allowing for more efficient and personalized shopping experiences, while also posing challenges for traditional brick-and-mortar retailers (Parker, van Alstyne and Choudary, 2016). The emergence of ride-sharing platforms like Uber and Lyft has disrupted the transportation industry, providing consumers with more convenient and on-demand mobility options, while also creating

new challenges for traditional taxi and limousine services (Rai, Constantinides and Sarker, 2019). In the financial and banking sector, the growth of digital payment platforms like PayPal and WeChat Pay has transformed the way consumers and businesses manage their financial transactions, offering greater convenience and accessibility (Oppong-Tawiah, Bassellier and Pinsonneault, 2020).

The success of digital business platforms can be attributed to their ability to create and capture value through innovative business models and value propositions (Peruchi *et al.*, 2022). These platforms often employ strategies such as offering free or subsidized services to one user group in order to attract a larger user base and generate revenue from other user groups, such as advertisers or complementary service providers (Holotiuk and Beimborn, 2017; Rohn *et al.*, 2021). This platform-based approach to innovation allows for the rapid development and deployment of new offerings, catering to the evolving needs and preferences of customers (Liu *et al.*, 2023).

However, the rise of digital business platforms has also brought about a range of challenges and concerns, both for platform owners and for the broader societal and regulatory landscape. One of the primary challenges is the potential for platform monopolies and the concentration of market power, which can lead to anti-competitive practices and the exclusion of smaller players (Kowalski, 2020; Parker, van Alstyne and Choudary, 2016). Another key challenge is the impact of digital business platforms on employment and labor practices. The rise of gig economy platforms, such as Uber and Lyft, has led to the emergence of a more flexible and on-demand workforce, but this has also raised concerns about worker protections, labor rights, and the potential for the exploitation of workers (Rohn *et al.*, 2021; Hein *et al.*, 2020). This has led to increased regulatory efforts, such as the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union, to ensure the responsible and ethical use of user data by platform-based businesses (Rai, Constantinides and Sarker, 2019).

Despite these challenges, the continued growth and evolution of digital business platforms is expected to have a significant impact on the global economy and the way organizations operate and engage with their customers (Michael A. Cusumano, Annabelle Gawer and David B. Yoffie, 2019; Hein *et al.*, 2020). As technology continues to advance and the competitive landscape

becomes increasingly platform-centric, organizations will need to develop strategies to effectively leverage digital business platforms and navigate the complex regulatory and competitive environment (Sedera, Tan and Xu, 2022).

Block chaining Improving Monetary Transactions in the Digital Economy

The rapid digitization of the global economy has transformed the landscape of monetary transactions, necessitating the development of innovative financial banking technologies that can keep pace with the evolving needs of businesses and consumers (Tapscott and Tapscott, 2017). One such transformative technology is blockchain, a decentralized and distributed digital ledger that has the potential to improve, or mordenise the way banking transactions in the digital economy are conducted (Iansiti and Lakhani, 2017).

At its core, blockchain technology is a secure and transparent system for recording and verifying digital transactions, without the need for a centralized authority or intermediary (Sheth and Dattani, 2019). This decentralized nature of blockchain allows for the creation of a tamper-resistant and distributed digital ledger, where each transaction is recorded in a series of interconnected blocks, verified by a network of peer-to-peer nodes, and secured through cryptographic techniques (Zheng *et al.*, 2017).

The application of blockchain technology in the realm of monetary transactions has been particularly transformative, as it addresses several key challenges faced by traditional financial systems (Guo and Liang, 2016). One of the primary benefits of blockchain-based monetary transactions is the increased efficiency and speed of the transaction process, as the decentralized nature of the technology eliminates the need for intermediaries, such as banks or financial institutions, to verify and process transactions (Mhlanga, 2023; Xie *et al.*, 2023). This increased efficiency translates to reduced transaction costs, as the elimination of intermediaries and the associated fees can lead to significant cost savings for both businesses and consumers (Panda *et al.*, 2021). The impact of blockchain-based monetary transactions on the digital economy has been far-reaching, with a wide range of applications and use cases (Tapscott and Tapscott, 2017). One of the most prominent examples is the rise of cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin and Ethereum, which leverage blockchain technology to facilitate decentralized, peer-to-peer transactions without

the involvement of traditional financial institutions (Iansiti and Lakhani, 2017). The availability of these blockchain-based cryptocurrencies has opened up new avenues for cross-border payments, remittances, and international trade, as they eliminate the need for costly and time-consuming traditional banking processes (Sas and Khairuddin, 2017). This has particularly benefited individuals and businesses operating in regions with limited access to traditional banking services, as blockchain-based transactions can provide a more inclusive and accessible alternative (Yadav *et al.*, 2022).

Beyond cryptocurrencies, blockchain technology has also found applications in other areas of the digital economy, such as supply chain management, digital identity management, and smart contract-based transactions (Alsmadi *et al.*, 2023). In the supply chain management area, blockchain can enhance transparency and traceability, allowing for better tracking of goods and materials throughout the supply chain, as well as the verification of the authenticity and provenance of products (Buthelezi *et al.*, 2022). The use of blockchain-based digital identity management systems can also help address the challenges of identity theft and data breaches, as the decentralized and secure nature of the technology can provide individuals with greater control over their personal information and enhance the security of online transactions (Panda *et al.*, 2021). The integration of blockchain with smart contract technology has the potential to automate and streamline a wide range of banking transactions, from invoice payments to insurance claims, further enhancing the efficiency and reliability of the digital economy (Rangga Gelar Guntara, Muhammad Naufal Nurfirmansyah and Ferdiansyah, 2023).

However, the widespread adoption and implementation of blockchain-based monetary transactions in the digital economy is associated with challenges. One of the primary concerns is the potential for regulatory uncertainty and the lack of clear governance frameworks, as the decentralized nature of blockchain technology can create regulatory blind spots and compliance issues (Zheng *et al.*, 2017). The scalability and performance limitations of certain blockchain networks, particularly in terms of transaction throughput and processing speed, can hinder their widespread adoption in high-volume, real-time banking applications (Miraz and Ali, 2018). The volatility and speculative nature of some blockchain-based cryptocurrencies has also raised concerns about their stability and suitability as a reliable medium of exchange (Yadav *et al.*, 2022). Despite these challenges,

the potential of blockchain technology to transform the landscape of monetary transactions in the digital economy remains significant (Iansiti and Lakhani, 2017; Tapscott and Tapscott, 2017). As the technology continues to evolve reaching maturity levels, and as regulatory frameworks and governance models are further developed, the integration of blockchain-based solutions into the digital economy is likely to accelerate, driving increased efficiency, security, and inclusivity in the financial sector (Zheng *et al.*, 2017).

The application of blockchain technology in monetary transactions has the potential to significantly impact the digital economy, offering a range of benefits, such as increased efficiency, reduced costs, enhanced security, and greater banking inclusion. As technology continues to evolve and overcome existing challenges, the integration of blockchain-based solutions into the digital economy is expected to gain further momentum, transforming the way we conduct banking transactions in future.

Benefits of Automated Self-Service Transactions with Blockchain Technology

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the landscape of commercial transactions, ushering in an era of increased convenience, efficiency, and accessibility for both businesses and consumers (Kuperberg, 2020). At the forefront of this digital transformation is the emergence of blockchain technology, which has the potential to revolutionize the way we conduct automated self-service transactions in the digital economy (Nofer *et al.*, 2017). Blockchain is a decentralized, distributed digital ledger that records transactions across many computers in a network, without the need for a centralized authority or intermediary. This unique architecture allows for the creation of a transparent, tamper-resistant, and secure system for recording and verifying digital transactions, which is particularly well-suited for the development of automated self-service solutions (Sas and Khairuddin, 2017).

One of the primary benefits of utilizing blockchain technology for automated self-service transactions is the enhanced efficiency and speed of the transaction process (Zheng *et al.*, 2018). By eliminating the need for intermediaries, such as banking institutions or third-party service providers, blockchain-based transactions can be executed in near real-time, significantly reducing the processing time and associated costs for both businesses and consumers (Tapscott and

Tapscott, 2017). The decentralized and distributed nature of blockchain technology can help to enhance the reliability and resilience of automated self-service transactions, as the network of peer-to-peer nodes verifies and records each transaction, reducing the risk of single points of failure or service disruptions (Panda *et al.*, 2021; Kshetri and Voas, 2018).

The integration of blockchain technology with smart contract functionality further enhances the potential for successful automated self-service transactions. Smart contracts are self-executing, programmable agreements that are stored and executed on the blockchain, allowing for the automation of various transactional processes, such as invoicing, payments, and asset transfers (Khan *et al.*, 2021). By leveraging smart contracts, businesses can create highly customizable and autonomous self-service solutions that can execute transactions with minimal human intervention, further improving efficiency and reducing the risk of human error (Lin *et al.*, 2022).

One of the most prominent examples of successful automated self-service transactions facilitated by blockchain technology is the rise of decentralized finance (DeFi) applications. DeFi platforms leverage blockchain and smart contract technologies to offer a wide range of banking services, such as lending, borrowing, and trading, without the involvement of traditional financial intermediaries (Kuperberg, 2020). This has enabled the development of highly efficient and accessible self-service banking solutions, particularly for individuals and businesses that have limited access to traditional banking services. (Nofer *et al.*, 2017).

The banking sector in Zimbabwe

The banking sector in Zimbabwe includes a mix of commercial banks, building societies, and microfinance institutions, all supervised by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ). Key players include commercial banks like CBZ Bank, FBC Bank, Stanbic Bank, and Steward Bank, alongside building societies such as CABS and ZB Building Society. There are also state owned banking institutions such as AFC Commercial Bank and the Infrastructure Development Bank of Zimbabwe (IDBZ) (IOBZ, 2025).

The banking industry in Zimbabwe has undergone considerable changes owing to the emergence of automated self-service digital platforms, which are essential for fostering financial inclusion

and enhancing service delivery in a context characterized by economic difficulties (Mutale, 2024). Historically burdened by hyperinflation and liquidity crises, the sector's demand for innovative solutions has resulted in the widespread adoption of mobile banking applications, internet banking, and automated teller machines (ATMs) (Ndlovu et al., 2022). These digital platforms provide banking services to marginalized communities, especially in rural regions where conventional branches are scarce (Mookerjee et al., 2025). With a substantial proportion of mobile device ownership, banks have leveraged this trend to market their services, supported by financial literacy programmes designed to educate consumers (Verma, 2024).

Theories underpinning the study

This study is underpinned by two key theories: The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory. These frameworks provide a robust lens through which to understand how new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and blockchain are adopted within banking systems, particularly in a developing economy like Zimbabwe.

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model, developed by Davis (1989), posits that two key factors, namely, Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Ease of Use, determine the likelihood that users will accept and adopt a new technology. Perceived usefulness refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance their job performance, while perceived ease of use relates to the degree to which they believe using the technology will be free of effort.

In the context of this study, TAM is highly relevant as it helps explain how bank employees, customers, and decision-makers evaluate the utility and usability of AI-powered self-service platforms and blockchain-enabled systems. For example, if Zimbabwean banking clients perceive AI-based chatbots or blockchain-secured transactions as beneficial and easy to use, they are more likely to adopt these technologies. On the other hand, poor user experiences, lack of digital literacy, or perceptions of complexity, may hinder acceptance.

Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) Theory

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory, proposed by Rogers (2003), explains how new ideas and technologies spread within a society or organization over time. The theory outlines five key

attributes that influence adoption: Relative Advantage, Compatibility, Complexity, Trialability, and Observability. It also categorizes adopters into groups (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards) based on their readiness to embrace innovation.

This theory is very essential as it provides a macro-level view of how disruptive technologies like AI and blockchain diffuse through the Zimbabwean banking ecosystem. It accounts for both organizational and socio-cultural factors, including economic conditions, regulatory environments, institutional readiness, and the digital divide. For instance, banks in Zimbabwe may adopt blockchain at different rates depending on their technological capacity, leadership vision, and ability to manage change.

Together, TAM and DOI offer a comprehensive theoretical foundation for this study. While TAM emphasizes the psychological and behavioral dimensions of individual technology acceptance, DOI captures the broader socio-organizational processes that influence how innovations spread. Applying both models enriches the analysis by addressing micro and macro-level adoption dynamics, thereby offering a well-rounded understanding of how disruptive technologies can be successfully implemented in Zimbabwe's banking sector.

Methodology

The research design for this study followed a qualitative approach. Online interviews were carried out (through zoom platform) with bank managers to collect comprehensive facts to enable proper analysis of the status quo in the Zimbabwean banking sector. The interviews were carried out separately with each bank manager on different time and day. The target population for the study consisted of individual banks (both Commercial and Building Societies) operating in the banking industry. Purposive sampling was used, where selection of the participants was intentional, based on their specific knowledge, experiences, and characteristics relevant to the research question. This was more cost-effective and time-efficient, as it allowed the researchers to focus on bank managers who provided in-depth and relevant data. The primary aim was to find out the kind of adopted AI embedded in the banking software that enhances bank processes.

A total of sixteen (16) bank managers from the individual banks participated in the study. These were from the following institutions: **Commercial Banks:** AFC Commercial Bank, BancABC Limited, CBZ Bank Limited, Ecobank Zimbabwe Limited, FBC Bank Limited, First Capital Bank Limited, Infrastructure Development Bank of Zimbabwe (IBDZ), Nedbank Zimbabwe Limited (formerly MBCA Bank Limited), Metbank Limited, NMB Bank Limited, Stanbic Bank Zimbabwe Limited, Steward Bank Limited (TN CyberTech Bank Limited), and ZB Bank.

Building Societies: CABS, FBC Building Society, National Building Society.

Savings Bank: People's Own Savings Bank.

The topic involves potential risks, particularly as these technologies impact sensitive financial data and human participants (customers and employees). As such, ethical clearance was a critical requirement. Ethical considerations for Artificial Intelligence include bias and fairness, transparency and explainability, accountability, job displacement and informed content. For Blockchain technology, it involves privacy versus transparency, data security, regulatory uncertainty and financial inclusion. As such, the study was cleared by the Great Zimbabwe Research Ethics Committee. Furthermore, each participant was requested to fill in a Consent Form to be part of this study.

In addition, the study also utilised literature analysis and document reviews as the secondary data collection method. This approach was used to gain a deep, contextual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Cheteni, Matsongoni and Umejese, 2024). According to Mhlanga (2023), combining primary and secondary data sources in research offers a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the topic.

The data collected from the primary sources was analysed using a thematic analysis approach. This analytical method involves the systematic identification, organisation, and interpretation of recurring patterns and themes within the data, allowing researchers to uncover the core concepts, underlying meanings, and critical insights that emerge from participants' narratives and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2022). In addition, secondary data was analysed through literature (case studies of blockchain implementations and industry trends) and document analysis. The study adopts a twin approach in the analysis of data by using both descriptive and inferential

methods. According to Giwa and Ngepah (2024), the descriptive method has the advantage of summarising and presenting data, offering a clear picture of what the data shows, while inferential method allows for generalising findings beyond the sample to a larger population.

Results and Discussion

The proliferation of mobile devices and the widespread adoption of smartphones has profoundly reshaped the Zimbabwean banking sector, ushering in a new era of automated, mobile-based self-service banking transactions. This relates to all the major local banks such as CBZ, FBC and CABS as well as international banks such as Stanbic and First Capital bank. According to the findings, if the disruptive blockchain technology is used, this emerging model of banking services in the country holds the potential to fundamentally transform the way individuals and organizations manage their transactions, promising greater convenience, accessibility, and operational efficiency (Omrani *et al.*, 2023). Table 1 shows summarised study results.

Table 1: Research Results

Aspect	Disruptive AI Technologies in Automated Self-Service Digital Platforms	The Use of Blockchain in the Banking Sector in Zimbabwe
Current Adoption Level	Low but emerging	Very Limited to Non-existent in current mainstream operations. Research discusses its potential as a disruptive technology.
Primary Use Cases	• Fraud detection • Risk management • Operational efficiency • Basic customer service	Potential applications include secure, transparent transaction ledgers, cross-border payments, trade finance, and smart contracts.
Key Drivers	Customer satisfaction, cost reduction, need to better manage risk, enhancing	The potential for increased transparency, enhanced security, decentralisation, and reduced need for third parties in transactions.

	security, and overall operational efficiency.	
Major Barriers	Lack of AI knowledge, high implementation costs, weak infrastructure e.g., power outages and regulatory uncertainty.	Regulatory uncertainty/conservative stance of regulators, lack of understanding/knowledge.
Identified Opportunities	Improved operational efficiency, enhanced customer service, better fraud detection, financial inclusion	Potential to build trust in digital financial services, create new business models, improve efficiency.
Overall research findings summary	AI is primarily embedded in existing banking software for back-end processes. Standalone AI applications like advanced analytics or comprehensive self-service platforms are in early phases.	While recognised as a major disruptive technology in global finance literature, its use in Zimbabwe's banking sector is largely in exploratory stages.

The results show that disruptive Artificial Intelligence technologies in automated self-service digital platforms are still in their infancy in Zimbabwe. The foundation of automated mobile self-service money transactions using AI technology of blockchain lies in the advancements made in mobile banking and digital payment technologies (Kaseke and Chirume, 2023). Mobile banking applications in Zimbabwe, frequently integrated with digital wallets and contactless payment systems, enable users to conduct a diverse array of banking activities directly from their smartphones (Slade *et al.*, 2015). These mobile banking services, if AI and blockchain are used, are designed to be intuitive, user-friendly, and seamlessly integrated into the daily lives of consumers resulting in flexible and fast transactions being done easily (Tam and Oliveira, 2017).

A key factor driving the growth of automated mobile self-service money transactions in Zimbabwe is the rising adoption of smartphones and the ubiquity of mobile internet access. Pew Research Center (2021) found that approximately 85% of adults in the United States own a smartphone, with even higher ownership rates among younger demographic groups (Pew Research Center, 2017). This pervasive smartphone ownership now applicable in Zimbabwe, coupled with the proliferation of high-speed mobile internet networks, such as 4G and 5G, has facilitated the seamless integration of banking services into the daily lives of consumers (Shaikh and Karjaluoto, 2015). In Zimbabwe such transactions include online payments for goods and services acquired both locally and abroad.

Moreover, the rise of digital payment technologies in Zimbabwe, has further accelerated the adoption of automated mobile self-service money transactions. These technologies leverage the convenience and security of mobile devices to facilitate instant, secure, and hassle-free banking transactions, reducing the reliance on traditional payment methods like cash and physical credit cards. The integration of biometric authentication, such as fingerprint and facial recognition in banks, has also contributed to the enhanced security and user experience of these mobile financial services (Morosan and DeFranco, 2016).

For Zimbabwean banks and businesses, the use of blockchain technological advancements offer a range of benefits, including cost savings, increased operational efficiency, and the ability to reach previously underserved or underbanked population segments (Ozcan and Santos, 2015). By automating routine banking tasks and reducing the need for in-person interactions, banks can lower their operational costs and redirect resources towards innovation and the development of more tailored financial products and services (Slade *et al.*, 2015). This data-driven approach to banking services can lead to improved customer experiences, increased customer loyalty, and the development of new revenue streams for banking institutions (Shaikh and Karjaluoto, 2015).

However, the widespread adoption of automated mobile self-service money transactions in Zimbabwe, has also given rise to a range of challenges and concerns. One of the primary issues is the potential for increased banking exclusion, such as the elderly, low-income individuals, and those with limited access to mobile technology or digital literacy as already realized by Ozcan and

Santos (2015). Another key consideration is the heightened risk of cybersecurity threats and data privacy breaches associated with the digital nature of automated mobile self-service money transactions like blockchain (Morosan and DeFranco, 2016).

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of automated mobile self-service money transactions, such as blockchain, remain compelling, and the trend towards increased adoption is likely to continue. Banks and policymakers are actively exploring ways to address the issues of financial inclusion, cybersecurity, and regulatory oversight, ensuring that the benefits of these technologies are accessible to all and that the risks are effectively managed (Ozcan and Santos, 2015). One potential solution to the challenge of financial inclusion is the development of tailored digital banking services and the integration of mobile technology into existing banking infrastructure in underserved communities.

Similarly, the issue of cybersecurity and data privacy can be addressed through the implementation of robust security protocols, the adoption of advanced encryption and authentication methods, and the establishment of comprehensive regulatory frameworks to govern the storage, processing, and usage of consumer financial data (Morosan and DeFranco, 2016). Banking institutions and technology providers are also investing in the development of innovative solutions, such as blockchain-based payment systems and biometric authentication, to enhance the security and privacy of automated mobile self-service money transactions (Slade *et al.*, 2015).

To maintain the stability and resilience of the financial system, which includes banks, in the face of disruptive innovations, policymakers and regulators are actively engaging with the financial technology (fintech) industry to develop regulatory sandboxes, where new technologies and business models can be tested and evaluated in a controlled environment (Tam and Oliveira, 2017). In Zimbabwe, FinTech Hackathon competitions have been on the rise for such major banks like the Commercial Bank of Zimbabwe (CBZ), and for such renowned yearly events as the Zimbabwe Trade Fair (ZTF) (Shaikh and Karjaluoto, 2015).

The findings of the study show that the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) offers a foundational perspective for explaining adoption behaviour of disruptive technologies (Artificial

Intelligence and Blockchain) even in the context of Zimbabwe's banking sector. According to Lai, et al. (2023), TAM posits that a user's intention to adopt a new technology is driven primarily by their perceptions of its usefulness and ease of use. In the Zimbabwean banking sector, AI-powered self-service platforms demonstrate clear utility to customers and banks. For the banks in Zimbabwe this includes benefits like cost reduction, improved operational efficiency, better risk management, and enhanced customer satisfaction. For the customers, the usefulness relates to the ability to perform banking tasks quickly, accurately, and without human assistance. For the ease of use for customers, user-friendly interfaces, clear instructions, and intuitive navigation have been crucial for adoption. The customers' confidence in their own technical abilities, or self-efficacy, have influenced their perception of ease of use. Additionally, for banks, ease of use also applies to the internal implementation process. The ease of integrating a new AI system with existing infrastructure affects a bank's willingness to adopt it, according to Khan, et al. (2021).

For disruptive technologies like blockchain, the basic TAM framework needs significant expansion to account for its complexity and the risk environment of Zimbabwe. According to Dehghan, et al. (2022), Blockchain's benefits extend far beyond those of typical information systems. The issues at hand are the financial stability, trust and transparency; and cost and speed. Furthermore, for users, blockchain technology is highly abstract and complex, which creates significant hurdles for adoption. The user experience of blockchain applications (for example, wallet management, and transaction confirmation) must be made as simple as possible to overcome this barrier.

The findings of the study also show that the Diffusion of Innovation (DOI) theory explains well the adoption of disruptive AI technologies and blockchain in Zimbabwe's banking sector. It does this through its core concepts of perceived innovation characteristics, communication channels, social systems, and adopter categories. For both banks and customers, the adoption process is a phased trajectory that is shaped by the perception of the benefits these innovations bring with them, as well as risks within a Zimbabwean banking context. Păvăloaia and Necula (2023) assert that the adoption process begins with the introduction of the disruptive technologies and the subsequent spread of information about them. This is then followed by the characteristics of the innovation, and finally we have the social system and communication channels and the adopter categories in

the Zimbabwean context. The adoption of AI and blockchain followed a timeline driven by different types of adopters which are innovators and early adopters (banks), innovators and early adopters (customers), early and late majority (banks), early and late majority (customers) and then the laggards.

The rise of automated mobile self-service money transactions in Zimbabwe represents a significant transformation in the financial banking landscape. Driven by the convergence of mobile technology, the growing demand for convenient and accessible banking services should result in digital payment systems like blockchain being successfully used and supported.

Recommendations

Development of Comprehensive Ethical Frameworks

To effectively regulate the use of disruptive AI and blockchain technologies, it is essential to create thorough ethical frameworks that encompass accountability, transparency and fairness. These frameworks must incorporate explicit accountability mechanisms that clarify who holds responsibility for the actions and decisions made by AI systems and blockchain applications. This entails defining liability in instances of errors or harm resulting from these technologies.

Promotion of Digital Literacy and Financial Inclusion

Maximizing the benefits of automated self-service technologies necessitates initiatives to enhance digital literacy and promote financial inclusion, particularly for underserved populations. Establishing partnerships between financial institutions, educational organizations, and community groups can facilitate tailored educational programs aimed at improving digital literacy.

Investment in Cybersecurity Initiatives

With the growing dependence on digital technologies, it is essential to implement strong cybersecurity initiatives to safeguard sensitive information and uphold consumer confidence. Financial institutions and tech companies ought to allocate resources towards advanced security measures, which encompass multi-factor authentication, encryption, and biometric identification systems to protect transactions and personal data.

Encouraging Cooperation between Conventional Financial Institutions and Fintech Enterprises

The connection between conventional financial institutions and fintech enterprises holds the promise of fostering innovation while ensuring stability within the financial ecosystem. The creation of collaborative innovation hubs can unite banks and fintech startups to jointly develop new solutions, thus promoting knowledge exchange and swift prototyping.

Conclusion

The incorporation of disruptive technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and blockchain into Zimbabwe's banking sector signifies a crucial transformation in the financial services landscape. The results suggest that AI-driven innovations, including automated self-service platforms and predictive analytics, in conjunction with blockchain's secure transaction features, can greatly enhance service delivery within Zimbabwe's banking sector. Nevertheless, the implementation of these technologies is accompanied by considerable challenges. Factors such as digital literacy, cybersecurity threats and regulatory deficiencies, present risks that must be mitigated to guarantee fair access to financial services. The dependence on mobile technology and automated systems may unintentionally worsen financial exclusion for at-risk populations, highlighting the need for targeted measures to address these disparities. To fully leverage the potential of disruptive AI and blockchain, a cooperative strategy involving financial institutions, policymakers and technology experts is crucial. Establishing comprehensive ethical guidelines, fostering digital literacy and investing in cybersecurity measures, is essential for cultivating a secure and inclusive financial environment.

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Unveiling Strategic Human Resource Training and Development Challenges in Zimbabwe's Local Authorities: Pathways to Sustainable Governance

Evans Bonjisi Tembo¹, Thomas Brighton Bhebhe¹ & Grace Portia Kuda Ngorora-
Madzimure¹

¹ Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Management, Chinhoyi University of Technology,
Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe, (Corresponding author: ebtembo@gmail.com).

Abstract

This study examines the barriers to strategic human resource training and development (HRTD) within Zimbabwe's local authorities and proposes context-driven strategies to strengthen workforce capacity and governance. The study is anchored in the High-Performance Work Performance Systems (HPWS) theory. The study adopted a positivist philosophical stance and a descriptive survey design within a quantitative methodological approach. Data was collected using structured questionnaires which were analyzed using SPSS version 21.0. The sample comprised 312 respondents, selected through stratified sampling from 25 local authorities distributed across the country. Findings reveal that strategic HRTD is hindered by internal misalignments, leadership inertia and limited HR capacity. It is further exacerbated by external challenges such as technological disruption, economic instability and regulatory volatility. In response, the study advocates for a governance framework that is contextually responsive, leveraging digital innovation, institutional partnerships and diversified funding to reposition HRTD as a catalyst for resilience and improved service delivery. The research contributes to HRTD theory by illustrating how institutional and environmental constraints influence capacity-building in local governance and introduces a hybrid model that reconceptualizes HRTD as a strategic instrument through innovation-driven, context-sensitive approaches. While the study offers valuable insights, its geographic focus on Zimbabwean local authorities may limit the broader applicability of its findings, suggesting the need for future comparative research across diverse regional contexts.

Keywords: strategic human resource training and development, local authorities, sustainable development, public sector, institutional challenges, service delivery

Introduction

Local authorities in Zimbabwe are central to translating national policies into meaningful community outcomes, particularly in advancing sustainable development. Both urban and rural councils have made strides in localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), yet challenges such as institutional fragmentation and chronic resource constraints continue to hinder effective service delivery. This study investigates the organizational and environmental barriers to strategic human resource training and development (HRTD) within Zimbabwe's local governance sector. Its dual objectives are: (i) to identify the key internal and external impediments to strategic HRTD and (ii) to propose context-sensitive strategies that can strengthen service delivery across local authorities.

Strategic HRTD is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of public performance. In high-risk, mission-critical environments such as municipal firefighting, targeting training enhances employees' knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs), directly impacting safety and operational effectiveness (Ithnin et al., 2022). Broader HR frameworks involving mission definition, talent acquisition and performance management aim to align human capital with institutional goals (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). However, their integration into Zimbabwe's local governance requires adaptation to complex political, financial and regulatory realities (Tsara & Zinyama, 2022).

Despite growing interest in public sector reform, most scholarship focuses on national-level HR strategies or private-sector models. The unique dynamics of municipal workforce development in African contexts remain underexplored. This study contributes to filling that gap by advocating for comprehensive, embedded HRTD programs tailored to the operational realities of local authorities.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: High Performance Work Systems (HPWS) Theory

The High-Performance Work Performance Systems (HPWS) theory, introduced by Pil and MacDuffie (1996) and elaborated by Appelbaum and Berg (2001), offers a robust lens for examining how strategically aligned human resource training and development (HRTD) drives public-sector performance. HPWS posits that integrated bundles of HR practices rather than isolated interventions unlock enhanced organizational outcomes. Core practices include rigorous recruitment and selection processes that secure high-caliber talent, targeted training and continuous

professional development initiatives, systematic performance management systems aligning individual objectives with organizational goals, structured internal promotion pathways paired with comprehensive career planning, and participatory decision-making mechanisms that foster employee engagement (Cotton et al, 2021; Dimple & Kuriakose, 2025). These interrelated practices and workplace conditions maximize performance (Waseem et al., 2025).

Some studies suggest that higher levels of High-Performance Work Systems are associated with better financial outcomes, faster adoption of innovations and improved change management. These effects have been observed even in bureaucratic and resource-constrained public institutions (Bryson & White, 2021; Qureshi & Tasneem, 2021). Moreover, configurational studies underscore the necessity of contextual fit, showing that effective HPWS bundles must be tailored to local cultural norms, regulatory requirements and environmental contingencies (Assanti, 2025).

In Zimbabwe's public sector, HPWS theory has underpinned the cultivation of collaborative team cultures, the strengthening of HR union partnerships and the institutionalization of Integrated Results-Based Management (IRBM) and Results-Based Budgeting (RBB) systems. Persistent implementation challenges such as funding shortfalls, technological gaps and entrenched administrative traditions, highlight the value of HPWS both as a diagnostic tool for persistent HR obstacles and a blueprint for holistic, context-sensitive reforms aligned with public-sector governance dynamics (Munyade, 2022).

Strategic HRTD in Local Government: Concepts and Relevance

In the wake of accelerating socioeconomic transformations, local authorities in emerging economies such as Zimbabwe confront pressing demands to synchronize their human capital interventions with both immediate service delivery needs and broader developmental agendas (Tsara & Zinyama, 2022). Traditional distinctions characterize training as short-term skill acquisition for current roles, whereas development targets long-term capacity building for future responsibilities and leadership (Armstrong & Tailor, 2023; Torrington et al, 2020). Strategic HRTD transcends this binary by embedding both training and development with an explicit organizational strategy ensuring that learning initiatives reinforce the institution's mission, vision, values and measurable objectives (Noe, 2017).

Tembo et al. (2024) define strategic Human Resource Training and Development (HRTD) as “deliberate and planned efforts by an organization to enhance the knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies of its workforce in alignment with its strategic objectives.” The process involves

four key stages: identifying the skills needed to meet strategic objectives; designing training programs to build those skills; delivering the training through various methods like classes, online learning and coaching; and finally, evaluating the results using performance metrics to see how well the training worked (Noe, 2017; Tembo et al., 2024).

Embedding HRTD strategically with local governance yields multiple, mutually reinforcing benefits. First, it ensures a cadre of fully competent staff equipped to deliver timely, high-quality public services (Tsara & Zinyama, 2022). Second, it accelerates the adoption of technological innovations and process optimizations vital in an era of e-governance and data-driven decision making (Sørensen & Torfing, 2022). Third, by aligning learning paths with clear career trajectories, strategic HRTD bolsters employee morale, mitigates resistance to change and fosters organizational commitment (Dachner et al, 2021). Finally, it cultivates a culture of continuous improvement, where reflective practice and knowledge sharing become institutional norms rather than episodic events (Dachner et al, 2021; Noe, 2017).

Despite clear imperatives to professionalize local government workforces, authorities in developing countries frequently encounter systemic obstacles that undermine capacity-building, including policy inconsistency, where uneven application of training guidelines across councils leads to fragmented skill development (Assanti, 2025; Mhaka, 2024); a lack of structured career pathways, as the absence of coherent succession planning erodes motivation and retention (Ramolobe, 2023; Tsara & Zinyama, 2022); strategic misalignment, evidenced by HR practices operating in silos and disconnected from broader municipal priorities (Mhaka, 2024) and chronic underinvestment in learning ecosystems, whereby both formal accredited programmes and informal modalities such as peer coaching and communities of practice suffer from inadequate funding and institutional support (Munyade, 2022; Ramalobe, 2023).

Overcoming these challenges requires a holistic workforce planning framework that integrates talent management, succession planning and rigorous skills-gap analysis. Local authorities must consciously allocate resources to both core training interventions and emergent development opportunities such as leadership rotations and cross-departmental projects that reinforce strategic agility (Ramalobe, 2023). Proactive investment in HRTD thus becomes not only a mechanism for enhancing day-to-day operational capacity, but also a cornerstone for fulfilling the developmental mandate of local government in alignment with national and global sustainability goals (Noe, 2017).

Comparative research underscores the imperative of embedding human resource training and development within broader digital transformation agendas, advocating for innovation for the adoption of agile learning platforms that deliver on-demand, just-in-time training to municipal workforces (Sørensen & Torfing, 2022). Regional partnerships exemplified by South Africa's Local Government Sector Education Training Authority (LGSETA) further illustrate the advantages of cross-border collaboration in co-creating curricula finely tuned to the operational realities of local government (Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023; LGSETA, 2024). Moreover, emerging evidence indicates that synchronizing HRTD with Environmental, Social and Governance objectives not only fosters greater public trust, but also deepens community engagement, thereby reinforcing the social licence under which municipalities operate (Abilla-Buame, 2025; Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023).

Role of Local Authorities in Achieving Sustainable Development

Local authorities around the world constitute the tier of government most proximate to citizens, entrusted with translating overarching development agendas into context-specific initiatives (Munyade, 2022). Whether through municipal councils in Europe and Latin America, district assemblies in Asia or country governments in North America, these bodies facilitate decentralized governance, deliver essential public services and foster participatory decision-making (Ansell et al., 2022). Across virtually every region, local governments coordinate infrastructure maintenance, water and sanitation provision, public health programming, primary education support, housing development and environment management (Bvirindi & Chikwawawa, 2022; Torrington et al., 2020). Their community-level mandate positions them as frontline agents in poverty reduction, gender equality advancement, youth inclusion and climate resilience planning (Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023). Furthermore, many increasing numbers of councils now conduct voluntary performance reviews and benchmarking exercises to ensure alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and complementary regional frameworks such as the European Green Deal or ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community vision thereby reinforcing strategic coherence and accountability (Ansell et al., 2022).

Under the 2013 Constitution, Zimbabwean local authorities operate within a distinct legal framework that empowers them to decentralize governance across urban and rural districts and to uphold equitable service delivery, participatory governance and fiscal accountability (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013; Mukushwa et al., 2021). The country's 92 councils align their strategic plans with the National Development Strategy 1 (2021 - 2025), the African Union's Agenda 2063 and

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Mutambisi & Chavunduka, 2023). As statutory development and planning authorities, they oversee and guide all governmental, non-governmental and private sector development activities within their jurisdictions (Bvirindi & Chikwawawa, 2022).

Their comprehensive service portfolios include infrastructure maintenance, domestic, commercial and industrial water provision, housing and transport management, waste disposal, cemetery and burial-ground administration, street lighting, municipal policing, clinics and ambulance services, educational facilities, road upkeep, sanitation, land-use regulation and other critical services essential to community wellbeing (Mukushwa et al., 2021; Munyade, 2022). To strengthen institutional capacity, the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works in Zimbabwe, in partnership with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), has convened workshops and capacity-building initiatives focused on strategic planning, risk mitigation and inclusive governance (Makiva & Tashu, 2023). However, a persistent top-down approach by central government, limited devolution of fiscal authority, uneven policy integration and underinvestment in institutional capacity, continue to hamper local authorities' financial autonomy and strategic alignment (Makiva & Tashu, 2023; Widerberg et al, 2023).

Thus, the capacity of local authorities to drive sustainable local development is inextricably linked to their ability to build and maintain competent, motivated and strategically aligned human resource systems. Yet persistent top-down governance, limited fiscal devolution, fragmented policy integration and underinvestment in local institutions continue to constrain financial autonomy and strategic coherence (Bvirindi & Chikwawawa, 2022; Mukushwa et al., 2021).

Institutional Challenges in Strategic HRTD in Local Authorities

Institutional challenges pose enduring barriers to the effective implementation of human resource training and development (HRTD) in local authorities worldwide. These obstacles emerge at organizational, policy and procedural levels, producing fragmented initiatives, limited impact and weakened capacity for sustainable governance (Makiva & Tashu, 2023; Moagi & Nhede, 2025; Mofokeng et al., 2025). A central institutional constraint is the lack of integrated, evidence-based HRTD planning (Lau & Manning, 2023). Empirical research on South African and European municipalities reveals that many councils operate without comprehensive workforce strategies or dedicated departmental HRTD frameworks (Cloete, 2023; Ndou & Agbenyegah, 2022). Consequently, the disconnection between individual development plans and broader HRD interventions creates a misalignment between organizational objectives and staff capabilities,

undermining professionalization efforts and stalling transformative service delivery (Mofokeng et al., 2025; Munyade, 2022). In addition, institutional silos in which HR policies remain decoupled from performance management systems, integrated development plans and broader transformation agendas, exacerbate these implementation gaps (Lau & Manning, 2023; Mojaki, 2024).

Furthermore, institutional challenges undermine the foundations of robust human resource training and development in local authorities. Studies report pervasive managerial apathy towards staff development, deficient internal communication, ambiguous accountability structures and inadequate recognition of employee contributions as critical impediments to sustained capacity building (Cloete, 2023; Munyade, 2022; Ndou & Agbenyegah, 2022). Furthermore, inconsistent interpretation and enforcement of HR policies, the absence of formal succession planning and misaligned job descriptions and competency frameworks, are especially acute, particularly in resource-constrained and smaller municipalities (Herath, 2025). These institutional shortcomings are not confined to the Global South; even well-resourced local councils in OECD member countries struggle with organizational inertia, political interference and a regulatory emphasis on compliance rather than on strategic capacity enhancement (Ahn, 2024).

Professionalization efforts, while promising, face significant challenges, such as fragmented initiatives, inconsistent standards and insufficient inter-institutional coordination (Moagi & Nhede, 2025). The South African Local Government Association's professionalization framework, for example, emphasizes standardized capacity development, ethical compliance and stakeholder collaboration, yet concedes enduring gaps in institutionalization and implementation (Cloete, 2023; Mofokeng et al., 2025). Mofokeng et al. (2025) further argue for embedding anti-corruption safeguards within professionalization programmes to bolster ethical standards and public trust. Moreover, Moagi and Nhede (2025) advocate establishing a centralized competency registry to harmonize accreditation processes and eliminate duplication across municipalities. Emerging research also highlights the promise of cross-sectoral peer-learning networks and digital certification platforms in strengthening coordination and ensuring consistent application of professional standards (Qureshi & Tasneem, 2021).

Environmental Challenges Affecting Strategic HRTD

Environmental constraints shaping human resource training and development in local government extend well beyond organizational boundaries, encompassing macro-level economic, political, social, technological and ecological forces. Resource scarcity manifesting as limited financial budgets, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient training materials or technologies, undermines

the capacity of local authorities to design and deliver comprehensive HRTD programmes (Lance, 2022; Makiva & Tashu, 2023). Many municipalities, particularly in developing contexts, operate within volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, where rapid policy shifts, demographic pressures and labour market volatility complicate workforce planning and skills development (Lance, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these challenges by accelerating retirements, disrupting international recruitment, exacerbating digital divides and compelling a swift transition to virtual service and training modalities (Lance, 2022; Mukushwa et al., 2021).

Economic instability, inflationary pressures and shifting macroeconomic indicators directly affect employee retention, recruitment, compensation and staff development budgets, forcing local governments to balance austerity measures with the necessity of strategic HRTD investments (LGSETA, 2024). Resource constraints are especially acute under fiscal austerity, where municipalities struggle to compete with national and private entities for scarce talent pools (Munyade, 2022; Tsara & Zinyama, 2022). The need to balance cost-cutting with strategic investment in training presents enduring dilemmas.

Technological transformation represents a double-edged sword: while digitization and e-learning offer scalable and flexible training solutions, many local authorities lag in adopting new platforms due to deficient digital infrastructure, limited digital skills and low organizational agility (Moagi & Nhede, 2025). The pace of Artificial Intelligence (AI), automation and data analytics is outstripping the training and adaptation capacity of current HR systems in many municipalities, risking obsolescence and growing digital divides (Mofokeng et al., 2025). Moreover, the rapid advance of artificial intelligence, automation and data analytics outpaces the adaptation capacity of existing HR systems, heightening the risk of skill obsolescence and widening digital divides (Mofokeng et al., 2025).

Societal trends including demographic transitions, evolving workforce expectations, demands for inclusion and diversity, and an aging labour force, further complicate HRTD planning delivery (Rekha, 2024 as cited in Nugroho, 2025). Policies must increasingly address intergenerational dynamics, mental health and well-being and lifelong learning to meet shifting community needs (Mukushwa et al., 2021). In particular, gender equity, mentorship programmes and supportive networks emerge as vital components of comprehensive HRTD strategies (Mojaki, 2024).

Political, legal and policy developments such as new governance mandates, performance standards, employment equity requirements and expanded service delivery obligations demand

adaptive HR strategies that rapidly update training content and compliance frameworks (Munyade, 2022). The rollout of South Africa's Municipal Staff Regulations illustrates both the potential and challenges of standardizing HR practices across diverse municipal environments. Failure to remain compliant with evolving legal frameworks exposes local authorities to regulatory risk, legal sanctions and reputational damage (LGSETA, 2024; Ndou & Agbenyegah, 2022).

Finally, the growing imperative to integrate environmental and social sustainability through climate change adaptation, resource efficiency and community engagement, requires innovative training content and new cross-sectoral partnerships, placing additional strain on existing HRTD systems (Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023). To thrive amid these macro-level challenges, resilient local authorities must continuously scan the external environment, anticipate emerging trends and adapt their HRTD strategies accordingly (Lance, 2025).

Effects of Inadequate HRTD on Sustainable Governance Outcomes

The intersection between human resource training and development (HRTD) and sustainable governance is systemic: the inadequate HRTD weakens every facet of local government effectiveness and erodes citizen welfare. When municipalities underinvest in HRTD, competency frameworks remain underdeveloped, producing skill mismatches, workforce gaps and sluggish responsiveness to evolving community needs (Bryson & White, 2021). In Ghana and Brazil, councils that lack robust in-service training for engineers and financial officers have increasingly outsourced these functions, drained scarce municipal funds and stalled integrated development plans (Abilla-Buame, 2025; World Bank Group, 2021). At the same time, downsized headcounts, ineffective onboarding and minimal opportunities for up skilling, further diminish the capacity for timely, quality service delivery, eroding public trust and undermining community outcomes (Yassine & Youssef, 2024).

Poorly trained and unsupported staff struggle to contribute meaningfully to democratic representation, policy formulation, financial oversight and civic education, which are pillars of sustainable governance. Evidence from Malawi and South Africa shows that administrative and political acumen among local officials correlate with mismanagement, weak accountability and ethical lapses, all of which fuel corruption and governance crises (Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023). In OECD member states, municipalities with comprehensive HRTD frameworks report higher citizen satisfaction and lower incidences of procurement irregularities (Ahn, 2024).

A growing body of research confirms a positive relationship between well-structured HRTD and organizational performance (Wei, 2022), including efficiency, effectiveness and accountability (Makiva & Tashu, 2023). In China's municipalities, for example, targeted leadership development programs boosted service delivery metrics by nearly 20 percent over three years (Wei, 2022). Conversely, local authorities that neglect ongoing training face declining employee motivation, stagnating morale, higher staff turnover and widespread disengagement dynamics that compound operational failures and erode the likelihood of sustainable, responsive programs (Wei, 2022).

When crises strike, be they pandemics, economic shocks or environmental disasters, local governments devoid of continuous learning cultures are ill-equipped to adapt, absorb external shocks or foster innovation (LGSETA, 2024). The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) found that cities without regular HRTD for risk managers and planners saw recovery times from extreme weather events increase by 40% (Aronsson-Storrier, 2023). Since they lack mechanisms to capture, share and apply institutional knowledge, these municipalities suffer organizational amnesia, faltering generational succession and suboptimal decision-making that jeopardize both present and future capacities to meet sustainable development objectives (Ahn, 2024).

Moreover, underdeveloped HRTD systems often fail to integrate inclusion initiatives, diversity training and gender-responsive planning, thereby exacerbating social inequalities and weakening the social contract between authorities and citizens (Ahn, 2024; Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023). In Latin America, municipalities that omitted diversity modules in their training saw female participation in local councils stagnate below 15%, compared to over 30% in jurisdictions that mandated gender-sensitivity workshops (Aronsson-Storrier, 2023; Nieto et al, 2022). This shortcoming not only undermines equity, but also diminishes the legitimacy and resilience of governance systems (Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023).

Pathways to Sustainable Governance through Enhanced Strategic HRTD

Literature demonstrates that transforming local authorities into engines of sustainable governance hinges on the institutionalizing comprehensive, strategically aligned human resource training and development (Bryson & White, 2021; Khunoethe & Reddy, 2023; Rekha, 2024). Meta-analyses of high-performance work systems show that integrated HPWS principles into HR frameworks can boost service delivery efficiency and citizen satisfaction by up to 15% across European and Latin

American cities (Herath, 2025; Nieto et al, 2022), leveraging digital transformation and anchoring in robust governance and oversight structures.

Success also depends on leveraging digital transformation to redesign administrative processes, enabling data-driven HR decision-making, remote learning and real-time workforce analytics (World Bank Group, 2021; Yassine & Youssef, 2024). Embedding HRTD within robust governance and oversight structures ensures training initiatives align with legal mandates and policy objectives, fostering transparency and minimizing political interference (Herath, 2025; Lau & Manning, 2023).

Decentralization of HRM decision-making, empowered by digital platforms, allows local managers to tailor learning and development programs to evolving community needs, enhancing agility and responsiveness (Rekha, 2024 as cited in Nugroho, 2025). Equitable, performance-linked reward systems have been shown to increase employee motivation, reduce turnover by 20% and cultivate a culture of excellence in municipal administrations across Asia and Africa (Cotton et al, 2021). Meanwhile, strengthened stakeholder oversight, underpinned by clear legal and policy frameworks, reinforces accountability, curbs patronage and bolsters public trust (Ahn, 2024; Makiva & Tashu, 2023).

Collectively, these measures align organizational culture, individual aspirations and policy objectives, offering a credible pathway to attaining Sustainable Development Goals, fulfilling Agenda 2063 targets and building inclusive, prosperous local communities (Akinola & Matlosa, 2025; Aronsson-Storrier, 2023; Herath, 2025).

Research Methodology

Research Philosophy and Design

Anchored in a positivist philosophical orientation which posits that objective reality can be empirically observed and measured (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023), the study adopted a quantitative descriptive survey design to systematically examine patterns in strategic human resource training and development across Zimbabwe's local authorities. This design was selected for its suitability in capturing observable trends, enabling statistical analysis and supporting generalizability across diverse administrative contexts. It also offered cost-effective and time-efficient collection of baseline data while enhancing reliability through standardized measurement tools (Babbie, 2020).

Sampling Strategy

The target population included both managerial and non-managerial employees from urban and rural councils spanning all ten provinces of Zimbabwe. The study was conducted between January and June 2025, a period marked by intensified decentralization reforms and renewed emphasis on institutional capacity-building. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation across council types, geographic regions and functional departments. From a sampling frame of 25 local authorities, a total of 312 respondents were systematically selected. Strata were defined based on council size, location and administrative category. Table 1 below presents the sampling framework used in this study.

Table 1: Sampling Framework

Administrative Category	Targeted Councils	Sample Size	Completed Questionnaires
City Councils	Bulawayo; Gweru; Harare; Mutare; Masvingo.	65	64
Municipal Councils	Bindura; Chegutu; Chitungwiza; Kariba; Redcliff.	65	61
Town Councils	Chiredzi; Gokwe; Karoi; Rusape; Zvishavane.	65	63
Local Boards	Chirundu; Epworth; Hwange; Ruwa; Lupane.	65	61
Rural District Councils	Beitbridge; Chirumanzu; Rushinga; Manyame; Umuguza.	65	63
Total	25	325	312

Source: Survey Data (2025).

Instrument Development and Validation

Data was collected using structured questionnaires comprising five-point Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The instrument was developed through a rigorous process involving literature review, expert consultation and alignment with government policy documents and council performance audits. It operationalized 19 internal and external barriers and eight innovative strategies, each mapped to thematic constructs relevant to strategic HRTD. To ensure face and content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by subject matter experts in public administration and human resource management. A pilot test involving 30 respondents from non-sampled councils was conducted to refine item clarity, structure and

relevance. Reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all exceeding the 0.70 threshold (Izah et al, 2023) across major constructs.

Data Collection Procedures

Primary data was gathered through both in person and electronic administration of questionnaires to accommodate geographic dispersion and respondent preferences. Secondary data was sourced from government reports, council performance audits and policy documents provided by the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. These sources enriched the empirical foundation and contextual relevance of the study.

Data Analysis

Survey data was processed and analyzed using SPSS version 21.0, following a structured four-step protocol to ensure data integrity and alignment with the study's objectives. First, the dataset was screened for completeness and missing values were addressed using listwise deletion or mean-value imputation, depending on the extent and pattern of missingness (van Ginkel, 2023). Second, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations and frequency distributions were computed to summarize respondent characteristics and item-level responses. Third, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal component extraction with varimax rotation was conducted to examine the underlying structure of the multi-item constructs and to validate dimensionality (Field, 2024). Fourth, multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the predictive relationships between identified internal/external barriers and the adoption of innovative HRTD strategies across local authorities. Findings were presented in tabular form, with effect sizes reported where appropriate to enhance interpretability (Lakens, 2022). Key patterns and trends were further illustrated through graphical displays to facilitate visual interpretation and support policy-relevant insights (Wickham et al., 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) Research Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works. Informed consent was secured from all respondents, who were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation, anonymity and data confidentiality. Data collection protocols adhered to ethical principles of respect, beneficence and justice, with safeguards in place to protect participant privacy and minimize potential risks.

Results

Demographic Information

Table 2 presents the demographic breakdown of respondents. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation across council types, geographical regions and administrative roles.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 312)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Council Type	City Council	64	20.5
	Municipal Council	61	19.6
	Town Council	63	20.2
	Local Board	61	19.6
	Rural District Council (RDC)	63	20.2
Gender	Male	178	57.1
	Female	134	42.9
Role	Top Management	40	12.8
	Middle Management	58	18.6
	Operational Management	104	33.3
	Non-Managerial	110	35.3
Years of Service	< 5 years	72	23.1
	5–10 years	104	33.3
	> 10 years	136	43.6

Source: Survey Data (2025)

As shown in Table 2 above, the sample of 312 respondents was evenly distributed across council types and gender, with males comprising 57.1% and females 42.9%. Most participants held operational (33.3%) or non-managerial roles (35.5%), while top and middle management accounted for 12.8% and 18.6% respectively. Experience levels are well stratified, with 43.6% of respondents having over a decade of service, suggesting that data is informed by seasoned institutional knowledge, while newer voices (23.1% with less than 5 years) contribute fresh perspectives on reform and innovation.

Constraints to Strategic HRTD Implementation

The first objective sought to identify the principal internal and external constraints affecting the implementation of strategic human resource training and development (HRTD) within Zimbabwe local authorities (LAs). It was assessed through 19 Likert-scale indicators capturing internal and

external barriers. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3 below, with visual comparison in Figure 1.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Strategic HRTD Barriers (N = 312)

Barrier Type	Barrier	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Internal	Strategic misalignment	4.11	0.716	-0.687
	Inadequate leadership support	4.00	0.713	-0.912
	Limited HR professional capacity	4.07	0.817	-1.015
	Bureaucratic procedures and red tape	4.04	0.768	-1.008
	Poor performance management integration	4.03	0.708	-0.758
	Deficient learning culture	3.54	1.023	-0.430
	Limited comprehensive training policy	4.09	0.725	-0.698
	Resource constraints	4.07	0.746	-1.100
	Evaluation and feedback shortfalls	3.78	0.833	-0.608
External	Governmental appointment processes	3.98	0.902	-0.777
	Economic instability and hyperinflation	4.00	0.816	-0.781
	Regulatory and policy volatility	3.38	1.017	-0.495
	Infrastructure deficits	3.79	0.931	-0.826
	Donor dependency and funding shifts	3.65	0.895	-0.707
	Socio-cultural constraints	3.70	0.871	-0.658
	Technological lag	4.05	0.822	-0.997
	Lingering pandemic effects	3.54	1.001	-0.746
	Environmental concerns	3.63	0.890	-0.471
	Globalization and competition	3.89	0.845	-0.883
	Valid N (listwise)	312		

Source: Survey Data (2025)

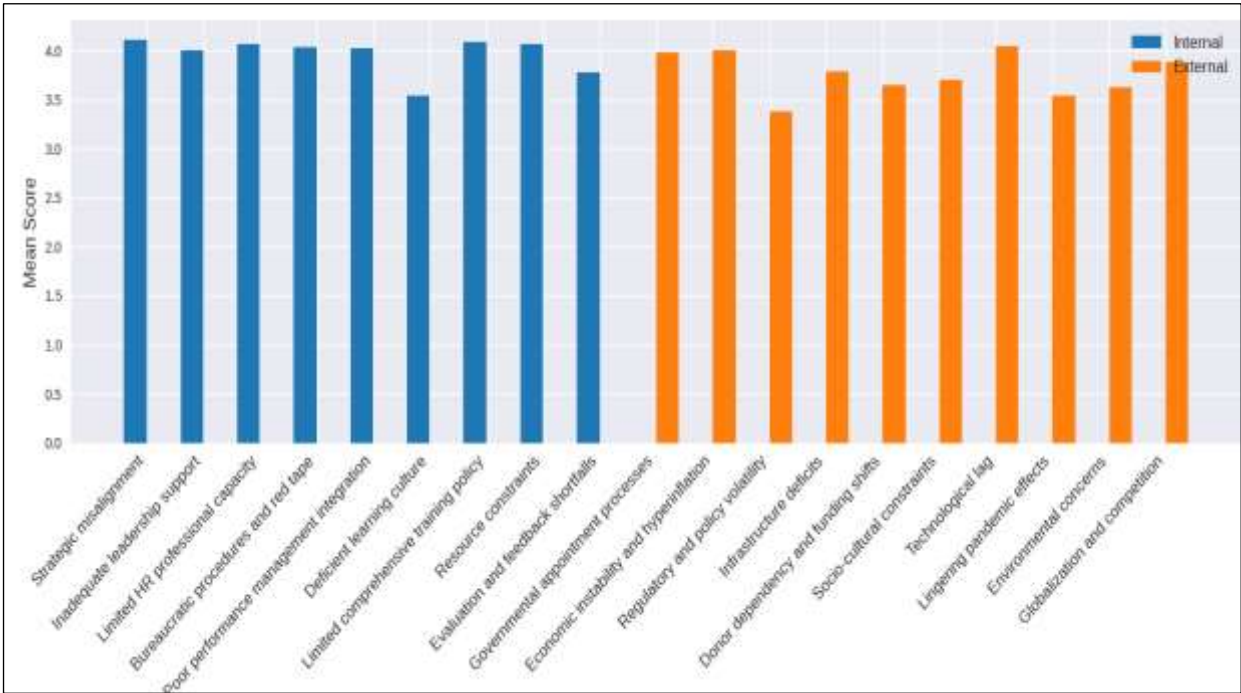


Figure 1: Clustered Bar Chart of Internal vs External Barriers (N = 312)

Source: Survey Data (2025)

As depicted in Table 3 and Figure 1 above, the survey of 25 local authorities with 312 respondents revealed that both internal and external barriers to strategic human resource training and development cluster tightly around high-impact scores, with means mostly above 3.7 and skewness values showing strong agreement that these obstacles are serious. This consensus indicates that training initiatives are not only misaligned with organizational goals, but also hampered by systemic resource shortages and policy gaps.

Internally, strategic misalignment (M=4.11) and the absence of comprehensive training policy (M=4.09) appear to constitute foundational impediments, as fragmented policy guidance inhibits the development of coherent learning pathways. Deficits in HR professional capacity (M=4.07) exacerbate these challenges, since understaffed teams frequently lack specialist competencies in learning needs analysis, institutional design and impact evaluation. Resource constraints (M=4.07) perpetuate this cycle by forcing HRD to compete with core service delivery for limited funds, while bureaucratic approval processes (M=4.04) and weak integration with performance management systems (M=4.03) further attenuate agility accountability. These internal dynamics combine to relegate training to a discretionary activity rather than an imperative driver of performance improvement.

Externally, rapid technological change outpacing institutional capacity (M=4.05) highlights a widening technology-skills gap that impedes the adoption of scalable e-learning and blended modalities. Economic instability and hyperinflation (M=4.00) undermine long-term budgeting for capacity building and politicized appointment processes (M=3.98) disrupt leadership continuity, weakening oversight of strategic HRTD initiatives. Infrastructure deficits, donor dependency and socio-cultural constraints further complicate implementation.

Furthermore, a one-way ANOVA was performed to test whether perceptions of key internal and external barriers differed significantly across the five council categories (City, Municipal, Town, Local Board and Rural District Council (RDC)). Table 4 below depicts the ANOVA results.

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA Results on Barrier Perception by Council Type

Barrier	F-Value	p-Value	Council Type with Highest Concern
Strategic Misalignment	4.21	< 0.05	City Councils
Resource Constraints	3.87	< 0.05	RDCs
Technological Lag	5.02	< 0.01	Town Councils

The ANOVA results revealed significant variation in barrier perception across council types: City Councils expressed heightened concern over strategic misalignment (F=4.21, $p < 0.05$), reflecting their sensitivity to planning fragmentation; RDCs rated resource constraints more severely (F=3.87, $p < 0.05$), underscoring acute rural capacity gaps; while Town Councils reported the highest concern over technological lag (F=5.02, $p < 0.01$), highlighting uneven digital readiness across mid-tier authorities.

Support for Innovative Strategies

The second objective examined context-sensitive strategies capable of enhancing service delivery within local authorities. Table 5 presents the mean scores.

Table 5: Mean Support for Innovative Strategies (N = 312)

Strategy	Mean	Std. Dev.
Participatory budgeting via mobile platforms	4.62	0.51
Micro-PPP initiatives	4.58	0.54
Cooperative service clusters	4.49	0.57
Modular curricula with universities and tech hubs	4.42	0.61
E-procurement and digital supply chains	4.38	0.63
Solar-powered training hubs	4.21	0.68

Innovation labs and hackathons	4.09	0.72
360-degree feedback integration	3.98	0.75

Source: Survey Data (2025)

As presented in Table 5 above, the survey results indicate strong consensus on the relevance of tech-enabled and community-driven innovations in local government reform. Highest-rated strategies “Participatory budgeting via mobile platforms (Mean = 4.62)” and “Micro-PPP initiatives (Mean = 4.58)” reflect a clear preference for inclusive governance and localized partnerships. Mid-tier support for “Modular curricula and e-procurement systems” suggests growing interest in digital integration and academic collaboration. Lower ratings for “360-degree feedback (Mean = 3.98)” may signal limited familiarity or perceived complexity. Overall, narrow standard deviations across items affirm consistent endorsement of scalable, context-sensitive innovations.

In addition, multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess whether perceived barriers predicted support for specific reform strategies. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6: Summary of Regression Results on Barrier–Strategy Linkages

Barrier Predictor	Reform Strategy Targeted	β (Standardized)	p-Value
Strategic Misalignment	Modular curricula with universities	-0.42	< 0.01
Resource Constraints	Solar-powered digital training hubs	0.38	< 0.01

As indicated in Table 6, strategic misalignment significantly reduces support for modular curricula ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that fragmented planning environments hinder innovation. In contrast, resource constraints positively predict support for solar-powered hubs ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting openness to alternative capacity-building models in under-resourced councils. Figure 3 illustrates the standardized beta coefficients for two key barriers – strategy relationships, highlighting direction and strength of their predictive influence.

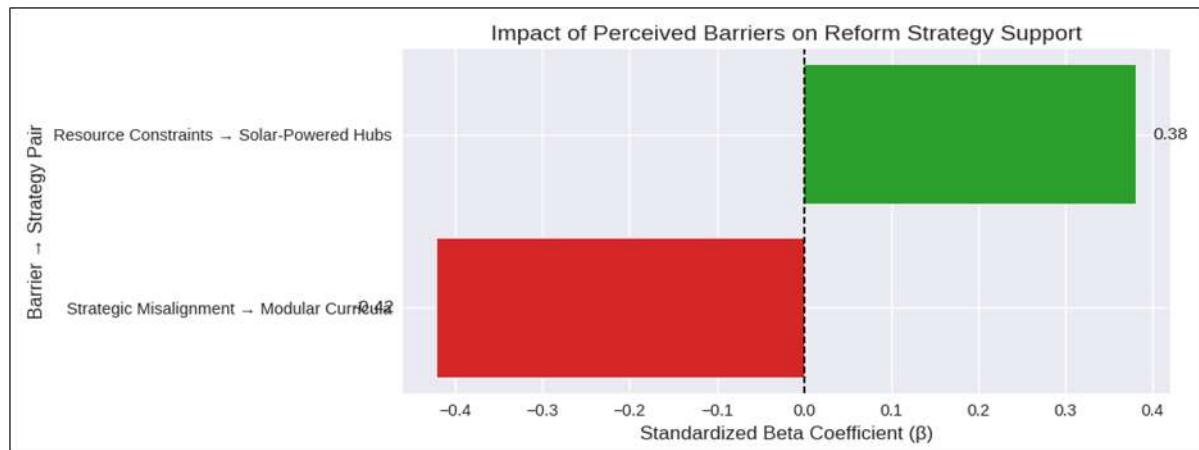


Figure 2: Impact of Perceived Barriers on Reform Strategy Support

Source: Survey Data (2025)

Discussion

Strategic human resource training and development in Zimbabwean local authorities is shaped by a convergence of institutional and environmental constraints that undermine reform coherence and capacity-building momentum. Internally, the absence of integrated, evidence-based training policies and fragmented planning frameworks mirrors findings from South African and European municipalities, where disjointed HRTD strategies have stalled professionalization and weakened service delivery (Cloete, 2023; Lau & Manning, 2023; Ndou & Agbenyegah, 2022). The misalignment between individual development plans and broader organizational objectives exacerbated by siloed HR practices and deficient performance management systems, echoes the implementation gaps identified by Mofokeng et al (2025) and Mojaki (2024). These institutional fissures are compounded by managerial apathy, ambiguous accountability structures and the lack of formal succession planning, which collectively erode strategic agility and diminish the status of HRTD as a core governance function.

Externally, Zimbabwean local authorities operate within volatile and resource-constrained environments, consistent with VUCA conditions documented across developing municipalities (Lance, 2022). Economic instability, politicized recruitment and infrastructural deficits destabilize long-term planning and leadership continuity, while technological lag impedes the adoption of scalable e-learning modalities. The rapid advance of artificial intelligence and automation, outpacing HR adaptation capacity, further risks skill obsolescence and widens digital divides. These challenges are not merely technical but deeply structural, requiring a recalibration of HRTD governance to embed digital transformation, decentralization and strategic oversight.

Despite these constraints, the study reveals a strong appetite for innovation among local authorities. The embracing of participatory budgeting via mobile platforms, micro-PPP initiatives and modular curricula co-developed with universities, reflects a shift towards hybrid governance models that prioritize collaboration, contextual relevance and digital integration. These findings align with emerging scholarship advocating for cross-sectoral peer-learning networks, centralized competency registries and digital certification platforms to harmonize professional standards and strengthen institutional coordination (Moagi & Nhede, 2025; Qureshi & Tasneem, 2021).

Consistent with Ahn's (2024) proposition, this study affirms that decentralized HRM decision-making enabled by digital platforms, can significantly enhance organizational responsiveness, while performance-linked reward incentives and robust stakeholder oversight serve to strengthen accountability and reinforce public trust. Collectively, these measures align organizational culture, individual aspirations and policy objectives, positioning HRTD as a strategic lever for achieving Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling Agenda 2063 commitments.

Theoretical Implications

This study makes a substantive theoretical contribution to the field of strategic human resource training and development by elucidating how institutional and environmental constraints coalesce to shape capacity-building outcomes within local government systems. It reinforces prevailing critiques of HRTD fragmentation attributable to policy incoherence, leadership inertia and chronic resource deficits while advancing the discourse through a proposed hybrid governance model that repositions HRTD as a strategic instrument for organizational resilience and service delivery excellence. The integration of context-responsive, innovation-led mechanisms such as participatory budgeting, micro-PPP frameworks and digital training hubs, enriches adaptive governance theory and foregrounds the transformative potential of technology-enabled learning in volatile public sector environments. Furthermore, the findings extend the High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS) framework by advocating a contingent model attuned to low-resource, high-uncertainty contexts. This model emphasizes decentralization, technological adaptation and inter-organizational collaboration as critical enablers of strategic HRTD, challenging the universalist assumptions of conventional HPWS applications.

Managerial Implications for Local Authorities

This study highlights critical managerial levers for embedding human resource training and development (HRTD) within local governance systems. Local authorities are urged to institutionalize evidence-based training policies, digitize approval and evaluation workflows to enhance responsiveness and cultivate partnerships with academic institutions and technology hubs for curriculum co-design and impact assessment. Diversified financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships and social impact bonds can stabilize funding streams, while merit-based recruitment and performance-linked incentives promote accountability and leadership continuity. Innovation-driven platforms, including hackathons and professional learning consortia, offer scalable models for collaborative curriculum development and accreditation harmonization.

Strategic Recommendations

To reposition HRTD as a strategic lever for sustainable governance in Zimbabwean local authorities, the following are recommended:

- Institutionalize a National HRTD Framework aligned with strategic planning cycles.
- Professionalize HR Units through specialist training in needs analysis, instructional design and evaluation.
- Digitize Bureaucratic Workflows to enhance agility and transparency.
- Invest in ICT Infrastructure and Digital Literacy to support scalable e-learning.
- Forge Strategic Partnerships with universities and tech hubs for localized, modular curricula.
- Diversify Funding Streams via local revenues, micro-PPPs and donor alignment.
- Promote Merit-Based Recruitment to ensure leadership continuity and reduce politicization.
- Adopt a Contingent HPWS Model tailored to low-resource, high-volatility governance contexts.

Limitations of the Study

The study's focus on Zimbabwean local authorities limits generalizability to other governance contexts. Reliance on cross-sectional, self-reported data introduces perceptual bias and constraints insight into behavioural change over time. Future research should adopt mixed-method, longitudinal designs and pursue comparative analyses across varied local government systems to

assess the transferability of the HRTD framework. Exploring regional learning networks, digital certification platforms and competency registries may further illuminate scalable mechanisms for institutionalizing HRTD in decentralized settings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that strategic human resource training and development in Zimbabwean local authorities is constrained by institutional fragmentation and external volatility, limiting its integration into governance and service delivery systems. Despite these challenges, strong support for innovative, context-sensitive strategies such as participatory budgeting and digital training hubs, signals readiness for reform. A hybrid governance approach that leverages digital tools, cross-sectoral collaboration and targeted capacity-building can reposition HRTD as a driver of resilience and performance. These findings offer a foundation for future comparative research across decentralized public sector systems.

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Effect of employee training, career development and job security on the performance of the small-scale mining sector in Zimbabwe.

Georgina Shumba¹, Lovemore Chikazhe² & Miriam Jengeta³,

¹Chinhoyi University of Technology, (Corresponding author: gshumba@cut.ac.zw)

Abstract

Globally, the mining sector plays a major role in the development of economies through foreign exchange, employment opportunities and supporting the country's infrastructure development and Gross Domestic Product. The current study investigates the effect of human resource framework factors (employee training, career development, employee job security) on the performance of the small-scale gold mining sector. In Zimbabwe's Mashonaland West Province, a cross-sectional survey of 210 randomly selected workers from small-scale gold mining sector was conducted between April and June 2023. the study adopted positivism philosophy and quantitative approach. The study is underpinned by the Bandura's social learning theory and the Behaviourist theory. Data was analysed using structural equation modelling and presented in tables. The study findings show a correlation between human resources framework factors (employee training, career development, employee job security) and improved organisational performance. Studies focusing on human resource framework factors on the influence of organisational performance are scarce especially within the mining industry in the Sub-Saharan nations like Zimbabwe where the majority of the small-scale gold miners are informal. Thus, the current study was conducted to further the corpus of knowledge in the business management domain. Moreover, studies of this nature are imperative as they provide fresh insights and validate extant knowledge on human resource framework factors and organisational performance within the mining industry.

Key Words: career development, employee training, job security, organisational performance, small-scale mining, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Globally, the mining sector plays a major role in the development of many economies through foreign exchange, employment opportunities and supporting the country's infrastructure development and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Singo et al., 2022; Zvarivadza, 2018). In Zimbabwe, over 500,000 people are involved in Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (Nyavaya, 2021). The majority of such businesses are informal and some are in the process of registering their businesses. Employees within the small-scale gold mining organisations in Zimbabwe are facing challenges which include lack of career progression, promotions and rewards for outstanding work, unfavourable working conditions, uncompetitive salaries, lack of proper health and safety facilities and absence of reasonable welfare packages, among others (Mkodzongi & Spiegel, 2019; Munyoro et al., 2017; Nyavaya, 2021). Hence, the study sought to answer the following question in trying to close the knowledge gap: "What is the effect of employee training, career development and job security on the performance of small-scale gold miners?" Employees within small-scale gold mining companies continue to switch employers searching for better conditions of service yet the conditions are more or less the same across the sector. The Ministry of Mines and Mining Development of the Zimbabwean government has attempted to formalise artisanal and small-scale mining in an attempt to regulate small scale mining activities and conditions of service for small-scale mining employees but it seems difficult to implement the policy. Employees in the small-scale mining sector in Zimbabwe are exposed to multiple health risk hazards (Masiya et al., 2012). Additionally, there are no occupational health and safety regulations in Zimbabwe for small-scale miners to avoid, monitor, and mitigate workplace dangers (Nyavaya, 2021). Since mining is a high-risk industry, robust control measures are needed to safeguard the health of workers (Government of Zimbabwe, 1990; International Labour Organisation; 2015; Nyavaya et al., 2021; Singo et al., 2022). To date, no single small-scale gold mining organisation in Zimbabwe has any risk mitigating framework or human resource framework to guide employees' welfare (Mapira, 2017; Singo et al., 2022). Moreover, Zimbabwean small-scale gold miners are subjected to risky working conditions such as pollution (Mapira, 2017; Ralph et al., 2018). Numerous issues within the mining industry were observed in studies on Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining, including hazardous mining pits, a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) use, a lack of safe drinking water and restrooms, inadequate hygiene, and ineffective waste management, among others (Mawowa, 2013; Ramatsetse et al., 2019). Also, previous studies focused on employee performance rather than organisational performance (Febrianti et al., 2020; Yandi &

Havidz, 2022). Similarly, a few studies that focused on organisational performance were not closely linked to the current study variables but to wider human resources issues (Akoi & Yesiltas, 2020; Sunahwati et al., 2019). There is therefore a need for a study that closes this knowledge gap. Hence, this study seeks to suggest ways to improve the performance of small-scale gold mining companies through the implementation of a human resources framework, which addresses the employee issues such as employee training, career development and employee job security.

Theoretical Literature

Theories underpinning the study

The current study is underpinned by Bandura's Social Learning Theory and the Behaviourist theory. The impact of outcome and self-efficacy expectations on individual performance is explained by Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Hall, 2018). The theory assumes that an individual lacks motivation to act or perform unless they feel they may achieve desired results via their efforts. Self-efficacy can also be used to predict training programme performance (Jain & Sullivan, 2020). Self-efficacy is directly related to programme success in the human resources field. Employees are less likely to try to boost organisational performance if they have low self-efficacy expectations. Since worker circumstances might affect organisational effectiveness, the current study aimed to enhance them. The Behaviourist approach assumes that training is a combination of favourable and unfavourable factors that lead to a change in conduct (Harasim, 2017). This idea is connected to behaviour and particular work settings and results from the perspective of the organisational environment, where HRM initiated training takes place. Therefore, behaviourism may be applied in task-oriented HRM procedures in the mining industry where employees' success or failure in putting newly acquired skills into practice may be judged. These theories have been used by previous scholars (Bandura & Hall, 2018; Harasim, 2017; Jain & Sullivan, 2020).

Small-Scale Mining

Small-scale mining is characterised by primitive and subpar mining practices with either no or very little control over dangers (Nyavaya, 2021). Artisanal and small-scale gold miners have limited awareness of health and safety (Singo et al., 2022). Underground mining, lengthy workdays, and worker violence are characteristics of small-scale mining (Ramatsetse et al., 2019). Increased occupational injuries and deaths are a sign of improper implementation of the

hierarchy of controls (Mkodzongi & Spiegel, 2019). This is due to lack or absence of proper human resource framework among the artisanal and small-scale gold miners (Mawowa, 2013). Since most of these miners lack collateral security, finance is also a problem (Munyoro et al., 2017). Accordingly, a shortage of finance is reducing output levels while also raising threats to the personal safety and health of the miners and the environment (Singo et al., 2022).

Employee training

According to Garavan et al. (2021) training is a methodical process to increase a worker's competency, ability and knowledge necessary for successful job performance. Mkodzongi and Spiegel (2019) also define training as a planned intervention meant to improve certain aspects of a person's ability to execute their profession. Additionally, training focuses on enhancing the abilities that appear to be essential for achieving organisational goals (Ogbu et al., 2017). Guerrazzi (2016) define training as the process of enhancing a person's current talents, knowledge, exposure and skills. Saleem and Mehwish (2011) assert that training is an organised expansion of the knowledge, abilities and feelings required for employees to perform well in the given procedures as well as to function in subordinate situations. Employee training is defined in this research as a systematic procedure to improve employees' skill, knowledge, capacity, and competency in order for them to do their jobs successfully and uphold the required performance standards.

The goal of efficient training initiatives is to raise employees' productivity. The performance of businesses may be improved by training in a variety of activities (Guerrazzi, 2016; Nguyen, 2019). Without adequate training, both new and experienced personnel lack the knowledge and skill sets required to execute their responsibilities to the best of their abilities (Wulandari and Indartono, 2021). Proper training tends to help employees stay on the job longer than inadequate training does (Garavan et al., 2021). Effective training initiatives aid in creating a more supportive atmosphere for learning for the workforce and prepare them to deal with impending problems more quickly and successfully (Burgess et al., 2020). Managers are involved in creating successful training programmes for their staff in order to increase their capacity and give them the information, skills, and talents they need to accomplish organisational objectives (Wulandari & Indartono, 2021). Additionally, training improves the ability of talented workers to be retained (Ogbu et al., 2017). Training employees demonstrates the company's long-term dedication to its employees and raises staff motivation levels (Garavan et al., 2021). All of these contributions help organisations gain a competitive edge

over their rivals (Burgess et al., 2020), improve employee productivity, and increase organisational output (Hassan et al., 2019).

Career Development

According to Napitupulu et al. (2017), career development is described as an organization's continual, formalised effort to grow and enhance its human resources in light of the demands of both the employees and the establishment. Febrianti et al. (2020) define career development as matching up the requirements, personality traits, and professional roles of an individual with those of the organisation in order to discover a fit between the two. Nasution et al. (2018) also posit that career development is a shared responsibility that depends on the requirements and conditions of both individuals and organisations. By creating an individual learning strategy to help them reach their potential and meet the organisation's goal, workers strategically investigate, plan and shape their future at work through the career development process (Nguyen, 2019). Career development begins with employee orientation and continues throughout a person's working life through on-the-job training, experience, short courses, professional courses, postgraduate degrees, or certificates (Nguyen, 2019). This research defines career development as a continuous, formalised effort by a small-scale gold mining company that focuses on growing and enhancing the company's human resources in light of the needs of both the employees and the company.

Nkechi and Dialoke (2017) and Okurame (2012) postulate that career development is frequently utilised to bridge the performance gap between present performance and anticipated future performance. Numerous personnel in numerous firms have received training, yet there is no sign of their careers progressing (Nkechi and Dialoke, 2017). Chetana and Mohapatra (2017) posit that career development possibilities have a significant role in determining the connections between employees and organisations. As a result, an organization's activities place a high value on staff development, which is also linked to business performance (Napitupulu et al., 2017). The needs of both the company and the individual are met through career development that addresses the development of people at various career stages (Nkechi and Dialoke, 2017). According to Okurame (2012), an organisation uses a variety of activities, techniques, and programmes to chart the careers of its employees. These efforts are crucial to preserving the equilibrium between employees' needs for job security, advancement, and

development and those of the organisation, which include employee loyalty, trust, and commitment (Chetana & Mohapatra, 2017).

Job Security

Febrianti et al. (2020) define job security as the concern a person has of losing their work and going without a job. A secure employment for an employee is one in which they can work there for as long as they like without feeling threatened or having any reasons, either objective or subjective, to think they would lose their job (Vijayan, 2017). Nella et al. (2015) suggest that job stability is a critical component that influences employees' motivation and psychological well-being. When a person believes that they are secure or safe in whatever activity they are involved in, it provides a sense of contentment and fulfilment (Abolade, 2018). Job security is described as a fantastic motivator that helps an individual to go on in life. This research defines employee job security as the fear of losing one's job and going without a job.

Job security that ensures peace of mind is the most crucial requirement for an employee in a working relationship (Selenko et al., 2017). Employee organisational satisfaction and level of commitment are strongly influenced by job security (Abolade, 2018). An employee will undoubtedly put in more effort if they are confident that they will not be fired from the company any time soon (Selenko et al., 2017). In fact, he or she will want to repay by contributing more to the organisation, which action will raise his level of pleasure as well (Nasution et al., 2018). Employees expect financial stability from their employer, and if this is not provided, an organisation risks losing its human resource (Febrianti et al., 2020). Employees instantly begin to display a good attitude when an organisation ensures job security and organisational justice, and this positive attitude is highly important to the organisation since it eventually increases organisational performance (Adeniji et al., 2019).

Organisational performance

The examination of an organisation's performance in relation to its aims and objectives is known as organisational performance (Rostami et al., 2015). Additionally, organisational performance relates to how well a company is performing in terms of profitability, return on investment, staff retention, and having a positive reputation in its host community (Ramatsetse et al., 2019). Similar to personal performance, organisational performance may be seen as the accomplishment of goals that were established at the beginning of a business year or quarterly,

depending on the kind of activities undertaken (Wylie, 2015). According to this study, organisational performance refers to how well a business performs in terms of producing gold, making a profit, getting a return on investment, keeping employees, and maintaining a good reputation in the community where it is based.

Organisational performance is a crucial problem for many working managers and may be considered as one of the markers of a company's success (Ramatsetse et al., 2019). Organisations have created a variety of metrics for monitoring their success, (Akoi & Yesiltas, 2020). Because increasing profit margins is every business' top priority, the majority of companies measure their performance in terms of net profit, revenue, sales growth, staff size, physical expansion, or increased market share. Management must focus on employee motivation, contentment and work ethics in order to achieve a successful performance (Rostami et al., 2015). In general, it is impossible to isolate the performance of the firm from that of its personnel (Salleh et al., 2020). Since there is a strong correlation between individual performance and organisational performance, a company's goals will be realised through the efforts of its employees (Rostami et al., 2015).

Empirical Literature and Research Hypotheses Development

Employee training and organisational performance

Literature confirms a general relationship between employee training and organisational performance (Garavan et al., 2021; Ogbu et al., 2017; Wulandari & Indartono, 2021). Salleh et al. (2020) established that training policy positively correlates with organisational performance. Similarly, Ogbu et al. (2017) in Nigeria conducted research on staff training and organisational performance and discovered a substantial positive association between the two variables. Guerrazzi (2016) studied how training affects the productivity of Italian businesses and found that training, on-the-job training, training design, and training delivery methods, all significantly affect organisational performance. Additionally, Garavan et al. (2021) investigated the impact of staff training on the perceived organisational performance and discovered a reasonably good correlation between the two variables. In order to further explore the impact of staff training on organisational performance, the current study focused on small-scale miners in Zimbabwe, where the bulk of these firms operate informally. Based on arguments raised above, it can be proposed that:

H1: Employee training has a positive effect on the performance of organisations within the small-scale mining sector

Career development and organisational performance

There is a general consensus in literature that career development influences organisational performance (Febrianti et al., 2020; Kiran et al., 2019; Rehman, 2017; Saina et al., 2015). In Nigeria, Adeniji et al. (2019) conducted research on the competency model for tracking organisational progress and career development in the health industry. The findings of the study show that career development initiatives have a substantial impact on organisational growth. It has been proven that career development strategies contribute to corporate success. Additionally, Nkechi and Dialoke (2017) examined the impact of career development on employees' performance and found that it had a favourable impact on both employee and organisational performance. Similarly, Jain and Sullivan (2020) investigated how careerism relates to organisational commitment, satisfaction and performance. They found that career development has a positive and substantial impact on organisational performance. Ogueyungbo (2019) looked at how training and career development affected employee performance and found that both employee and organisational performance are significantly impacted by career development. However, the majority of these earlier researches concentrated on formal organisations with long-term employment contracts with employees. The current study was conducted in order to help build a career development policy that includes employees working in the informal sector. Based on the aforementioned justifications, it may be assumed that:

H2: Career development has a positive effect on the performance of organisations within the small-scale mining sector

Employee job security and organisational performance

There is evidence in extant literature that job security correlates with organisational success (Imran et al., 2015; Nasution et al., 2018; Selenko et al., 2017). Abolade (2018) studied the effects of staff turnover and job insecurity on organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, Chirumbolo and Areni (2005) investigated the impact of job uncertainty on absenteeism and work performance and found that it had a detrimental effect on both. It was concluded that job instability has a considerable influence on employee happiness and a collateral impact on how

an organisation is considered to be doing. Imran et al. (2015) studied the relationship between organisational justice, job security, and work happiness and productivity. They found that these factors, as well as job satisfaction, might contribute to lower productivity within an organisation. These earlier researches neglected employee security and yet the majority of workers in the small-scale mining sector are not secure. Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be hypothesized that:

H3: Employee job security has a positive effect on the performance of organisations within the small-scale mining sector

Based on the above hypotheses, a conceptual framework is proposed in Figure 1.

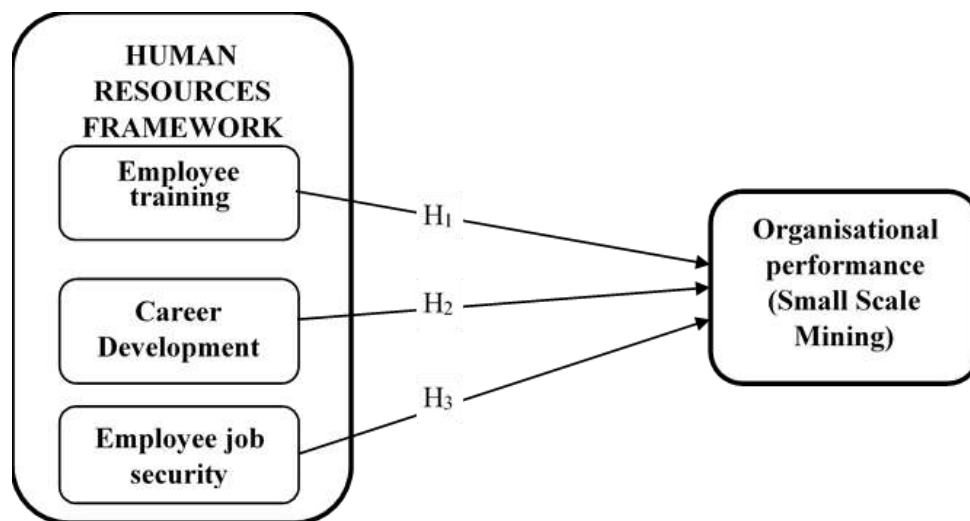


Figure 1: Conceptual framework (Adapted from Guerrazzi, 2016; Nguyen, 2019)

Methodology

The methodology covers questionnaire design and measurement as well as sampling and data collection procedures. The study targeted small scale mining employees from Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in Mashonaland West province since the region hosts the majority of small-scale gold miners in Zimbabwe. Employees from the small-scale mining firms were considered in this study ahead of business owners because the researcher sought opinions from the affected employees as these would provide honest responses free from bias. A cross-sectional survey was used to obtain data from 210

respondents. Respondents were randomly selected from the various small-scale mining organisations between April and June 2023. Respondents were randomly selected to give all employees an equal chance to participate in the study. Simple random sampling was employed at each site.

Questionnaire design

A structured questionnaire with Likert-type questions was physically distributed to collect data from the employees within the small-scale miners. Respondents were given up to five working days to complete the questionnaire on their own so as to avoid bias. The instrument had five sections: employee training (EMPT), career development (CDEV), employee job security (EMJS), organisational performance (ORGP) and demographics. All items within each construct were scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). These items were borrowed from previous related studies as indicated in Table 1 but these were modified to meet the needs of this study. Table 1 shows codes, items and sources for the instrument used for the current study.

Table 1: Instrument used to collect data

Codes	Employee training	Sources
EMPT1	My supervisor pays attention to my level of competence	Chikazhe et al. (2023), Mustaffa (2012), Saleem and Amin (2013)
EMPT2	My organisation assists me in developing skills needed for future	
EMPT3	My organisation offers a reward to anyone who upgrades skills	
EMPT4	I am satisfied with the training I receive from my organisation	
EMPT5	My employer provides training opportunities for me to meet the changing demands	
EMPT6	Overall, the training I receive on the job meets my needs	
Codes	Career development	Nkechi and Dialoke (2017), Saleem and Amin (2013)
CDEV1	The career development policy in our organisation is fair	
CDEV2	My immediate superior cares about my career development	
CDEV3	My superiors provide information about various promotion opportunities	
CDEV4	I show interest in being promoted	
CDEV5	I feel satisfaction with career	
CDEV6	There is a really high chance for promotion on my job	
Codes	Employee job security	Lee and Jeong (2017), Mustaffa (2012)
EMJS1	My company offers me open contracts	
EMJS2	The organisation offers regular advancement opportunities	
EMJS3	The organisation has policies to protect workers in case of disability	

EMJS4	My company has a good early retirement plan	Akoï and Yesiltas (2020), Chikazhe et al. (2023) Mustaffa (2012), Ramatsetse et al. (2019), Saleem and Amin (2013)
EMJS5	I am allowed to join any workers' union	
EMJS6	Overall, I see that there is job security in our organisation	
Codes	Organisational performance	
ORGP1	The organisation always achieves its targeted levels of production	
ORGP2	The organisation achieves monthly set sales targets	
ORGP3	The organisation makes good profits	
ORGP4	The company's financial statements show positive cash flows	
ORGP5	The organisation shows signs of expansion every year	
ORGP6	The companies continue to acquire new assets on a yearly basis	

Demographic information for respondents

A total of 210 out of the 260 questionnaires that were distributed were returned and usable. This translate to 81 percent response rate. This reflect a high response rate which is acceptable. Non-response bias assessment was conducted and the results reflect that there was no bias in the responses. Table 2 below shows the sample profile for respondents who participated in the current study.

Table 2: Sample Profile

Characteristic		Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	18-19	23	10.9
	20-29	44	20.9
	30-39	55	26.4
	40-49	61	29.1
	50+	17	12.7
Gender	Male	156	74.5
	Female	54	25.5
Occupation	Underground miner	139	66.4
	Blaster	15	7.3
	Electrician	9	4.5
	Heavy equipment operator	12	5.5
	Site surveyor	8	3.6
	Other	27	12.7
	Less than \$100	103	49.1

Average monthly income earned (USD)	\$101-250	63	30
	\$251-500	23	10.9
	\$501-750	13	6.4
	Above \$750	8	3.6
Years of working at the mine	Less than 5	80	38.2
	5-10	71	33.6
	More than 10	59	28.2
Highest level of qualification from this university	Below diploma	99	47.3
	Diploma level	72	34.5
	First degree	23	10.9
	Other	16	7.3

The majority (76.4%) of small scale gold mining employees were between 20 and 49 years of age. This shows that this is the most active group that seeks to earn a living from working for small scale miners. Male respondents constituted 74.5% of all the respondents while female respondents constituted 25.5%. These findings show that there are more males than females in the small-scale mining industry in Zimbabwe. This may be due to the hard nature of the duties involved. The majority of the employees are underground workers who constitute 66.4%. This is attributed to the fact that most of the mining activities are more labour intensive. In addition, the majority of the employees (79.1%) earn less than \$250 USD per month. Around 38.2% of employees have worked at a particular mine for less than 5 years followed by those who have worked for 5 to 10 years who constituted 33.6%. This could imply that some workers switch employers in search of better working conditions. A reasonable sample (47.3%) of the respondents have qualifications below diploma level. This implies that most of the respondents (57%) are post-diploma level.

Results

Scale validation

Scale validation was done using confirmatory factor analysis and this included sampling convergent validity and discriminant validity. However, adequacy test was first conducted and the results are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Sampling adequacy test results

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.859
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2113.250
	df	276
	Sig.	.000

From Table 3 above, the sampling adequacy test shows Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy, Bartlett's test of Sphericity and Degrees of Freedom of 276 met the minimum requirements as recommended by Field et al. (2012) that the Bartlett's test of Sphericity be significant at $p < 0.05$.

Convergent validity test results

Standardised factor loadings, individual item reliability, critical ratios, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to determine convergent validity. Table 4 below shows the results for convergent validity.

Table 4: Convergent validity results

Constructs	Items	Standardised Factor Loadings (λ)	Individual Item Reliabilities	Critical Ratios	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliabilities
Employee training	EMPT1	.439	.728	-	.901	.895
	EMPT2	.799	.763	31.887***		
	EMPT3	.907	.895	25.098***		
	EMPT4	.866	.908	9.865***		
	EMPT5	.837	.663	11.472***		
	EMPT6	.762	.695	20.003***		
Career development	CDEV1	.555	.716	-	.931	.926
	CDEV2	.624	.651	15.764		
	CDEV3	.734	.683	18.172***		
	CDEV4	.828	.666	9.452***		
	CDEV5	.810	.843	7.662***		
	CDEV6	.863	.678	18.332***		
	EMJS1	.785	.698	-	.803	.870

Employee job security	EMJS2	.787	.656	26.554***		
	EMJS3	.642	.745	17.094***		
	EMJS4	.521	.778	12.548***		
	EMJS5	.450	.665	17.443***		
	EMJS6	.757	.654	9.437***		
Organisational performance	ORGP1	.896	.734	-	.780	.898
	ORGP2	.921	.618	26.138***		
	ORGP3	.932	.744	21.622***		
	ORGP4	.864	.679	15.244***		
	ORGP5	.524	.736	18.676***		
	ORGP6	.638	.690	19.340***		

Note: - CR is fixed; *** p < 0.001

Results from Table 4 show that standardised factor loadings were above the recommended 0.4 cut-off point (Yong and Pearce, 2013; Wixom and Watson, 2001). Critical ratios were appropriately large and significant at $p < 0.001$. Individual item reliabilities, composite reliabilities and Cronbach's alpha values were all acceptable as they were above 0.5 (Pallant, 2020). Thus, these results indicate that the convergent validity conditions were satisfactory.

Discriminant validity test results

Discriminant validity was assessed using the mean, standard deviation, average variance extracted (AVE) and squared inter-construct correlations (SICC). Table 5 below shows results for discriminant validity.

Table 5: Mean (M), standard deviation (SD), AVE and SICC

Construct	Mean	SD	EMPT	CDEV	EMJS	ORGP
Employee training	3.039	1.003	.676			
Career development	3.112	.899	.225	.721		
Employee job security	2.653	.834	.279	.353	.598	
Organisational performance	4.583	.975	.423	.267	.256	.626

Note: Diagonal elements in bold represent AVEs

Results in Table 5 show that all constructs had average variance extracted above 0.5 and all AVEs (diagonal elements) were above the squared inter-construct correlations, (Field, 2009; Park, 2015). Therefore, minimum conditions for discriminant validity were achieved.

Hypotheses testing (H1-3)

H1, H2 and H3 were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS version 21. Table 6 shows the results for hypotheses testing.

Table 6: Results of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Hypothesised Relationship	SRW	CR	Effect sizes	Remark
H1	Employee training → Organisational performance	.347	18.965***	.005	Supported
H2	Career development → Organisational performance	.289	12.643	.003	Supported
H3	Employee job security → Organisational performance	.401	21.664***	.009	Supported

Notes: SRW standardised regression weight, CR critical ratio, *** significant at $p < 0.001$

Results for H1 show that employee training has a direct and positive effect on organisational performance (SRW= 0.347, CR = 18.965, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, H1 was supported. Also, results for H2 show that career development has a direct and positive effect on organisational performance (SRW= 0.289, CR = 12.643, $p < 0.001$). So, H2 was supported. Lastly, results for H3 show that employee job security has a direct and positive effect on organisational performance (SRW = 0.401, CR = 21.664, $p < 0.001$). As a result, H3 was supported.

Discussion and Implications

Discussion

Studies focusing on human resource framework factors (employee training, career development and employee job security) that influence organisational performance are scarce within the gold mining industry especially in the Sub-Saharan nations like Zimbabwe where the majority of the small-scale miners are informal businesses. The majority of prior studies focused on employee performance (Burgess et al., 2020; Chibundu, 2017; Úbeda-García et al., 2013) whereas the current study investigated the effect of human resource framework factors (employee training, career development and employee job security) on organisational performance. Studies of this nature are imperative as they provide fresh insights and validate extant knowledge on human resource framework factors and organisational performance within the mining industry. The study found a correlation between staff training and organisational performance. This means that well-trained small-scale mining personnel

perform better and eventually improve productivity and organisational performance (Wulandari & Indartono, 2021). This suggests that training will improve employees' ability, knowledge, and competency, which are essential for effective work performance (Chibundu, 2017). Once taught, personnel can help the organisation accomplish its objectives. Therefore, the goal of successful training initiatives is to raise staff productivity (Nkechi and Dialoke, 2017). To improve business effectiveness, it is crucial to receive training in many functions. Additionally, training improves the ability of a skilled worker to be retained (Garavan et al., 2021). The discovery makes a significant addition to the body of knowledge in human resources because there is currently a dearth of information about this phenomenon available to the mining sector.

Career development was found to influence organisational performance. Thus, when small scale mining organisations offer career development opportunities to their employees, they will perform better at the work place (Kiran *et al.*, 2019). In order to connect individual and organisational needs, personal qualities and professional positions, career development indicates that an organisation takes a conscious effort to align individual subjective and more objective career components to an organisation (Febrianti *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, career development may be used by small-scale mining organisations to bridge the performance gap between present performance and anticipated future performance (Rehman, 2017). Because the study is one of the few that provide empirical data based on the link between career development and organisational performance within the small-scale mining industry, this finding substantially contributes to the body of knowledge in human resources.

Employee job security was found to influence the performance of the small-scale mining industry. This is critical since job security is a major concern in Zimbabwe, particularly in the mining industry. So, if employees perceive their jobs to be secure, they will perform well and contribute to organisational performance (Nasution et al., 2018). A significant aspect influencing employee motivation and psychological well-being is job stability (Selenko et al., 2017). Job security was found to be a powerful incentive that helps workers to be more dedicated to work hard in order to contribute to the performance of their company (Abolade, 2018). Hence, if small-scale mining companies improve on job security, employees could respond by acting positively.

Implications to theory

In the human resource literature, it is evident that staff motivation is crucial in influencing firm performance (Nkechi and Dialoke, 2017; Garavan et al., 2021; Nasution et al., 2018; Selenko et al., 2017). In most prior studies, staff motivation was a result of different factors including, better salaries, promotions and other tangible benefits. However, the current study investigated a different human resource framework (employee training, career development and employee job security) within the informal mining sector to show its influence on firm performance. As expected, employee training had a favourable impact on organisational performance. The study supports findings from other related studies (Burgess et al., 2020; Chibundu, 2017; Úbeda-García et al., 2013; Wulandari & Indartono, 2021). The study also found a clear and advantageous relationship between career growth and organisational success. These results are consistent with prior researches (Adeniji et al. 2019; Febrianti et al., 2020; Jain & Sullivan, 2020; Kiran et al. 2019; Napitupulu et al., 2017; Ogueyungbo; 2019; Rehman, 2017; Saina et al., 2015). Moreover, the study's results also show that employee job security has a favourable impact on organisational performance, which is consistent with previous related researches (Abolade, 2018; Imran et al., 2015; Nasution et al., 2018; Selenko *et al.*, 2017). This implies that small size mining firms must consider staff training, career growth, and job security when developing methods for enhancing organisational performance.

Furthermore, the study findings validate Bandura's Social Learning Theory which calls for managers to comprehend that individuals' lack of motivation results in workers underperforming. In this study, it was concluded that human resource framework factors (employee training, career development and employee job security) influence the performance of small-scale miners. The study results are also in line with the Behaviourist approach which sees training as a combination of favourable factors that lead to a change in one's conduct.

The link between employee training, career advancement, job security, and organisational success is better understood as a result of these discoveries especially within the informal small-scale mining sector. As a result, this study adds to the body of knowledge in human resources by offering an empirically supported human resource paradigm. This study adds to existing knowledge that employee training, career development and job security are important variables that influence organisational performance.

Implications to management

For small scale gold mining organisations to achieve high level performance, management is advised to look into aspects like employee training where issues such as identifying and developing skills needed for the future and rewarding employees who upgrade their skills are to be considered. On career development, management ought to ensure that their organisations have career development policies which are fair or favourable to employees. Managers should show superior care about employees' career development. Additionally, it is the duty of management to provide information about various promotion opportunities within the organisation and to show that there is a really high chance for promotion in all posts within the structure of each firm. As for employee job security, small scale firms should offer open contracts to their employees so that workers do not feel insecure because of short contracts. Policies to protect workers in case of disability are recommended as part of job security. Additionally, there has to be a good early retirement plan for employees with all workers allowed to join any workers' union of their choice.

Small scale gold mining organisations are further advised to consider all these variables as a set of predictors of organisational performance instead of viewing them separately. Primary, small scale mining organisations are encouraged to improve on employee training by paying attention to the level of competence of employees, assisting employees in developing skills needed in the future and offering rewards to anyone who upgrades their skills. Furthermore, small scale mining organisations ought to improve career development by offering a fair career development policy, caring about career development of employees, and providing information to employees about various promotion opportunities. Finally, small scale gold mining organisations are advised to improve on employee job security by offering open contracts and regular advancement opportunities, as well as putting in place policies to protect workers in case of disability, offering employees good early retirement plans and allowing employees to join any workers' union of their choice.

Implications for future studies

Only Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe was included in the sample. Therefore, it can be challenging to generalise the results. By expanding relevant studies to additional provinces within Zimbabwe and outside, future studies might be made better. Also, cross-sectional design limits causal inference, hence the study suggests longitudinal or qualitative follow-up. Only

employee perceptions were utilised in the current study to determine how employee training, career development and job security affect organisational performance. Future research may enhance the study's findings by incorporating managers' perspectives to evaluate the impact of employee training, career development and job security on organisational performance.

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Effective strategies to mitigate staff turnover in universities through the establishment of knowledge management units in human resources departments in Zimbabwe.

Mashokoh Admore¹, Matingwena Janeth², Mhlanga Fortunate³, Aron Gonye⁴, Pride Mkandatsama⁵ & Emmanuel Nhedzi⁶

¹ Great Zimbabwe University, Department of Scholarly Communication, Masvingo, Zimbabwe (Corresponding Author: amashokoh@gzu.ac.zw)

² Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences, Mutare, Zimbabwe

³ Harare Institute of Technology, Harare, Zimbabwe

⁴ Great Zimbabwe University, Department of Human Resources, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

⁵ Great Zimbabwe University, Department of Human Resources, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

⁶ Great Zimbabwe University, Department of Soil and Plant Sciences, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Abstract

The study explores effective strategies to mitigate staff turnover in Universities through the establishment of knowledge management units in human resources departments in Zimbabwe. The study tries to identify how knowledge management units can address the gap left by seasoned staff by leveraging knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and organisational learning. The total number of human resource personnel across these universities was 40, 18 at University A, 10 at University B, and 12 at University C. We selected a purposive sample of 13 participants, which included five from University A, four from University B, and four from University C. The study was guided by Knowledge Management Theory. The study indicated that there were no knowledge management units at these state universities. The study revealed that human resources personnel believed that KMUs can facilitate knowledge sharing among staff and address staff turnover challenges. The study established that by developing knowledge management units, universities can promote organisational learning and innovation, creating a healthy work environment. The study concluded that establishing KMUs in human resources departments can be an effective strategy to mitigate staff turnover in universities. The study recommended that university human resource departments should establish knowledge management units that facilitate

knowledge sharing among staff within different departments using technology to capture, share, transfer, retain, and preserve knowledge. The study further recommended that human resources departments should develop robust programmes that promote staff development to avoid losing critical knowledge from their employees. The study recommended that human resources departments should foster a culture that values knowledge sharing by utilising experienced employees to share their field experiences and pass knowledge to newer staff members.

Keywords: Human resources, Knowledge Management, Staff retention, Strategies, Universities

Introduction and Background

The increasing levels of turnover among staff in higher education, along with the potential of human capital, pose a serious threat to stability and sustainability for higher education institutions (Khalaf, Anter, & Abo Alnour, 2025). Institutions face the reality of having to advertise for new employees who may not understand the ways of the university system. Institutions need to be creative in order to retain talent as the academic system evolves and competition is intensified to find qualified professionals. Kossyva, Theriou, Aggelidis, and Sarigiannidis (2024) state that universities are emerging as important actors, and information retention is important. There are many creative HRM methods of HRM to retain relevant knowledge, including individual and organisational learning, motivation, the identification, management, and training of talent, etc. Human resource (HR) teams in various corporate organisations can aid knowledge retention significantly (Hadi & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019). According to Ntini and Dewah (2023), one promising possibility was the creation of knowledge management units within HR departments.

According to Majka (2024), knowledge management is a multidisciplinary concept that encompasses the strategies, processes, and tools used to identify, capture, distribute, and enable the effective use of knowledge within an organization. Knowledge Management seeks to harness the collective intelligence of an organization by systematically managing the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, thereby transforming raw data and information into actionable insights (Khalaf, Anter, & Abo Alnour, 2025). Through the methodical management of knowledge generation, diffusion, and application, knowledge management (KM) aims to transform raw data and information into actionable insights and harness the collective intellect of an organisation (Gates, 2024). Knowledge management

units are specialised teams or departments within an organisation that concentrate on the methodical management of information and knowledge, claim Gope, Elia, and Passiante (2018). According to Sivakumar & Kumar (2019), knowledge management departments can be extremely important in gathering, disseminating, and applying organisational knowledge.

Majka (2024) welcomes us to knowledge management, a cross-cutting field of study made up of processes, tactics, and tools for recognizing, capturing, sharing, and facilitating the appropriate use of knowledge in an organization. Essentially, knowledge management tries to take advantage of organizations' collective knowledge by managing how knowledge is created, shared, and utilized, while turning low-level raw data and information into actionable intelligence (Khalaf, Anter, & Abo Alnour, 2025). In essence, knowledge management (KM) looks to deliver actionable insights by managing knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, and knowledge utilization while capitalizing on organizations' collective intelligence (Gates, 2024). Knowledge management units are specialized teams or departments in organizations focused on organizing the systematic management of knowledge and information (Gope, Elia, and Passiante, 2018). For Sivakumar & Kumar (2019), a knowledge management department can be incredibly useful for gathering, sharing, and using organizational knowledge.

Also, gaps in the professional support and co-operation between staff and library directors (Hempel et al., 2013; 2019). Nyambok and Hongo (2022) concluded that supervisors of library employees should demonstrate good leadership qualities, support staff through professional development programs, mentoring, coaching, and supervise collaboratively, where staff are given a sense of professional space and ownership. This study highlighted the importance of library teams based on their feedback, as members lamented the void left by a member's departure. If libraries follow Nyambok and Hongo's (2022) suggestion of developing good professional development programmes, mentoring, and co-operative supervision, a new library team atmosphere or culture could emerge and succeed, considering the challenges associated with collaboration amongst staff and towards library users.

Despite the best efforts of Human Resource Departments to retain university employees. Saeed, Mohammad, Ahmed, Uddin, Mohammed, and Davi (2023) note that a permanent competitive benefit needs to be part of knowledge that should be part of knowledge. Managers should consider knowledge acquisition to reduce staff turnover. Knowledge

increases the increase in use of management system (KMS) information and communication technology. Santos, Carvalho, and Martins, (2024) posit that the establishment of KM units supports worldwide endeavours in higher education institutions to apply technology and innovation to their workforce management. The integration of KM into HR functions can streamline processes, improve communication, and foster a collaborative culture among staff. This is particularly relevant in Zimbabwe, where traditional approaches to HR may not adequately address the needs of a diverse and dynamic workforce.

The findings of Ntini and Dehwa (2023) at NUST found that the Registrar's Department operated without a knowledge management policy and knowledge strategies to retain critical knowledge that is lost when employees with critical knowledge leave, whether through resignations, death, or other circumstances; and with senior-level executives' support, funding to encourage knowledge retention is also very limited. The findings also assessed that coaching and mentoring, incentives, succession planning, and a lack of retention methods were all barriers to the transfer and retention of knowledge within the department.

Statement of the Problem

High turnover rates in Zimbabwean universities pose a major challenge to maintaining stability and quality in higher education. Retaining skilled faculty and administrative staff has become a widespread issue. This challenge disrupts academic programs, weakens institutional knowledge, and negatively affects student performance. According to Vakira et al. (2023), the turnover rate among university employees reached 18% between 2020 and 2021 in Zimbabwean state universities, indicating significant staff losses. A NewsDay Zimbabwe report (2022) further highlights this issue, stating that institutions like Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) have lost 50 lecturers, including five PhD holders, just since January of that year. The University of Zimbabwe (UZ), Midlands State University (MSU), and other state universities were facing similar problems. Current human resource practices have not been effective in reducing turnover or creating a workplace that promotes employee satisfaction and knowledge retention. As a result, these losses jeopardize the successful implementation of important educational initiatives like Education 5.0 and weaken the overall stability of Zimbabwe's higher education sector. This situation highlights the urgent need for research into new frameworks that can help reduce turnover through strategic methods. One

promising option is to create knowledge management units within university HR departments. These units would help systematically capture, share, and preserve institutional knowledge, ensuring continuity even when staff leave. Combining traditional retention strategies, such as improving career development pathways, fair pay, and working conditions, with strong knowledge management practices could improve employee engagement, cut turnover, and ultimately enhance the quality and stability of higher education in Zimbabwe.

Research objectives

- To identify the key factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities
- To assess the potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates
- To propose effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices

Theoretical Framework

The Knowledge Management Theory (Ikujiro Nonaka & Hirotaka Takeuchi, 1990) provides useful insight into the problem of turnover among employees in higher education (Patwary, Azam, Ashraf, Muhamed, Yusoff, Mehmood, & Rabiul, 2023), particularly if institutions have a use for a Knowledge Management unit to capture knowledge. According to Kim, Prempeh, Addai, and Wargo (2025), by providing a space in which people exchange ideas and experiences, colleges would cultivate happiness and employee engagement, reducing turnover since employees would feel valued and appreciate the university's mission. Differentiating between explicit (documented and easily transferable) and tacit (personal and context-specific) knowledge will help universities implement strategic approaches to capture both sorts of knowledge and identify robust training initiatives that will develop employees and/or support advanced employee training (Terhorst & Krumpholz, 2024). Moreover, knowledge management units can help create a culture of collaboration where staff support and share knowledge, strengthening relationships and community feeling (Chakraborty, Sharada & Anand, 2024). Furthermore, by addressing particular issues and enhancing general job satisfaction, knowledge management units can create focused retention strategies based on information obtained from employee input (Obeng, Arhinful, Mensah, & Owusu-Sarfo, 2024). Universities in Zimbabwe can therefore establish an organised method of information

exchange that not only improves organisational learning but also directly lowers employee turnover by implementing information Management Theory.

Literature Review

Factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities

The concept of retention of academic staff has piqued significant interest in a number of countries, and Zimbabwe is not immune. A study by Chivandire (2019) found that marital status, education level, training and development, workload, salaries, and opportunities for furthering one's career had significant influences on the retention of academic staff in Zimbabwean universities. They noted that education level and gender, though not married, did not significantly influence retention. In terms of conditions of high turnover, Paulos, Ndlovu, and Muriwo (2023) concluded that the causes of high turnover, according to employees' perceptions of their work environment, were reward structure, working conditions, inflexibility, poor work-life balance, inadequate resources, intrinsic motivations, and personal factors. They further established that the effects of employee turnover were typically associated with reduced productivity, reduced service quality, stress, work overload, damage to reputation, and low motivation. The research determined that the state universities in Zimbabwe are contending with high employee turnover, hampering their growth strategies, such that it is becoming increasingly uncertain towards the provision of expected services for national development. Another study by Vakira et al. (2023) found that the reasons for the exit of employees were inspired by many factors, such as poor career development, promotion, poor leadership practices, localization, and working conditions. Data also revealed that exit from the staff leads to work overload and high expenditure through recruitment and selection, and training of new employees, and training. However, data has shown that high staff turnover should first hire local people to combat top management, if they meet the requirements for the situation. Research is very important for academic researchers, human resource physicians, and management because it outlines strategies to reduce high employee turnover. In addition, there is limited research on employee turnover strategies in higher education institutions, especially in developing countries.

Potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates

According to Gates (2020), effective Knowledge Management (KM) practices significantly improved employee performance and employee satisfaction, which led to employee retention.

Effective KM practices increased linkages to have information and a better knowledge base, which improved employee productivity and efficiency. Because understanding KM practices involved developing a supportive climate - where employee job stress was lowered - and subsequently enhanced employee job satisfaction. In fact, Zayed et al. (2022) found that KM dimensions positively affected their measures of employee retention (Zayed et al., 2022). KM played an important role in the retention measures for KM as the knowledge acquisition, knowledge storage, and knowledge sharing - supervisor support, co-worker support and flexible tasks. In addition, the retention of major employees is important towards the long - term development of an organization (Mishra and Mishra, 2023). Organizational issues regarding successful employee retention involve training, time, and cost, and losing knowledge. Retention then revolves around the importance of linked factors (environment) as part of the holon of growth/individual's careers and compensatory policies (the biggest part to employee retention), and the level of interactivity of advisement/reward and support. Additionally, Saeed's (2017) study showed that there is significant evidence that knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge storage, and knowledge application have a positive effect that is statistically significant on employee performance, IT performance, and customer satisfaction. The results also showed that the knowledge management mechanism is a key factor for organisational performance and development.

Effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices

Leveraging knowledge management (KM) tools and practices can significantly enhance organizational efficiency and innovation. Abiola's (2023) study found employee engagement, productivity, innovation, customer satisfaction, and financial results could all be realized by creating a culture of knowledge sharing, the support of leadership, encouraging employee involvement, and effectively leveraging technology infrastructure. In the same vein, Tucker (2024) suggests that HR leaders should think about the employee perspective when designing retention plans, building a strong leadership presence, and a strong communication network amongst the members of the organization. Additionally, Kuuyelleh, Alqahtani, and Akanpaadgi (2022) found that work-related, contact, and regular cushioning of staff promoted retention amongst academic staff of Ghanaian technical universities. Further, Bradley (2020) suggests that leaders to intentionally develop employee advancement programmes to retain and recruit the best talent, which would minimize costs, maximize

revenue, and enhance employee satisfaction. Also, Haughton (2021) found that organizations needed to provide a positive work environment that shaped employees to share and retain knowledge, which would grow an organization's knowledge bank. Moreso, Pascoe (2021) found that dealing with workforce turnover impact included reasonable and alternative training modalities, the use of champions or volunteers, increased program alignment with organizational goals, and creating diverse funding portfolios. One of the methods of retention strategy is a knowledge retention policy. According to Goswami (2020), knowledge management policy sets the benchmarks for every employee when managing and evaluating performance. Dewah and Sibanda (2022) found that, ICT infrastructure allows for the rapid and immediate capture, transfer, sharing, storage, and dissemination of knowledge between employees, helps with knowledge retention, and gets the right knowledge to the right employees at the right time and place.

Materials and methods

In this study, we used a qualitative research design to gather detailed insights from human resource personnel at Zimbabwean state universities. Although there are over twelve state universities in Zimbabwe, we focused on three institutions: University A, University B, and University C. These were chosen for their diverse profiles, geographic locations, and the importance of their human resource functions. The total number of human resource personnel across these universities was 40: 18 at University A, 10 at University B, and 12 at University C. We selected a purposive sample of 13 participants, which included five from University A, four from University B, and four from University C. The selection criteria focused on individuals with direct involvement and expertise in human resource management. This ensured that the participants were knowledgeable and could provide in-depth perspectives relevant to the study's goals. We collected data until we reached thematic saturation, meaning no new significant themes or information emerged. This occurred after we completed interviews with all 13 participants. This sampling approach covered about 32.5% of the total HR personnel population at the three universities, balancing detailed insights with practical feasibility. Overall, this strategy and sample size allowed us to thoroughly explore human resource management challenges, especially those related to staff turnover, across different institutional contexts within Zimbabwe's state university sector.

Findings & Discussions

This section presented results that were obtained from 13 participants (human resources personnel) that were interviewed.

Key factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities

Based on the interviewee responses, the key factors contributing to staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities can be synthesized into several overarching themes. These themes reflect the multifaceted challenges faced by university employees, which collectively impact their job satisfaction, commitment, and ultimately retention.

Inadequate Compensation and Financial Incentives

A recurring theme is the lack of competitive salary packages and benefits, which leads skilled staff to seek better-paying opportunities elsewhere. Respondents highlighted how salary disparities and external offers, both from local competitors and international institutions, present significant “pull” factors, causing staff to leave for improved financial security and career prospects. This creates difficulties for universities in sustaining an experienced and stable workforce. Some of the statements by respondents were:

R.1 *“Many skilled staff members leave for a better salary package. The institution has trouble building long-term expertise and continuity.”*

R.9 *“Competitors offer higher pay, better benefits, causing skilled employees to leave.”*

R.10 *“Overseas assignments are seen as more secure and better paid.”*

Workload Pressure and Burnout

Several interviewees pointed to the escalating workload without commensurate support or resources, generating burnout, stress, and emotional exhaustion among staff. The strain of high work demands, coupled with limited personnel or infrastructure, reduces morale and productivity, pushing employees toward turnover. This was exemplified by statements like:

R.3 *“The volume of work is exploding, but no extra resources and support have been made available.”*

R.12 *“Staff feels overwhelmed and unsupported. Burnout has negative effects on mental health and productivity.”*

Lack of Professional Development Opportunities

A prominent theme is the absence of clear promotion pathways and skill development mechanisms. Staff feel “stuck” in their roles, leading to dissatisfaction and a sense that their contributions are undervalued. The lack of continuous training further exacerbates feelings of stagnation and discontent, as was stated by some respondents:

R.4 *“Few avenues for promotion as a result, many staff feel trapped.”*

R.11 *“Absence of opportunities to refresh and upgrade skills leads to reduced productivity and discontentment.”*

Organisational Culture

A toxic organizational culture fueled by ineffective leadership, lack of transparency, and poor communication emerged as key contributors to low morale and disengagement. Factors such as unclear roles, favouritism or nepotism, and withholding of important information erode trust, collaboration, and job satisfaction. Respondents had this to say:

R.6 *“Poor management practice creates a toxic atmosphere.”*

R.7 *“Lack of transparency breeds mistrust and disengagement”*

R.13 *“Favouritism kills the spirit of fairness and equity.”*

R.5 *“Uncertainty about responsibilities and rules undermines trust in leadership.”*

Work Conditions and Work-Life Imbalance

Rigid working hours and a lack of flexibility make it difficult for staff to balance personal and professional lives, contributing to stress and decreased job satisfaction. This theme highlights the importance of flexible work arrangements to enhance morale, reduce absenteeism, and increase productivity. One interviewee had this to say:

R.8 *“Inflexible working hours make it challenging for employees. Also, rigid schedules contribute to stress, decreased job satisfaction, and health problems”.*

The interviews with human resources providers at Zimbabwe's universities provided a complex set of issues that affect staff turnover, as retention difficulties are never simple in the higher education context. A key theme was inadequate remuneration because R.1 noted that many salaries are modest from many institutions, which makes it difficult for retention to

happen in a situation where some of the institutional staff think they are being undervalued personally and can justify switching institutions simply for more money. Al-suraihi et al. (2024) noted that it is important for institutions to consider reviewing their remuneration packages in the context of their regional range to give employees a position of job satisfaction with the option to stay or go due to prospective offers elsewhere. The issue raised by R.2, that insufficient resources significantly hinder staff performance, is a critical factor affecting employee effectiveness and job satisfaction in Zimbabwean universities. When staff do not have the right tools, equipment, or support from their institutions, their ability to meet job responsibilities is compromised. This, in turn, negatively impacts productivity and the quality of work. Research shows that the availability of resources directly influences employees' ability to deliver quality outcomes and feel motivated. For example, a study by Dewah and Sibanda (2022) in Southern African universities points out that resource constraints are a major barrier to effective knowledge management and HR functions. This results in challenging working conditions and reduced staff efficiency. Similarly, Mavodza (2010) notes that poor institutional support, including a lack of necessary infrastructure, hinders university staff in Zimbabwe from performing at their best. This scarcity can increase stress and burnout. Interviewees, R.3 and R.12, in the broader staff turnover discussion highlight that a heavy workload combined with insufficient resources leads to emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction. From the perspective of organizational behavior, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory suggests that having adequate physical and environmental resources is essential for higher-level motivational factors like achievement and recognition (Maslow, 1943). When basic work resources are missing, staff spend their energy trying to overcome these shortcomings instead of excelling in their roles. This lowers morale and raises the likelihood of turnover. Furthermore, limited resource availability restricts the adoption of innovative or effective practices. Staff cannot experiment or improve without the necessary physical and administrative support (Hassan, 2014). This connects to the social lab concept discussed earlier, where spaces for experimentation and learning require sufficient resources to thrive. Their absence hinders systemic improvements in social work and education. The return on investment is investing in tools to do their job, as part of staff retention is tied to job retention. R.2 stated, "It adds another layer of complexity to working in higher education. Besides no pay and lack of resources, R.3 stated institutional workload has increased without appropriate support. R.3 dismissed it as a work-life crisis; it adds serious amounts of stress and burnout." Vakira et al. (2023) highlighted that staff

turnover is partly explained by poor career progression and workloads, and has a significant impact on employee exit; turnover-related costs can occur because of recruitment and training costs.

Limitations on career advancement also emerged as a prominent theme, with R.4 and R.11 talking about limited pathways for advancement, and limited professional development opportunities demotivating staff and prompting them to seek advancement elsewhere. This aligns with Chivandire's (2019) study, which noted that career advancement, training, remuneration, and workload significantly affect retention of academic staff in Zimbabwean universities. In addition, R.5 noted that rapid changes to policy result in job insecurity, highlighting the role of stability and explicit communication to foster trust and commitment amongst staff. The negative management and communication practices (R.6 and R.7) perpetuate a work environment that is discouraging, and subsequently lead staff to feel undervalued, uncertain, and disconnected. This is reflected in Abiola's (2023) research, which called for leadership that supports knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and participation to increase productivity and improve retention.

The issues raised by respondents regarding work-life balance, nepotism, and competitive recruitment environments in Zimbabwean universities are consistent with findings from both local and regional studies. Respondent R.8's concern about rigid working hours adding to stress and reducing job satisfaction echoes findings by Mubanga and Nyanhete (2013), who studied the responsiveness of a Zimbabwean university to workers balancing family and work responsibilities. They found that inflexible work schedules and unnecessary overtime negatively affected employees' family lives and led to coping behaviors such as increased absenteeism. The study also highlighted the need for flexible work arrangements, including formalizing part-time work and establishing childcare facilities, to support staff well-being and morale. Similarly, research by Maunganidze and Bonnin (2025) confirms that especially women in Zimbabwean universities struggle with balancing work and caregiving responsibilities due to rigid institutional policies and lack of flexibility, leading to career sacrifices and burnout. Respondents R.9 and R.10 noted that better pay and career opportunities elsewhere, including overseas, drain skilled staff from universities. This is supported by regional literature, which highlights how competitive salaries and better benefits offered by other institutions and countries act as strong "pull" factors for academic and non-academic university staff (Dewah & Sibanda, 2022; Muleya & Maqubela, 2025).

Furthermore, the allure of overseas employment is well documented, with staff perceiving it as offering greater financial security and career advancement prospects (Munyoro et al., 2023). R.13's point about nepotism damaging fairness, morale, and efficiency is a critical organizational issue that has been observed in studies of Zimbabwean public institutions. Nepotism and favoritism undermine merit-based recruitment, cause dissatisfaction among staff, and hinder organizational performance (Mutage & Dewah, 2022; Mubanga & Nyanhete, 2013). The call for meritocratic processes aligns with broader recommendations across Southern Africa, emphasizing transparency and equity in HR practices to build trust and foster a positive workplace culture (Ogola, 2020). Studies from Southern Africa corroborate these challenges, noting that inflexible work environments, non-transparent recruitment processes, and competitive brain drain are widespread issues affecting staff retention in the higher education sector (Muleya & Maqubela, 2025; Dewah & Sibanda, 2022). For instance, South African universities report similar concerns about rigid institutional policies impeding work-life balance, and uncompetitive pay packages contributing to turnover, especially among women and early-career academics (Betsie & Mohlala, 2024).

The cumulative impact of the above factors is a serious problem for Zimbabwean universities, because high turnover disrupts continuity, increases attrition and training costs, and undermines institutional capacity to deliver quality education and research. Studies such as Vakira et al. (2023) and Chivandire (2019) reaffirm these results and specifically identify poor career progression and leadership to improve working conditions as important antecedents of turnover. Research by Manyeruke (2025) has shown that high teacher turnover negatively affects learners in a very impactful way through disruption to teaching and elements of quality. Therefore, in order to address these interconnected problems, a systemic approach is required, which includes competitive remuneration, adequate resources, job responsibilities, transparency, opportunities for career development, supportive leadership, flexible working arrangements, and hiring practices that promote equity. All of these factors buffer the impact of personal factors (such as turnover) by rebuilding trust and improving job satisfaction, ultimately stabilizing the academic workforce, developing and supporting Zimbabwean higher education institutions, and recognizing that stability through a quality workforce is important to sustainable growth and development.

Potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates

On the potential impact of knowledge management practices on employee retention rates, the following themes emerged:-

Feeling Valued

One interviewee indicated that:

R.13: "When knowledge is shared freely, employees will feel a stronger connection to the company and feel more valued as an employee, which results in staff retention".

Access to Information

Another respondent opined that:-

R.12: "Access to information and resources is crucial for staff to perform their jobs better and to remain less frustrated in the process of completing their work."

Continuous Training

One of the interviewees shared this:-

R.11: "Regular training sessions not only enhance skills but also show employees that the organization is invested in their growth."

Mentorship and Support Systems

One of the respondents had this to say:-

R.10: "Mentorship fosters strong relationships and provides guidance, making employees more likely to remain with the organization."

Collaboration Tools

Another responded and commented that:-

R.9: "Effective collaboration tools facilitate teamwork and communication, creating a sense of belonging that enhances retention."

Feedback Systems

One of the interviewees opined that: -

R.8: "Having systems in place for feedback allows employees to voice their concerns and feel heard, which improves job satisfaction."

Knowledge Sharing Culture

A respondent had this to say:

R.7: "A culture that promotes knowledge sharing and learning instills loyalty and commitment among employees. Such a culture motivates employees to contribute actively and remain dedicated to the organization."

Ideas and Innovation

Another respondent adds that: -

R.6: "When staff see their creativity recognized and implemented, it boosts their confidence and engagement. This sense of ownership drives loyalty and reduces turnover."

Recognition of Expertise

One interviewee indicated that:

R.5: "Recognizing employees' knowledge and expertise boosts their morale and encourages them to stay longer."

Employee Engagement

An interviewee had this to say:

R.4: "When staff believe their skills and insights contribute meaningfully, they develop a stronger attachment to the organization. This engagement leads to greater job satisfaction and loyalty."

Knowledge Management Units

Another respondent opined that: -

R.3 "When there is a knowledge management unit in the university HR department, it will identify training needs for newly employed staff, leading to a smooth transition of workflows."

Skills Development

As stated by one of the respondents: -

R.2. "Supporting staff with skills development helps employees contribute to the objectives of the organization, ensuring efficiency across different departments."

Knowledge Sharing

One of the interviewees opined that:-

R.1. "Knowledge management allows different sections, units, and departments to work as a team; this teamwork fosters a cohesive environment where everyone works towards common goals."

The interview responses regarding the impact of knowledge management (KM) practices on employee retention strongly emphasize the vital role that effective knowledge sharing, organizational learning, and supportive work environments play in retaining staff. This qualitative data is consistent with existing scholarly literature, like Saeed (2017), storage, and application improve employee performance, IT performance, and ultimate customer satisfaction, and support the overall development of the organization. Through Interview 13, free knowledge sharing meant employees felt more connected and valued, and this led to belongingness, a primary driver of retention. Here again, Interview 12 showed employees can rely on easy access to information and resources to perform well, and are saved from frustration, which increases job satisfaction and loyalty. Interview 11 confirmed that training on a consistent basis not only increases employee skill, but it demonstrated the organization is interested in staff development. This all contributes to employee morale and retention, while also supporting Mishra and Mishra (2023), who acknowledged as important happen that keeping key employees is a must for organizational long-term success. Mentorship, highlighted in Interview 10, develops interpersonal relationships while providing encouragement and guidance, which vastly improves job satisfaction and loyalty. Interview 9 highlighted that a good collaborative tool can improve an employee team with the collaborative team and enable better communication, which creates a sense of belonging and engagement. Tucker (2024) framed an employee-focused retention strategy with a requirement to develop a strong communication and leadership network.

Interview 8 helped to impress upon a number of the practical recommendations presented in the study. Participants spoke about feedback mechanisms that prompt employees to speak up about concerns and feel validated in their opinions, which ultimately enhanced employee satisfaction and loyalty. Interview 7 highlighted the need to create a culture of knowledge sharing and continual learning. This is consistent with Zayed et al. (2022), who state that knowledge management dimensions play a significant role in improving employee retention. Encouraging innovation and recognizing expertise, as reported by Interview 6 and Interview 5, both contributed to employees feeling seen and valued, which are vital to retention. Engagement discussed in Interview 4 is positively correlated with retention and is supported by Abiola's (2023) suggestion that employee engagement relates to knowledge sharing, leadership support for KM initiatives, and organization-related infrastructure & technology. As discussed in Interview 3, a dedicated knowledge management unit in HR can help the organization understand training gaps for each employee to help them adapt to pre-existing processes and encourage HR to identify ways to promote a seamless experience for new employees and sustain the workflow. Interview 2 emphasized that when employees have the skills they need, they have a better understanding of how the work connects to HR organizational goals, and to goals and a shared purpose with the organization. Interview 1 stated that KM supports collaborative work across departments, which minimizes duplication and develops a collaborative culture that supports retention.

Extensive literature supports the idea that knowledge management (KM) is a key resource for gaining and maintaining competitive advantage in organizations. For example, Ahumada Tello and Perusquia Velasco (2023) argue that effective KM depends on properly combining human capital, communication, technology, and innovation. Together, these factors drive ongoing improvement and competitive growth. They state that organizations that utilize KM create lasting value by capturing and sharing crucial knowledge, allowing them to maintain performance even as employees leave.

Similarly, Delong (2004) and McCann & Buckner (2004) point out that companies that focus on developing and keeping knowledge workers and promoting leadership-driven learning cultures integrate KM into HR practices. This approach improves organizational performance and resilience. Iyiola (2024) adds that KM strategies that foster trust, openness, and collaboration help employees feel valued, which supports knowledge retention and loyalty to the organization.

Empirical work by Abiwu and Martins (2023) directly connects talent management with KM, showing that integrated KM practices like encouraging knowledge sharing, improving resource access, enhancing training, providing mentoring, implementing feedback systems, and recognizing contributions positively impact work-life balance and employee retention, particularly in higher education.

These findings also match broader research showing that KM boosts innovation, productivity, and job satisfaction. Together, these lead to lower turnover rates and promote organizational growth (Echeverri et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2014). In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) context, Dewah and Sibanda (2022) discovered that universities' adoption of KM was positively linked with staff collaboration, learning culture, and retention, even though they faced resource challenges. Studies in Zimbabwe support these observations: Mutage and Dewah (2022) found that universities actively implementing KM policies supporting training and knowledge sharing saw improvements in staff morale and loyalty, resulting in fewer employees leaving. In contrast, when KM culture is weak and infrastructure is lacking, staff disengagement and turnover increase (Ncube & Mbawuya, 2022).

Moreover, HR departments in Zimbabwe that promote mentoring, ongoing professional development, and open feedback improve employee integration and satisfaction. This aligns with global evidence about KM's role in fostering positive employee experiences (Brightwheel, 2025; Abiwu & Martins, 2023). Thus, applying KM within HR creates supportive workplaces, enhancing performance and loyalty through consistent knowledge sharing and social connections. This overview highlights that incorporating KM into HR strengthens individual careers while also building resilience and a lasting competitive edge in Zimbabwean universities and similar environments.

Reasons for the low adoption of knowledge management by human resources departments in Zimbabwean universities

The low adoption of knowledge management (KM) by human resources (HR) departments in Zimbabwean universities can be grouped into several key themes supported by quotes and findings from research:

Lack of Integration and Coordination among Departments

HR departments often work in silos, with limited awareness or collaboration with other departments like ICT, Research Boards, and Libraries, which inhibits effective KM practices, as was stated by an interviewee who had this to say:

R 16 *"The two departments act as autonomous entities, with each department not aware of what the other department is doing. On the other hand, HR departments do not make use of the ICT department to promote knowledge socialisation, combination, or internalisation."*

Weak Knowledge-Sharing Culture

There is no conducive organizational culture for promoting knowledge sharing, leading to knowledge hoarding and reluctance by staff to share expertise. This was opined by one of the interviewees:-

R.13 *"The HR department is not doing enough in shaping the organisational culture to be amenable to knowledge sharing"*

Inadequate Training and Use of External Resources

HR training policies focus primarily on external trainers, limiting internal knowledge transfer; many employees have not participated in relevant KM training. Another interviewee adds that:-

R.9 *"Training strategy does not consider locally-based training experts as resource persons."*

Lack of Strategic Policies and Incentives

There is an absence of clear policies and rewards to encourage knowledge sharing and management, weakening the KM initiatives. One of the respondents gave the following comment: - R.7. *"All universities surveyed did not have a rewards management policy, and knowledge sharing culture does not exist."*

Limited Access to Knowledge Resources and Infrastructure

Challenges exist in library services, ICT infrastructure, and access to materials, hindering knowledge combination and internalization. A respondent stated that: - R.17. *"The library is failing to deliver, and the cost of acquiring local research publications is hindered by bureaucratic red tape."*

The low adoption of knowledge management (KM) by human resources (HR) departments in Zimbabwean universities relates closely to a mix of organizational, cultural, infrastructural, and policy challenges. These issues have similarities found worldwide, in Southern Africa (SADC), and specifically in Zimbabwe. A key factor is the lack of integration and coordination between departments, especially between HR and ICT. They mostly function as separate entities that do not support one another in sharing or internalizing knowledge. One respondent pointed out, “The two departments act as autonomous entities, with each department not aware of what the other department is doing. HR departments do not make use of the ICT department to promote knowledge socialization, combination, or internalization” (Nyamubarwa, 2013). This disconnect aligns with global research that shows effective KM depends on cooperation across different units to build knowledge-sharing communities (Borghoff, 2008; Lengnick-Hall & Lengnick-Hall, 2005).

Another major barrier is a weak organizational culture that discourages knowledge sharing, leading to knowledge hoarding and reluctance among staff to share their expertise. A respondent stated, “The HR department is not doing enough in shaping the organizational culture to be amenable to knowledge sharing,” highlighting this local cultural issue (Mutage & Dewah, 2022). Similar problems with traditional hierarchies and cultural barriers limiting knowledge exchange have been well documented in African universities (Ogola, 2020).

Additionally, inadequate training practices persist, where HR policies depend heavily on external trainers instead of utilizing local knowledge workers. This approach limits internal capacity building. One respondent noted, “Training strategy does not consider locally-based training experts as resource persons” (Nyamubarwa, 2013). This reflects findings that about 68% of staff have never taken part in KM training, which is crucial for the processes of knowledge socialization and internalization described in Nonaka’s SECI model (Nonaka et al., 2000). The lack of ongoing, context-specific training hampers KM adoption across African institutions (Mavodza, 2010).

Strategic policy gaps are also apparent, as universities lack formal incentives or rewards to promote knowledge sharing. This weakens motivation for KM. The claim that “All universities surveyed did not have a rewards management policy, and knowledge sharing culture does not exist” underscores this point (Nyamubarwa, 2013). Globally, Alavi and Leidner (2001) stress that established policies and rewards are critical for maintaining KM engagement.

Finally, limited access to current knowledge resources and ICT infrastructure, along with bureaucratic obstacles, severely impairs KM efforts. Respondents mentioned, “The library is failing to deliver, and the cost of acquiring local research publications is hindered by bureaucratic red tape” (Nyamubarwa, 2013). Similar issues with bibliographic and ICT resources are noted in Zimbabwean academic libraries (Mavodza, 2010) and affect many African universities (Ogola, 2020). These limitations hinder the combination and internalization of knowledge essential for knowledge-based HR functions.

These challenges in Zimbabwe reflect broader issues in the Southern African region, where fragmented departmental coordination, poor KM cultures, lack of local training capacity, absence of policy incentives, and limited infrastructure are common barriers to KM adoption in universities (Dewah & Sibanda, 2022). Addressing these interconnected challenges requires Zimbabwean universities to implement comprehensive solutions: fostering collaboration between departments, promoting a culture of knowledge sharing, investing in ongoing local training, establishing clear KM policies with rewards, and enhancing knowledge infrastructure to boost HR effectiveness and overall institutional performance.

Effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices

When interviewed on the effective strategies to leverage knowledge management tools and practices, the following themes emerged:-

Organized and Accessible Knowledge Systems Improve Productivity

One of the interviewees had this to say:

R.1: "Such a system reduces duplication of effort and promotes consistency in the work performed across the organization. When knowledge is organized and accessible, employees can make informed decisions and collaborate more effectively, ultimately improving overall productivity."

Regular and Ongoing Training to Maximize Usage

Another interviewee shared this: -

R.2: "Conducting regular training sessions are vital to help employees understand how to effectively use knowledge management tools"

Fostering a Knowledge-Sharing Organizational Culture

A respondent posits that: -

R.3: "Fostering an organizational culture that values knowledge sharing motivates employees to contribute their insights openly."

Implementing Collaboration Tools for Communication and Teamwork

One of the respondents revealed that: -

R.4: "Implementing collaboration tools is crucial as they facilitate seamless communication and teamwork among employees. When employees can easily share ideas and information, it leads to more effective problem solving and a stronger sense of community."

Establishing Feedback Loops

A respondent said this: -

R.5: "Establishing feedback loops allows the organization to refine its knowledge management practices based on real employee experiences and needs. This iterative process helps create a more user- friendly system that truly supports employees in their daily work."

Providing Incentives

One of the respondents adds that: -

R.6: "Providing incentives for employees who actively share knowledge can significantly boost engagement and participation. Recognition and rewards create motivation for staff to contribute valuable information and best practices. Mentorship builds strong relationships and helps new staff acclimate quickly, gaining the skills and insights needed to perform well. This approach strengthens the organization's capacity to sustain expertise over time."

Keeping the Knowledge Base Current and Reliable

As stated by a respondent: -

R.8: "It is crucial to keep the knowledge base current by regularly reviewing and updating content to reflect the latest information. This not only enriches the knowledge base but also fosters a culture where knowledge sharing is seen as a valued and rewarded behaviour."

Mentorship Initiatives to Ensure Knowledge Continuity

A participant disclosed that: -

R.7: "Setting up mentorship initiatives is an effective way to transfer knowledge from experienced employees to newer ones, ensuring continuity and reducing knowledge loss"

Integration of KM Practices into Daily Workflows

A respondent communicated the following: -

R.9: "Integrating knowledge management practices into daily workflows ensures that employees use these tools as part of their routine tasks."

R.12: "Departments should actively integrate knowledge management practices into their daily workflows to encourage employees to use these tools regularly".

Strong Leadership Support and Commitment

Respondents expressed the view that:

R.10: "Strong support from leadership is essential to promote knowledge management initiatives and encourage their adoption across the organization. Their visible commitment inspires employees to embrace knowledge management practices enthusiastically."

R.13: "There is a pressing need to secure strong support from leadership to promote knowledge management initiatives, encouraging widespread adoption and engagement across the organization. With committed leaders, knowledge management becomes a strategic priority that drives continuous improvement."

Leveraging the Expertise of Seasoned Staff for Onboarding

A participant stated that:

R.11: "The involvement of experts or seasoned staff members to guide newly recruited employees is critical for helping them fit into their roles with adequate skills. Experienced staff can provide practical insights and hands-on training that accelerates the learning curve. This guidance ensures that new employees become productive more quickly and feel supported during their transition."

The interviewees' insights on effective strategies to leverage knowledge management (KM) tools and practices align well with findings from contemporary KM literature across global, regional (SADC), and Zimbabwean contexts, emphasizing a holistic, integrated approach to KM implementation. The establishment of organized and accessible knowledge systems that minimize duplication and foster consistent practices, as highlighted by R.1, resonates with Ahumada Tello and Perusquia Velasco (2023), who emphasize the critical role of centralized knowledge repositories in enabling informed decision-making and collaboration. When knowledge is easily accessible, organizational productivity improves, as supported by Alavi and Leidner (2001), who advise integrating robust knowledge storage systems to enhance operational consistency.

The necessity of regular and ongoing training (R.2) to maximize staff competence with KM tools is well documented. Ahmad et al. (2022) argue that continuous capacity building ensures staff can effectively use KM platforms and stay current with evolving technology, preventing underutilization. This is echoed regionally by Dewah and Sibanda (2022), who found that Zimbabwean universities investing in continuous KM training observed higher adoption rates. Similarly, fostering a knowledge-sharing organizational culture (R.3) is a recurrent theme; Mutage and Dewah (2022) note that creating environments where employees feel valued for their contributions stimulates engagement, collaboration, and innovation, a finding consistent with Yang et al. (2014) on how culture drives KM performance.

Collaboration tools (R.4) supporting seamless communication underscore the technological enablers discussed by Borghoff (2008), who notes that technology must facilitate interaction to unlock collective intelligence. Additionally, the role of feedback loops (R.5) in refining KM practices aligns with Nonaka et al.'s (2000) SECI model, emphasizing the iterative knowledge conversion processes critical for adaptive KM systems. Providing incentives and recognition (R.6), including mentorship programs (R.7, R.11), links directly to Abiwu and Martins (2023), who found that such practices strengthen employee motivation, reduce knowledge loss, and improve retention, a correlation echoed in Zimbabwean higher education, where mentoring assists staff integration (Mutage & Dewah, 2022).

The importance of keeping the knowledge base current and reliable (R.8) is essential, as outdated knowledge diminishes trust in KM platforms (Echeverri et al., 2018). Embedding KM into daily workflows (R.9, R.12) transforms knowledge sharing from a supplemental

task to a core activity, boosting efficiency; this is affirmed by Dewah and Sibanda's (2022) regional study, highlighting that routine KM practice fosters collaboration and improves organizational outcomes. Vital to all is strong leadership support and commitment (R.10, R.13), which Koufopoulos et al. (2010) and Alavi and Leidner (2001) identify as critical for legitimizing KM efforts, securing resources, and overcoming resistance, observations corroborated in Zimbabwe (Nyamubarwa, 2013). Lastly, leveraging the expertise of seasoned staff for onboarding (R.11) is consistent with global best practices promoting knowledge continuity and rapid acclimation of new employees (Wang & Noe, 2010). Together, these themes reflect a multidimensional KM strategy advocated in the literature, where technology, culture, leadership, continuous learning, and process integration interlock to optimize knowledge assets and workforce performance. In Zimbabwe and the wider SADC region, studies by Dewah and Sibanda (2022) and Mutage and Dewah (2022) confirm that universities adopting these integrated KM strategies, including ongoing training, leadership buy-in, collaborative platforms, and mentorship experience better KM uptake and employee retention. This parallels global findings (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Nonaka et al., 2000), affirming that KM deployment is not merely technological but socio-technical, requiring aligned human and organizational systems.

Conclusions

The study concludes that to address the challenge of high staff turnover in Zimbabwean universities, it is important for these institutions to establish KM units within human resources. By fostering a knowledge-sharing culture, ensuring access to knowledge, and offering regular training and mentoring, they can boost employee motivation, institutional commitment, and retention. The researchers highlight that the lack of formal institutional KM procedures such as mentoring, organized training, succession planning, and incentives like monetary or non-monetary rewards may be the biggest obstacle to retaining skilled professionals. These gaps particularly hinder the transfer of organizational tacit and explicit knowledge, which is fundamental to KM theory and crucial for organizational learning and adaptability. Additional factors that support learning and performance include robust feedback mechanisms and leadership practices that foster a positive environment, making employees feel valued, heard, and connected to the organization. Consequently, universities can reduce turnover by implementing more comprehensive KM activities aligned with these dimensions, which motivate, retain, and enhance the performance of an academically skilled

workforce. This approach aligns with general organizational development principles, which view knowledge creation, sharing, and application as dynamic processes that, when effectively managed, contribute significantly to the strength and competitiveness of the organization.

The implication of the study

The study shows how important it is for human resources departments in Zimbabwean universities to have specific knowledge management (KM) units. These units play a key role in lowering employee turnover. In practice, KM units help universities keep skilled workers by seeing their contributions as essential to the institution's success. They also support career growth and offer a positive work environment that increases job satisfaction and loyalty. This is especially important in Zimbabwean higher education, where high staff turnover is causing the loss of important knowledge. Without proper KM structures like mentoring, structured training, succession planning, and reward-based retention programs, universities face big challenges (Ntini & Dewah, 2023). On a theoretical note, this study is based on Knowledge Management Theory, as KM incorporates dynamic processes focusing on capturing, sharing, and applying tacit and explicit knowledge to improve organizational learning, flexibility, and performance (Du Plessis, 2005). Through strategically employing KM, universities can gain a competitive advantage through enhanced employee engagement and institutional reputation, while achieving strategic objectives in a timely way. With the burgeoning political, social, and economic challenges of the 21st century, institutions can assume leadership in KM by leveraging the related and significant advantages accompanying an integrated ICT infrastructure that has the potential to disseminate and store knowledge as rapidly as possible, thereby ensuring the right information reaches the right people at the right time (Dewah & Sibanda, 2022).

Additionally, establishing a culture of continuous learning and the sharing of knowledge is consistent with Haughton (2021) and Zayed et al. (2022), who related culture building to the enhancement of retention and innovation. It also reinforces the significance of leadership commitment, effective feedback loops, and tracking mechanisms, as they are important for sustaining KM initiatives as well as building an environment where employees feel they are a part of the ongoing learning process and valued factors regardless of their role (Abiola, 2023; Tucker, 2024). Adopting a holistic KM framework that includes formal mentoring, training, succession planning, incentives, and support from the institution is critical if universities in

Zimbabwe are to eliminate turnover or attrition while retaining expertise and enhancing greater employee engagement, scalability, and flexibility that ultimately leads to better decision making in a complex, changing educational environment.

Recommendations

The study recommends that: -

- University human resource departments should integrate KM activities such as knowledge sharing, training, mentoring, and documentation into routine HR practices to facilitate knowledge sharing among staff within different departments using technology to capture, share, transfer, retain, and preserve knowledge
- Human resources departments should identify and address training needs through workshops, seminars, and on-the-job training to improve professional knowledge, working practices, and career development prospects
- Human resources departments should capture recorded seminars, talks, and workshops in a centralized digital repository so that knowledge sharing is accessible to all staff anytime, supporting asynchronous learning and future onboarding.
- Human resources departments should lobby for financial support that will see the promotion of knowledge management through stand-alone budgets towards mitigating staff turnover.

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Entrepreneurial Leadership as a Catalyst for Human Resource Development in Resource-Constrained SMEs in Africa: A Zimbabwean Perspective

Mavunga Getrude

Zimbabwe Open University, Department of Business Management, Faculty of Commerce.

(Corresponding author: mavungag@zou.ac.zw)

Abstract

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies face acute resource constraints that preclude the adoption of conventional, formalized Human Resource Development (HRD) models. Drawing on Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) and Afrocentric leadership philosophies, this paper develops an integrative conceptual framework explaining how entrepreneurial leadership catalyses HRD in Zimbabwean SMEs. Through a systematic literature synthesis of 85 core sources spanning leadership theory, indigenous African perspectives, and empirical studies of informal learning, the research identifies four leadership functions (adaptive experimentation, social-capital mobilization, emergent structure building, and ubuntu-infused relationality) that give rise to informal HRD mechanisms such as experiential learning cycles, peer coaching, problem-solving forums, and narrative exchange. These processes generate distributed learning capacity, adaptive competence, and cultural–structural alignment, offering a robust alternative to Western paradigms of formal training and hierarchical development. The framework not only underscores the cultural authenticity and resource efficiency of emergent HRD in resource-scarce contexts but also provides actionable insights for SME owner-managers and policymakers. The paper concludes by proposing a mixed-methods empirical validation of the model combining structured surveys with in-depth interviews to test its propositions and refine its constructs, thereby advancing both scholarly understanding and practical pathways for sustainable SME growth in Zimbabwe and similar emerging economies.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Leadership; HRD; SMEs

Introduction

Human Resource Development (HRD) is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone for enhancing organizational performance, fostering innovation, and ensuring long-term sustainability (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). In Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), particularly within emerging economies such as Zimbabwe, the importance of HRD is magnified by the sector's potential to drive economic growth, alleviate poverty, and generate employment (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020; Etuk et al., 2014). Notwithstanding this, many SMEs operating in resource-constrained environments struggle to operationalise HRD practices due to limited financial and infrastructural resources, insufficient training facilities, and weak institutional support (Nolan & Harney, 2024; Purgał-Popiela, 2024).

Furthermore, in Zimbabwe, the SME landscape is dominated by informal enterprises that often lack structured HR departments or standardized training programs (Nyamubarwa & Chipunza, 2021; Purgał-Popiela, 2024), which further complicates HRD efforts in the firms. As a result, employees frequently lack the skills and competencies necessary to respond to evolving market demands, constraining both organizational growth and wider economic competitiveness in the region.

Despite these challenges, Zimbabwean SMEs exhibit remarkable resilience and adaptability. This resilience is frequently attributed to the entrepreneurial leadership of owner-managers, who navigate constraints through innovation, proactiveness, and calculated risk-taking (Mashavira et al., 2021; Nyamubarwa & Chipunza, 2021; Purgał-Popiela, 2024). In many cases, leadership in Zimbabwean enterprises is also informed by indigenous philosophies, most notably the concept of ubuntu, which emphasizes communal relationships, mutual respect, and collective well-being (Nemashakwe et al., 2022; Nleya, 2020). When integrated into organizational practices, ubuntu nurtures a relational leadership approach whereby owner-managers prioritize mentorship, knowledge sharing, and employee empowerment even in the absence of formal HR structures (Nemashakwe et al., 2022). Similarly, the Afrocentric Effective Leadership (AEL) model highlights the need to align leadership styles with African cultural values to boost organizational effectiveness in SMEs (Nemashakwe et al., 2023). Together, these culturally grounded leadership frameworks offer adaptive strategies that compensate for the lack of formal HRD mechanisms, fostering a supportive culture of continuous learning and innovation.

By illuminating these adaptive leadership practices, this paper explores the intersection between entrepreneurial leadership and HRD in resource-constrained SMEs across emerging economies, with a particular focus on Zimbabwe. Drawing on literature from both Human Resource Management and entrepreneurship, the study develops a conceptual framework that explains the concept of HRD from the perspective of resource-constrained economies like Zimbabwe. In short, this paper seeks to pursue three specific objectives:

1. *Investigate how entrepreneurial leadership behaviours in Zimbabwean SMEs give rise to informal HRD mechanisms.*
2. *Develop an integrative conceptual framework that synthesizes Complexity Leadership Theory with Afrocentric leadership models to explain HRD practices and processes in SMEs in Zimbabwe and similar emerging economies.*
3. *Derive actionable recommendations for practitioners and policymakers aimed at nurturing resilient, culturally congruent HRD practices in SMEs across Zimbabwe and similar emerging economies.*

By pursuing these objectives, this study seeks to delineate a context-sensitive approach to HRD that departs from imported, Westernised training paradigms and offers both a novel scholarly contribution and practical guidance for resource-scarce settings like Zimbabwe.

Materials and Methods

This study adopts a systematic literature review approach, guided by the PRISMA framework, to develop and substantiate a conceptual model linking entrepreneurial leadership to HRD in resource-constrained SMEs in Zimbabwe. The review aims to synthesize existing knowledge on (1) complexity leadership theory (CLT) and distributed leadership, (2) Afrocentric leadership philosophies, and (3) informal HRD mechanisms within SMEs, particularly in Southern Africa.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

A comprehensive search was conducted across three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and African Journals Online (AJOL). The search strategy combined keywords and Boolean operators such as: “entrepreneurial leadership” AND “HRD” AND “SMEs” AND “Zimbabwe”, “Afrocentric leadership”, “informal learning”, and “resource-constrained”. Searches were limited to publications between January 2000 and December 2024 to ensure relevance and currency.

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion criteria were defined to capture both empirical and theoretical contributions that address leadership and HRD in SMEs within African or comparable emerging-economy contexts. Specifically, studies were included if they:

- Were published in peer-reviewed journals, books, or reputable reports.
- Focused on leadership models relevant to SMEs.
- Discussed HRD practices, especially informal mechanisms.
- Were written in English.

Exclusion criteria eliminated:

- Studies focused exclusively on large corporations or formal HR departments.
- Non-English publications.
- Conference abstracts without full-text availability.
- Screening and Selection Process

The initial search yielded 312 records. After removing duplicates, 278 unique records remained. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, resulting in 142 articles for full-text review. Following detailed evaluation against the inclusion criteria, 85 core sources were retained for synthesis.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Key data were extracted using a structured coding sheet capturing publication type, context, leadership model, HRD mechanisms, and relevance to Zimbabwean SMEs. Thematic synthesis was employed to identify recurring patterns and conceptual linkages. Findings informed the development of a conceptual framework that positions entrepreneurial leadership as a catalyst for HRD in resource-constrained environments.

Analytic Approach

The thematic coding process was used to extract and categorize concepts related to leadership functions (adaptive, enabling, administrative), Afrocentric values, and HRD practices (experiential learning, peer coaching, etc.). Through iterative comparison, the researchers identified points of theoretical convergence and cultural specificity, which informed the integrative CLT–Ubuntu model.

Future Empirical Validation

While this study focuses on conceptual development, the framework is explicitly designed to guide subsequent empirical validation. Planned follow-on research will employ mixed-methods field studies, surveys, and in-depth interviews with Zimbabwean SME owner-managers and employees to test the model's propositions and refine its constructs.

HRD in emerging economies

Human Resource Development (HRD) serves as a crucial driver for organizational performance, innovation, and sustainability across global enterprises (Armstrong, 2014). However, in emerging economies, the application of conventional Western HRD models often clashes with local realities characterized by informal economies, limited infrastructure, and distinct cultural norms (Nyamubarwa & Chipunza, 2019; Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020). As a result, SMEs in Zimbabwe and in other emerging economies frequently bypass formal HRD frameworks in favour of contextually relevant, resource-efficient approaches (Nemashakwe et al., 2023).

Instead, in emerging economies, SMEs tend to rely on non-formal learning strategies to build workforce capabilities, particularly where formal training infrastructure is limited or unaffordable (Matsongoni & Mutambara, 2018; Purgał-Popieła, 2024). These strategies are deeply embedded in local cultural practices and economic realities, offering adaptive and cost-effective alternatives to traditional HRD models. Tshuma et al. (2021) report that experiential learning is a prominent approach, especially in rural family-owned enterprises in Malawi and Zimbabwe, where employees acquire skills through hands-on problem-solving, trial-and-error, and reflective practice integrated into their daily work operations. This form of learning is not only practical but also aligns with indigenous knowledge systems that prioritize learning by doing.

Mentorship and peer coaching also play a vital role in workforce development within SMEs in emerging economies. In Zambia, for instance, over time, informal mentorship has been institutionalized to facilitate real-time knowledge transfer and business skill development. This form of mentorship, documented by DSIK (2023), emphasizes the value of tacit knowledge sharing, resilience-building, and entrepreneurial guidance in resource-constrained environments. Such informal, context-sensitive learning mechanisms are particularly effective

where formal HR structures are lacking. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, entrepreneurial leaders often function as on-the-job coaches, guiding employees through complex tasks and fostering a culture of collective learning (Tinarwo, 2016). These mentorship practices not only reinforce organizational memory but also align with communal values and indigenous knowledge systems that prioritize experiential and relational learning in developing human capital in SMEs.

Another innovative approach to workforce development in SMEs operating in resource-constrained economies is the use of collaborative learning strategies such as action learning. For instance, Zulu-Chisanga et al. (2023) highlight how African SMEs, particularly in South Africa, foster resilience and sustainability through participatory learning and peer collaboration, which align with indigenous communal values and the ethos of Ubuntu philosophy. These practices are not only culturally congruent but also practical in environments where formal training infrastructure is lacking (Nleya, 2020). Moreover, such approaches reflect a broader trend in African HRD, where socio-cultural dynamics, resource constraints, and the need for adaptive learning models shape how skills are developed and transferred (Zulu-Chisanga et al., 2023).

Constraints to Human Resource Development in Zimbabwean SMEs

Human Resource Development (HRD) within Zimbabwe's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is significantly constrained by a constellation of structural and contextual challenges. These challenges are deeply embedded in the country's socio-economic and political landscape, and they collectively hinder the institutionalization of formal HRD systems. Chief among these constraints is the persistent lack of financial capital. Zimbabwean SMEs typically operate with limited working capital and face considerable barriers to accessing affordable credit, largely due to perceptions of high risk and inadequate collateral (Canuto et al., 2024). This financial fragility restricts their ability to invest in structured training programs, career development pathways, or knowledge management systems.

Compounding the financial limitations is the high rate of employee turnover, particularly among skilled and semi-skilled workers. The phenomenon of skills flight continues to erode the talent base of SMEs, as employees often migrate to larger corporations, non-governmental organizations, or international markets in pursuit of better remuneration and career prospects

(Nyoni & Bonga, 2018). This transient workforce undermines the sustainability of HRD investments, as firms are unable to retain the human capital they develop. Likewise, infrastructural deficits, including unreliable electricity and water supply, as well as bureaucratic inefficiencies, further constrain operational capacity and limit the feasibility of formal HRD initiatives in SMEs in emerging economies (Muzari & Jambwa, 2014; Matsongoni & Mutambara, 2018).

In response to these systemic barriers, many SMEs adopt informal and adaptive HRD strategies. Entrepreneurial leadership has emerged as a critical enabler in this regard. SME owner-managers often compensate for the absence of formal HR structures by fostering flexible, culturally grounded learning environments. Drawing on indigenous philosophies such as Ubuntu, these leaders promote mentorship, experiential learning, and peer coaching as viable alternatives to conventional HRD mechanisms (Nemashakwe et al., 2023). Such approaches not only build internal capacity but also reflect a broader shift toward context-sensitive HRD models that are aligned with the socio-economic realities of Zimbabwe's SME sector.

Role of Entrepreneurial Leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership, which is characterized by innovation, adaptability, and a proactive mindset, has emerged as a critical factor in navigating the complexities of resource-constrained environments (Abdalla & Nakagawa, 2022). In Zimbabwean SMEs, entrepreneurial leaders often compensate for the lack of formal HR structures by fostering a culture of continuous learning, mentorship, and employee empowerment.

Therefore, what is emerging in this study so far is the realisation that, in resource-constrained SMEs, the success of HRD efforts depends largely on the ability of SME entrepreneurs to pivot informal HRD efforts. Their ability to innovate and improvise enables rapid adaptation to volatile market conditions, while their leadership style, which is often grounded in culturally embedded philosophies such as Ubuntu. The integration of ubuntu into leadership practices fosters a relational approach, where leaders prioritize employee development, mentorship, and knowledge sharing, even in the absence of formal HR structures (Nemashakwe et al., 2023). Nemashakwe et al., (2023) highlight the importance of Afrocentric leadership models that incorporate cultural values and the philosophy of ubuntu, emphasizing community, shared purpose, and relational leadership. The Afrocentric Effective Leadership (AEL) model they

propose underscores the significance of aligning leadership practices with African cultural values to enhance organizational effectiveness in SMEs. Therefore, SME owner/managers in emerging economies like Zimbabwe do more than manage operations as they instead actively shape learning environments in their firms to compensate for the absence of formal HR infrastructure. This culturally grounded leadership style not only compensates for the lack of formal HRD mechanisms but also cultivates a supportive organizational culture that encourages continuous learning and innovation.

In Zimbabwe, for example, Mashavira (2022) found evidence of owner-managers leveraging their social capital and personal networks to facilitate experiential learning, encourage peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and establish informal problem-solving forums. These practices represent a pragmatic and contextually grounded approach to HRD, one that aligns with the realities of operating in resource-constrained environments where formal HR structures are often absent. In conclusion, the informal approach to HRD in resource-constrained SMEs in Zimbabwe and beyond is not a merely reactive stopgap measure. Instead, it represents strategic, culturally attuned responses to systemic resource limitations. These practices reflect a broader shift toward context-sensitive HRD models that align with indigenous values and the socio-economic realities of emerging economies.

In summary, the evidence presented underscores that, in Zimbabwe's resource-constrained SMEs, entrepreneurial leadership is not an adjunct to HRD but is an enabler. By leveraging innovation, improvisation, and culturally embedded philosophies such as ubuntu, SME owner-managers construct informal yet highly effective learning ecosystems that substitute for absent formal HR structures (Mashavira et al., 2019). These context-sensitive practices not only cultivate critical skills and competencies but also foster resilient organizational cultures characterized by trust, collective responsibility, and continuous innovation. As such, they exemplify a broader paradigm shift in emerging economies away from imported, one-size-fits-all HRD models toward adaptive frameworks grounded in indigenous values and socio-economic realities.

Building on this empirical foundation, the next section of this paper turns to the development of a theoretical framework that integrates Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) with Afrocentric leadership principles, particularly ubuntu. CLT's emphasis on dynamic interaction, emergent learning, and system interdependencies complements Ubuntu's focus on relationality

and communal well-being, offering a robust lens through which to understand and support the informal HRD architectures that thrive within resource-scarce SMEs.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) and Afrocentric leadership models to develop a nuanced understanding of how entrepreneurial leadership catalyses Human Resource Development (HRD) in resource-constrained African SMEs. These theoretical lenses are particularly relevant in the African SME context, where uncertainty, informality, and cultural embeddedness influence both leadership behaviour and HRD outcomes.

Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT)

Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) offers a dynamic lens through which entrepreneurial leadership in resource-constrained SMEs can be understood. Rather than viewing leadership as a hierarchical, top-down function, CLT conceptualizes it as an emergent phenomenon arising from interactions within complex adaptive systems (Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007). This perspective is particularly relevant to SMEs in Zimbabwe, where formal structures are often limited, and leadership must adapt fluidly to environmental uncertainty and resource scarcity.

CLT identifies three interdependent leadership functions that are essential for fostering innovation, learning, and organizational adaptability:

Adaptive Leadership

This function is central to entrepreneurial leadership in SMEs. It involves fostering experimentation, informal learning, and innovation—often at the organizational periphery. In the Zimbabwean SME context, adaptive leadership manifests through owner-managers who encourage initiative-taking and problem-solving despite limited formal HRD infrastructure.

Administrative Leadership

While SMEs may lack extensive bureaucratic systems, administrative leadership still plays a critical role in providing minimal structure, resource allocation, and operational stability. In resource-constrained environments, this function may be informal but is vital for sustaining core business activities and enabling HRD efforts.

Enabling Leadership

This bridging function facilitates the integration of adaptive initiatives with administrative systems. It supports knowledge flow, sense-making, and the translation of emergent practices into sustainable routines. In Zimbabwean SMEs, enabling leadership is often exercised by entrepreneurial leaders who mediate between informal learning processes and the need for strategic coherence.

By applying CLT to the Zimbabwean SME context, this study positions entrepreneurial leadership as a catalytic force that enables HRD not through formal programs, but through emergent, context-sensitive practices. The theory's emphasis on interaction, emergence, and distributed agency aligns with the realities of SMEs operating under resource constraints, where leadership is often enacted through informal networks and improvisational strategies.

In Zimbabwean SMEs, where formal HR departments and structured training budgets are often absent due to economic instability and resource scarcity, entrepreneurial leaders frequently assume HRD functions informally. These leaders foster learning and adaptability through trial-and-error initiatives, cross-functional teamwork, and rapid feedback loops, enabling employees to develop skills organically in response to shifting market demands. This informal approach aligns with the principles of Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT), which emphasizes decentralized, adaptive leadership in dynamic environments (Goldstein et al., 2010). In the Zimbabwean context, such leadership is particularly vital, as SMEs operate under persistent economic volatility, currency fluctuations, and limited institutional support. Rather than enforcing rigid procedures, entrepreneurial leaders in Zimbabwe create "safe-to-fail" environments that encourage experimentation, peer learning, and the sharing of tacit knowledge across informal networks. These emergent HRD practices contribute to organizational resilience and sustainability, even in the face of severe constraints (Chinomona & Pretorius, 2011).

Afrocentric Leadership Models

Afrocentric leadership perspectives grounded in indigenous African philosophies, such as Ubuntu, emphasize community, reciprocity, and relational accountability. Ubuntu, foregrounds mutual respect, empathy, and collective well-being (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). Building on these philosophies, models such as the Afrocentric Effective Leadership (AEL) framework (Nkomo, 2011) and the Ubuntu-based leadership constructs of Mbigi and Maree (2005) propose that African leaders:

- Mentor through example, sharing both successes and failures.
- Co-create organizational norms via inclusive dialogue and consensus.
- Nurture individual and collective potential by embedding development within everyday interactions.

In the context of Zimbabwean SMEs, these Afrocentric behaviours translate into on-the-job coaching, communal problem-solving circles, and storytelling forums that leverage local narratives and social capital (Muzari & Jambwa, 2014). By integrating indigenous knowledge systems, Afrocentric leadership not only preserves cultural identity but also delivers practical, low-cost pathways for employee development.

Integrative Perspective: CLT × Ubuntu

By weaving together CLT's focus on emergent learning with Afrocentric emphases on relationality and communal values, our framework captures the dual imperatives facing African SME leaders: to enable adaptive innovation while remaining culturally authentic.

- **Adaptive + Ubuntu:** SME owner-managers sanction micro-experiments such as rotating team roles and foreground collective reflection, spawning experiential learning cycles that build employee agility.
- **Enabling + Ubuntu:** SME owner-managers may create "Ubuntu circles" and mentorship networks that translate individual insights into shared practices, constituting informal HRD scaffolding that spans the enterprise.
- **Administrative + Ubuntu:** SME owner-managers can craft codes of conduct and peer-coaching templates rooted in emerging HRD methods in communal norms, ensuring both consistency and cultural legitimacy.

Under this integrative lens, HRD in resource-scarce SMEs becomes less about formal programs and more about systemically harnessing social capital, distributed leadership, and indigenous wisdom to cultivate resilient human capital. In the following section, we operationalize this CLT–Ubuntu model, defining its core constructs, hypothesized relationships, and propositions to guide empirical examination and practical application in Zimbabwean and broader African SME contexts.

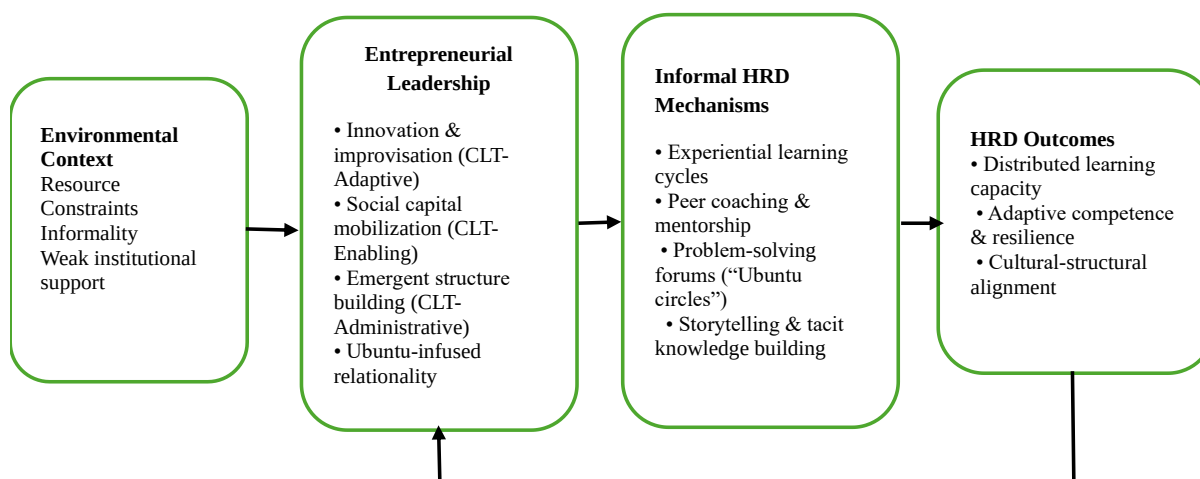


Figure 1: HRD systems in SMEs

The proposed conceptual model begins with the environmental context in which Zimbabwean SMEs operate. Chronic resource scarcity, weak institutional support, and highly informal market structures render conventional HRD departments and standardized training programs impractical (Nyamubarwa & Chipunza, 2021; World Bank, 2019). Under these conditions, firms cannot allocate dedicated budgets to formal learning, nor can they rely on established accreditation bodies to legitimize employee development. Instead, they must innovate within the constraints of their immediate environment.

At the heart of the model lies entrepreneurial leadership, reconceived through the lens of Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) and Afrocentric philosophies. Adaptively, owner–managers sponsor “micro-experiments” or safe-to-fail initiatives that generate novel practices and accelerate on-the-job learning (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Goldstein et al., 2010). Enabling leadership manifests as the strategic mobilization of social capital, leveraging personal networks, community ties, and informal affiliations to disseminate emergent lessons throughout the firm (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2018). Administratively, these leaders do not institute formal policies; rather, they allow emergent structures, shared routines, and unwritten codes grounded in common values to coalesce organically, thereby stabilizing best practices (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Underpinning all three CLT dimensions is ubuntu relationality, whereby decisions and learning processes are guided by communal well-being, mutual respect, and reciprocal obligation (Nkomo, 2011; Nemashakwe et al., 2023).

These entrepreneurial leadership behaviours give rise to four informal HRD mechanisms. First, experiential learning cycles transform daily operations into living classrooms, as employees

learn by doing, reflect on outcomes, and iterate continuously (Muzari & Jambwa, 2014). Secondly, peer coaching and mentorship emerge naturally, as more experienced workers guide newcomers through complex tasks and share tacit knowledge (Nzonzo & Chipunza, 2016). Thirdly, problem-solving forums or “ubuntu circles” convene staff around real-time challenges, fostering collective intelligence and co-creation of solutions (Mashavira et al., 2021). Finally, storytelling and narrative exchange enable the preservation and transfer of indigenous knowledge, further embedding learning within the firm’s cultural fabric (Nkomo, 2011). Collectively, these mechanisms produce three interrelated HRD outcomes. Distributed learning capacity arises as every employee assumes both learner and teacher roles, democratizing knowledge creation and retention (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Adaptive competence ensures that teams can rapidly reconfigure skills in response to market volatility, embodying the agility prized in entrepreneurial leadership (Gupta, MacMillan & Surie, 2004). Finally, cultural alignment occurs when HRD practices derive legitimacy from their resonance with indigenous values and communal norms rather than from external accreditation (Nemashakwe et al., 2023; Nleya, 2020). In sum, this model illustrates how entrepreneurial leadership functions as the catalyst for a contextually grounded, resource-efficient form of HRD that contrasts sharply with Western paradigms of formal training and hierarchical development systems as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Difference between Western and Zimbabwe HRD processes in SMEs

Aspect	Western HRD	Zimbabwean SME Model
Structure	Centralized HR department; formal curricula	Distributed, emergent learning embedded in daily work
Process	Pre-designed training programs; competency frameworks	Trial-and-error projects; “safe-to-fail” experiments
Orientation	Individual achievement, career-path planning	Collective growth, communal well-being (ubuntu)
Knowledge Flow	Top-down dissemination; standardized materials	Peer-to-peer exchange; tacit knowledge via storytelling
Legitimacy	Legitimized by external accreditation and benchmarks	Legitimized by cultural consonance and social endorsement

According to Table 1, where Western models treat HRD as a series of discrete interventions delivered by specialists, the Zimbabwean SME model reconceives leadership and development

as a single, fluid process driven by entrepreneurial leaders who cultivate emergent, relational learning environments that are both resource-wise and culturally authentic.

In conclusion, the conceptual model proposed in this paper underscores that entrepreneurial leadership in African SMEs is not merely a business function but a developmental strategy. Through culturally embedded, informal HRD mechanisms, entrepreneurial leaders enhance organisational learning, build employee capacity, and foster resilience, demonstrating that even under severe constraints, meaningful human capital development is achievable when leadership is contextually adaptive and culturally grounded.

Analysis and Discussion

This section analyses the relationship between entrepreneurial leadership behaviours and HRD outcomes, as outlined in the proposed conceptual model. The discussion contextualizes the findings in light of Zimbabwe's specific challenges, cultural values, and institutional dynamics, while drawing on existing literature to provide a critical reflection of how leadership practices in SMEs can address HRD limitations.

Entrepreneurial Leadership and HRD in Zimbabwean SMEs

Entrepreneurial leadership, characterized by innovation, adaptability, and relational leadership, is vital for driving HRD in Zimbabwe's resource-constrained SMEs. As Nyamubarwa and Chipunza (2019) argue, HRD models in Zimbabwean SMEs must move beyond Western-centric frameworks that rely heavily on formalized training and development systems. Instead, entrepreneurial leadership behaviours allow SMEs to adopt flexible, informal mechanisms of employee development that are culturally aligned and financially viable. In environments where formal training programs are not feasible due to budget constraints, leaders often rely on innovative practices such as on-the-job learning, peer mentoring, and experiential development.

This study also reveals that innovation in leadership is a key feature of entrepreneurial leadership in Zimbabwean SMEs, as owner-managers are often required to think creatively and find new solutions to existing problems without external resources. Chazuza and Mpofu (2025) highlight how SME leaders in Zimbabwe often prioritize resourcefulness, improvisation, and frugality, adapting existing knowledge and practices to suit their unique context. By fostering innovation, entrepreneurial leaders encourage employees to continuously learn and develop in

ways that are aligned with the dynamic needs of the business environment. This approach is particularly critical in sectors where employee skills are continually evolving, and adaptability is necessary to survive in a volatile economy.

Additionally, adaptability allows leaders to respond to changes in the economic or regulatory landscape, such as policy shifts or economic crises. Nemashakwe et al. (2023) stress that Zimbabwean SME leaders frequently face political and economic uncertainty, which requires agile leadership that can pivot business strategies quickly while fostering employee engagement and resilience. Through this adaptability, SME leaders can create a learning culture where employees continuously develop their skills to match the changing demands of the organization.

Relational leadership is another essential dimension in Zimbabwean SMEs, as it promotes a culture of mutual support, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Leaders who demonstrate relational leadership prioritize employee well-being and trust-building, ensuring that HRD processes are aligned with local values of Ubuntu. Tarambiwa (2021) argues that the ubuntu philosophy is integral to Zimbabwean organizational life, as it fosters community, empathy, and shared goals. In the SME context, leaders who embrace ubuntu tend to develop stronger relationships with their employees, which enhances motivation and retention, key HRD outcomes in resource-constrained environments like Zimbabwe.

Informal HRD Mechanisms and Cultural Alignment

The model also emphasizes informal HRD mechanisms as a critical strategy for fostering employee development in SMEs. Mentorship, experiential learning, and knowledge-sharing are essential practices that contribute to HRD outcomes in the absence of formal systems. These mechanisms are particularly valuable in Zimbabwe, where SMEs often lack the financial resources to invest in formal training programs or hire dedicated HR personnel. Masamba et al., (2024) highlights the prevalence of mentorship in Zimbabwean SMEs, where business owners and senior employees often play a significant role in guiding younger staff through informal learning channels. These mentorship relationships are vital in transferring tacit knowledge and skills that are difficult to codify in formal training programs.

Experiential learning is another informal mechanism commonly used in Zimbabwean SMEs. Employees are often allowed to learn by doing, which fosters hands-on experience and

practical skills. This approach aligns with Kolb, 2014) experiential learning theory, which asserts that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. In the context of Zimbabwe's SMEs, experiential learning enables employees to learn in real-time, adjusting to the evolving needs of the business.

Additionally, knowledge-sharing is central to entrepreneurial leadership, as it enables employees to exchange ideas, skills, and insights within a collaborative environment. This is particularly important in Zimbabwe, where access to external expertise is limited. Tarambiwa (2021) notes that informal networks and community ties are crucial in enabling resource-sharing and problem-solving in SMEs, particularly when formal knowledge infrastructures are absent.

Cultural and Contextual Influences

The Zimbabwean business context is shaped by a unique set of cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Cultural dimensions, such as collectivism and high-power distance, influence how leadership and HRD are practiced in SMEs. Hofstede's (1980) framework of cultural dimensions suggests that in collectivist societies like Zimbabwe, group cohesion and interpersonal relationships are prioritized over individual performance, making relational leadership a particularly effective strategy for HRD. In SMEs, leaders who understand these cultural dimensions can better align their leadership style with employees' needs, fostering an environment conducive to skill development and employee retention (Munyanyi et al., 2018). However, the model also acknowledges the significant constraints faced by SMEs, such as skills flight and political instability, which complicate HRD efforts. In fact, research (Munyanyi et al., 2018; Njanike, 2019) emphasizes that Zimbabwe's SMEs suffer from a high rate of employee turnover, particularly among skilled workers who seek opportunities abroad. In this context, entrepreneurial leadership plays a crucial role in not only developing existing employees but also in retaining talent by creating a supportive and growth-oriented work environment. Relational leadership and mentorship are particularly valuable here, as they help to build loyalty and commitment among employees, reducing turnover rates.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Practical Implications

This study underscores the strategic role of entrepreneurial leadership in addressing the persistent HRD challenges faced by SMEs in Zimbabwe and similar African contexts. Given

the resource constraints and socio-economic uncertainties that characterize these environments, SME leaders must adopt entrepreneurial leadership behaviours such as innovation, adaptability, and relational engagement to foster HRD through culturally grounded and informal means.

Firstly, owner-managers should intentionally integrate cultural values such as ubuntu, which emphasizes community, empathy, and mutual responsibility into everyday leadership and learning practices. This approach fosters relational trust, knowledge sharing, and emotional commitment among employees, thereby mitigating issues such as high staff turnover and low morale.

Secondly, informal HRD mechanisms such as mentorship, peer learning, and experiential development should be formally recognized and systematically supported within SME operations. Rather than relying solely on external training or formal HR departments (which may be financially unfeasible), leaders should cultivate internal learning environments that are flexible, context-sensitive, and embedded in daily business practices.

Furthermore, capacity-building interventions should be designed to strengthen entrepreneurial leadership capabilities among SME owner-managers. Business support organizations, incubators, and development agencies should offer targeted workshops that focus not only on technical business skills but also on soft leadership competencies such as emotional intelligence, adaptive thinking, and inclusive decision-making—tailored to the local cultural milieu.

Policy Implications

The findings of this research also carry significant implications for public policy and development programming in Zimbabwe and across sub-Saharan Africa. To create an enabling ecosystem for SME growth and HRD, policymakers must go beyond generic capacity-building initiatives and engage with the cultural and contextual realities of local business environments. Firstly, there is an urgent need for policy frameworks that formally recognize and support indigenous and Afrocentric leadership models. This includes integrating values such as ubuntu, collective accountability, and participative governance into national HRD strategies and entrepreneurship development programs. By doing so, policies will be more likely to resonate with and be adopted by local SME stakeholders.

Secondly, governments and development partners should facilitate access to financial, technical, and institutional resources that support entrepreneurial leadership development. This could involve the provision of leadership development grants for SMEs, subsidized training on informal HRD methods, or partnerships with universities and NGOs to deliver culturally relevant leadership programs.

In addition, national SME policies should promote the establishment of networks and platforms that enable SME leaders to share knowledge, mentor each other, and co-develop HRD solutions rooted in their lived experiences. Supporting local business associations and cooperative networks can foster peer-led learning, helping to overcome isolation and institutional weaknesses.

Finally, labour and education ministries should collaborate to align vocational and entrepreneurial training with the realities of informal HRD practices within SMEs. By embedding entrepreneurial leadership principles in education policy and curriculum design, future business leaders will be better equipped to drive HRD innovations that reflect both global insights and local wisdom.

Conclusions

This paper has explored the theoretical intersection between entrepreneurial leadership and Human Resource Development (HRD) in resource-constrained SMEs in Zimbabwe, particularly focusing on how entrepreneurial leadership behaviours can foster employee development without formal HRD systems. The study presented a conceptual model that integrates complexity leadership theory and Afrocentric leadership models, which together emphasize the adaptability, innovation, and relational leadership that is often seen in African SMEs.

The findings suggest that, in the context of Zimbabwean SMEs, entrepreneurial leaders who embrace cultural values such as ubuntu and who prioritize informal HRD practices—such as mentorship, experiential learning, and knowledge sharing—are well-positioned to overcome the barriers posed by limited financial resources, high turnover, and political or economic instability. These leaders are able to create environments conducive to employee development

by improvising solutions and leveraging informal networks that are aligned with local cultural values and communal practices.

The discussion has emphasized the critical role of indigenous leadership models in enhancing HRD outcomes in African SMEs, suggesting that these models not only offer a culturally appropriate response to HRD challenges but also serve as an essential mechanism for improving organizational performance and employee retention. While formal HRD systems are often lacking, entrepreneurial leadership behaviours that are rooted in community-oriented leadership practices can compensate for this deficit, fostering an environment where employees are continuously developed through adaptive and resourceful means.

This paper contributes to the growing body of literature that advocates for the need to contextualize HRD practices within the African context, taking into account the unique economic, cultural, and social dynamics of SMEs in Africa. By focusing on Zimbabwe, this study highlights the role of entrepreneurial leadership in driving HRD outcomes even in the face of significant resource constraints.

Recommendations

Based on the insights derived from the analysis and discussion, the following recommendations are made for both SME leaders and policymakers in Zimbabwe:

Practical Recommendations for SME Leaders

1. **Embrace Entrepreneurial Leadership Practices:** SME leaders should cultivate entrepreneurial leadership behaviours that emphasize innovation, adaptability, and relational leadership. These behaviours align with the cultural values of the communities in which these SMEs operate, fostering trust, collaboration, and resilience.
2. **Leverage Informal HRD Mechanisms:** Given the lack of formal HRD systems, SME leaders should focus on leveraging informal learning opportunities. Mentorship programs, knowledge-sharing platforms, and experiential learning initiatives can provide significant developmental opportunities without requiring substantial financial investment.
3. **Create Culturally Relevant Training Programs:** Training programs should be tailored to the local context and cultural values, incorporating aspects of ubuntu and community-based learning. These programs can enhance employee engagement and retention, ensuring that the workforce is not only skilled but also motivated to contribute to the success of the organization.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Support for Indigenous Leadership Models:** Policymakers should prioritize the promotion of indigenous leadership models that align with the values and practices of local communities. This would involve supporting training programs that focus on building entrepreneurial leadership skills among SME leaders.
2. **Facilitate Access to Resources:** Given the resource constraints faced by SMEs in Zimbabwe, there is a need for policies that provide financial and logistical support for HRD initiatives. Government support could include funding for leadership development programs or incentives for SMEs that invest in their employees' skills development.
3. **Create Networking and Mentorship Opportunities:** Policymakers should work to foster networks that connect SME leaders with potential mentors, knowledge-sharing platforms, and professional development resources. These networks can facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices, further enhancing the HRD capacity of SMEs.

This paper makes a distinctive contribution by articulating how entrepreneurial leadership framed through Complexity Leadership Theory and Afrocentric principles, such as ubuntu, serves as the critical engine driving Human Resource Development in resource-constrained SMEs. By shifting the focus from imported, formal training paradigms to emergent, culturally grounded learning processes, our model highlights the synergistic interplay of adaptive experimentation, social-capital mobilization, and relational stewardship in cultivating resilient human capital. Looking forward, the next imperative is to empirically test and refine this framework in Zimbabwean SMEs through mixed-methods field research. We recommend deploying structured surveys to measure the prevalence and impact of the identified leadership-HRD mechanisms, complemented by in-depth interviews to capture contextual nuances and validate the model's propositions. Such empirical validation will both strengthen theoretical rigor and offer practical guidance for leaders and policymakers committed to sustainable SME development

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The Ubuntu paradox: exploring the tensions and synergies between moral awareness, ethical leadership, and moral courage within urban councils in Zimbabwe

Shorai Chitimbe¹, Lovemore Chikazhe¹ & Miriam Jengeta¹

¹ Chinhoyi University of Technology, School of Entrepreneurship and Business Sciences

(Corresponding author: schitimbe@cut.ac.zw)

Abstract

This study explored the relationship between moral awareness, Ubuntu, ethical leadership, and moral courage within urban councils in Zimbabwe. The study was anchored in the positivist paradigm and utilized a cross-sectional survey research design. The population of the study comprised 406 senior, middle managers, and office employees. The target population was made up of 324 office employees, including frontline managers and clerical staff within the six urban councils in Mashonaland West Province. A criterion purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The sample size was 324 respondents. Data was collected using a questionnaire. The validity of the instrument was established through confirmatory factor analysis, and while reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha statistic. Descriptive statistics summarized the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while inferential statistics, including regression and correlation analyses, were used to test hypotheses, moderation, and mediation. The findings of the study revealed that moral awareness enhances ethical leadership. The results indicated no mediating effect of Ubuntu on the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership. The study found that moral courage was a critical factor in enabling leaders to translate moral awareness into observable moral conduct. The study recommended that urban councils implement ethics training programmes.

Keywords: Ethical leadership, moral awareness, moral courage, Ubuntu, urban councils.

Introduction

Ubuntu is being accepted as a potential framework for promoting good governance in contemporary African societies (Sipondo, 2025; Ngcetane-Vika & Pule, 2025; Zondi & Ehiane, 2025). Ubuntu emphasizes collective responsibility and relational relationships (Van Norren,

2022), reflecting the values and lived experiences of pre-colonial African communities (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024). Ubuntu embodies the principle that the well-being of an individual is linked to the welfare of others (Laughton et al., 2024). In the context of Zimbabwe, urban councils continue to face governance challenges. These challenges include corruption, poor service delivery, and a lack of accountability (Mutema, Kanyane, Masimba, Poshai, 2025; Marumahoko, 2024). This paper argues that by embracing Ubuntu principles, urban councils can enhance ethical leadership through moral awareness and moral courage. These values emphasize character and virtue (Chibaya, 2024; Nicolaides & Dlodla, 2023). Ethical leadership one of the positive leadership styles that goes beyond just establishing and adhering to codes of conduct, but creating a reciprocal exchange relationship between leaders and their followers (Iqbal & Parray, 2024). Such a value-driven and accountable leadership style is necessary for modeling moral values for employees to imitate (Pardhi & Suri, 2024). The interaction between Ubuntu, moral awareness, moral courage, and ethical leadership makes the relationship relevant and timely for Zimbabwe (Sipondo, 2025). The focus on moral responsibility is considered vital for addressing the governance challenges being experienced within urban councils (Nicolaides & Dlodla, 2023). Leaders within urban councils ought to cultivate moral awareness (Mohi & Zhang, 2023). While moral awareness plays an influential role in ethical conduct (Yusnaini & Meirawati, 2023), it has to be blended with moral courage for it to translate into observable moral action (Mollaei, Metanat, Javazm & Motie, 2025).

Despite the presence of policy frameworks and codes of conduct within urban councils in Zimbabwe, these councils continue to be blamed for poor service delivery as a result of governance challenges such as corruption and a lack of accountability (Marumahoko, 2024; Mutema et al., 2025). The continued presence of these challenges despite such policies indicates that policies and laws alone cannot force moral conduct. This calls for measures and strategies that can nurture a moral person. There is a dearth of studies that have directly looked into the interplay of moral awareness, Ubuntu, ethical leadership, and moral courage in the context of urban councils in Zimbabwe. Without a full understanding of how these variables interact, it hinders the development of relevant culturally imbued frameworks that promote sustainable ethical governance within urban councils is hindered. With this in mind, therefore, there is a need to probe how moral awareness can inform ethical practices through moral courage and Ubuntu principles

to improve governance within urban councils. This probing is done through the following research questions:

1. How does moral awareness interact with ethical leadership in the context of urban councils?
2. What is the influence of moral awareness on Ubuntu in the context of urban councils?
3. How does Ubuntu influence ethical leadership in the context of urban councils?
4. How does Ubuntu mediate the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership in the context of urban councils?
5. What is the moderating role moral courage play in shaping the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership in the context of urban councils?

Theoretical framework guiding the study

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored in the relationship between moral awareness, ethical leadership, Ubuntu as a mediator, and moral courage as a moderator, all hitched on the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) advanced by Bandura (1986) and refined over the years (Zhai et al., 2023). This framework explored how these constructs interact to influence ethical behaviour within urban councils and public institutions. The Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the interaction between cognitive processes, environmental influences, and individual characteristics in shaping human behaviour. It postulates that individuals learn behaviours through observation and imitation. This assumption is relevant in organizational settings where leaders serve as role models. This theory provides a foundation for understanding how ethical behaviour, moral awareness, and moral courage are cultivated and sustained within organizations. The current study positioned moral awareness as the independent variable. Moral awareness is defined as the ability to recognize ethical issues and dilemmas in decision-making processes. Previous research highlights that leaders who are aware of moral issues are more likely to engage in ethical conduct (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). This study predicted that increased moral awareness can lead to more effective ethical leadership practices, as leaders who recognize ethical issues are better equipped to address them.

Ethical leadership is conceptualized as a leadership style characterized by the demonstration of ethical behaviour. In this study, ethical leadership is taken as the dependent variable. Ethical

leaders serve as role models, influencing the behaviour of their followers and the decision-making processes within their organisations (Coffie et al., 2023). The effectiveness of ethical leadership is then dependent upon the moral awareness of a leader and the organizational culture, which is influenced by contextual factors, including cultural frameworks. Ubuntu, which emphasizes relational values and collective responsibility, is perceived to play a mediating role in this framework. It is assumed that Ubuntu enhances moral awareness by motivating leaders to recognize ethical issues within their cultural context. Leaders and employees who are influenced by Ubuntu principles are likely to appraise ethical issues more effectively and act in alignment with their ethical convictions. This aligns with the literature suggesting that cultural orientations impact ethical behaviour (Chigangaidze et al., 2021).

Moral courage is introduced as a moderator in the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership. It refers to the willingness to uphold ethical principles regardless of the adversities being faced. The presence of moral courage is perceived to enhance the capabilities of a leader to act on their moral awareness. This assumption is supported by studies that indicate moral courage is positively correlated with ethical decision-making (Luo et al., 2023). The interaction between moral awareness and moral courage suggests that leaders who possess both traits are more likely to champion ethical practices within their organizations. The connection between the constructs that frame this framework creates a dynamic system where moral awareness influences ethical leadership, mediated by Ubuntu and moderated by moral courage.

Literature review

The literature review looked into the key issues emerging from the themes of the study in relation to moral awareness, ethical leadership, moral courage, and Ubuntu.

The interaction of moral awareness and ethical leadership

Ethical leadership is a construct that is influenced by various factors. To nurture ethical behaviour, organizations should promote moral identification among their employees (Yue e al., 2022) and cultivate an ethical climate (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Ethical leadership has been shown to have a positive influence on various employee outcomes and organizational behaviour, such as reducing workplace cheating behaviour (Yue et al., 2022); enhancing organizational justice (Al Halbusi et al., 2021); increasing internal whistleblowing intentions (Mkheimer et al., 2022); amplifying

employee voice (Hosseini & Ferreira, 2023); and influencing an ethical climate (Al Halbusi et al., 2021).

Moral awareness enables leaders to identify moral issues with regard to their decisions or actions (Alwali & Alwali, 2024; London & Heidari, 2024). Leaders with strong moral awareness are observed to be better equipped to recognize and respond to ethical dilemmas that arise and understand their implications within their organizations (Kruijtbosch et al., 2025). Cullen (2020) discussed the concept of 'Moral Recovery,' arguing that because of moral awareness, an ethical leader can rise after a moral lapse or failure. This observation suggests that moral awareness can be developed and sharpened through learning and practice. Moral awareness has been reported to play an important role in shaping ethical behaviour across different fields (Ammari & Gantare, 2024; Hegazy et al., 2024). In the context of urban governance, moral awareness is considered crucial for policymakers and public servants in upholding ethical principles (Armstrong & Stedman, 2024). Despite its critical role, some scholars agree that it is not always easy for leaders to develop this awareness. Under public institutions, where vices such as corruption and nepotism are rife, ethical judgment can be distorted (Cardinal, 2025; Romero, 2024). Moral awareness can also be influenced by cultural and social values (Couto, Pilati & Kakinohana, 2025; Hong, 2023).

The influence of moral awareness on Ubuntu

Ubuntu puts much focus on relational relationships, mutual respect, and empathy (Nicolaidis & Dlodla, 2023; Sipondo, 2025). These values are subsumed in African axioms such as “A person is a person through other persons”, “I am because we are”, and “It takes the whole village to raise a child”. Grounded in African moral and ethical values, Ubuntu has been identified as a framework with the potential to address several social challenges (Chigangaidze et al., 2021; Gondwe, 2024). The identity of individuals through others brings out the essence of moral awareness embodied in Ubuntu (Laughton et al., 2024). This nurtures self-awareness and societal responsibility. It appeals to individuals to consider the implications of their choices and to put the welling being of others ahead of own self-interests (Mayaka & Truell, 2021). Even though no prior studies have focused on the relationship between moral awareness and Ubuntu, the influence of different cultural orientations on various leadership outcomes and organizational behaviour was highlighted by Shneor et al. (2021) in their collectivist to individualist cultural analysis. Similarly, the influence

of cultural dimensions is observed in other cultural orientations such as the Confucian cultures (Rochmansjah & Saputra, 2024).

Moral awareness is an important cognitive element that can interplay between individual ethical orientations and organizational culture (Wen & Chi, 2023). Moral awareness refers to the ability of an individual to recognize the moral dimensions of a situation and understand its ethical implications (Ogunfowora et al., 2022). This cognitive process enables an individual to identify potential ethical issues in a given context and is viewed as a basis for ethical decision-making and as a precursor to moral judgment (Formosa, 2021; Nguyen & Crossan, 2021). Research shows that moral awareness is influenced through various factors such as moral disengagement (Ogunfowora et al., 2022), competition, and moral identity, personal moral philosophies, perceived moral intensity, and cultural backgrounds (Rasheed et al., 2023; Tian et al., 2022). Other scholars suggest that moral awareness is augmented by moral sensitivity, a concept which goes beyond just recognizing ethical issues but being able to organize and interpret moral information correctly (Formosa, 2021; Luo et al., 2023).

The close relationship between moral awareness and moral sensitivity points to an intricate relationship and the significance of individuals in developing both these cognitive processes. We argue that by nurturing moral awareness in individuals within organizations, ethical behaviour can be promoted (Poszler & Lange, 2024). Within the context of this paper, moral awareness plays a crucial role in helping leaders in the public sector to navigate governance challenges such as the misuse of power, nepotism, embezzlement of funds, and procurement fraud (Sommersguter-Reichmann & Reichmann, 2024). Ubuntu, through the promotion of a worldview that views individuals as part of a larger community, influences the moral values of individuals (Akpa-Inyang & Chima, 2021). Individuals are encouraged to consider the impact of their decisions and choices on the well-being of others (Chigangaidze, Matanga & Katsuro, 2021). Such an outlook is considered to shape individual moral awareness by instilling a strong sense of moral sensitivity within their organisations (Metz, 2021). Unlike Western ethical frameworks, which prioritize individual responsibility and autonomy, Ubuntu ethics require leaders not just to be accountable to themselves, but also to be accountable to their entire communities (Akpa-Inyang & Chima, 2021). This is relational accountability, where ethical decisions and their breach affect the entire society. (Mhlambi & Tiribelli, 2023; Reviglio & Alunge, 2020). The role of Ubuntu in shaping

moral awareness is particularly relevant in Zimbabwe, where community well-being and social cohesion are central values (Wuta, 2025). The philosophy of Ubuntu (or unhu/hunhu in Shona) emphasizes interconnectedness and the idea that one's humanity is realized through others, influencing how individuals recognize and respond to moral issues (Dube & Higgs, 2024).

The interaction between Ubuntu and ethical leadership

Ubuntu and ethical leadership are two approaches that share noticeable common features in their approach to leadership and organizational behaviour (Rahaman, 2024). This alignment is evident in Ubuntu's emphasis on relational accountability and community engagement (Layden et al., 2024). The moral dimension of Ubuntu instills a sense of ethical duty and behaviour in leaders (Laughton et al., 2024). This moral dimension aligns with the concept of moral modelling in ethical leadership, where leaders are expected to demonstrate high ethical standards and serve as role models (Pardhi & Suri, 2024). It is being argued that the integration of Ubuntu into ethical leadership can enhance organizational identity (Aliye, 2020; Abbas, 2023).

Despite available evidence indicating that ethical leadership can help counteract corruption and other unethical vices (Antunez et al., 2023), the application of ethical leadership can be undermined by self-interested public officials (Aliye, 2020). For instance, citing the results coming from a study conducted in Pakistan where ethical leadership was reported having a positive link with unethical pro-organizational behavior (Ahmed & Khan, 2024). This observation aligns with the realities in many African countries, where Ubuntu originates. It is perplexing to observe that corruption remains a significant obstacle to effective governance and leadership (Zhai, 2022), against the backdrop of Ubuntu values being cardinal in African societies (Marovah & Mutanga, 2023). This state of affairs creates tensions between traditional collective approaches and modern individualistic systems in public institutions (Khan, 2023).

Ethical leaders who endeavour to embrace and implement Ubuntu values may face hurdles in their attempt to reconcile the Ubuntu collective approach and contemporary individualistic accountability approaches (Mokhutso, 2022). This divide between societal values and contemporary leadership practices in African public institutions threatens the realization of the potential benefits of Ubuntu (Aliye, 2020). This highlights the need to close the gap between cultural values and contemporary governance challenges. Ubuntu's emphasis on relational ethics

and communal wellbeing offers such a framework to address contemporary governance issues in African public institutions (Chigangaidze et al., 2021). We argue that by reframing leadership within the lenses of Ubuntu principles, public institutions in Africa can foster a more inclusive, accountable, and ethically imbued governance system (Aliye, 2020). This integration can instill a sense of shared responsibility and reciprocity among leaders and their communities (Munung et al., 2024).

The influence of moral courage on moral awareness and ethical leadership

Moral awareness plays a crucial role in influencing ethical leadership (Coffie et al., 2023). Research has shown that moral awareness is a fundamental factor in making moral decision-making (Arar & Saiti, 2022; Luo et al., 2023). It influences how leaders perceive and respond to ethical issues in their organisations. Leaders who possess high moral awareness are more likely to recognize ethical dilemmas, they are more likely to make principled decisions (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Moral courage plays a major role in leadership decision-making. Studies have shown that moral courage is positively correlated with ethical decision-making ability (Luo et al., 2023). Moral courage enables leaders to challenge unethical decisions within organizations, even when under pressure to act against their ethical convictions (Alshammari & Alboliteeh, 2023). Moral courage empowers individuals to move from recognizing an ethical issue to actually taking ethical action Luo et al., 2023). It has been observed that moral courage goes beyond individual traits and, as such, it is influenced by organizational factors such as ethical leadership and a positive ethical climate (Hakimi et al., 2023; Pakizekho & Barkhordari-Sharifabad, 2022). Leaders who exhibit moral courage are more likely to make decisions that are aligned with ethical principles, even under challenging circumstances (Yang et al., 2023). These findings underscore the importance of developing moral courage in leadership to improve overall decision-making processes and outcomes.

It is argued that moral courage strengthens the link between moral awareness and ethical leadership. Leaders with both high moral awareness and strong moral courage are more effective in promoting ethical governance (Asiimwe, 2023). There is scant or no literature that directly shows the evidence to support the claim that moral courage strengthens the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership. However, the conclusion can only be arrived at in the context of various individual papers on ethical leadership, moral courage, and their impacts. Moral

courage has been shown to have a positive effect on ethical leadership (Pakizekho & Barkhordari-Sharifabad, 2022). The perception of moral courage is also reported to extend beyond leadership to individual employees as well (Hakimi et al., 2023). This suggests that ethical leaders can foster moral courage in their followers (Mohi & Zhang, 2023). More so, moral courage was found to predict ethical leadership mediated by ethical climate (Awad & Ashour, 2022). This again demonstrates the role of moral courage in promoting ethical leadership. It was also observed that moral courage acts as a buffer against moral distress and moral injury (Berdida & Grande, 2023). Similarly, moral courage has been found to mitigate compassion fatigue through the combined mediating effects of moral sensitivity and professional identity (Yi et al., 2024). These observations highlight the critical role of moral courage as a necessary attribute for leaders and other professionals.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses development

The conceptual framework for this study was designed to explore the relationship between moral awareness, ethical leadership, moral courage, and Ubuntu within urban councils in Zimbabwe. This framework was informed by the reviewed relevant literature, which highlighted the importance of these constructs in promoting ethical conduct within urban councils. The reviewed literature indicated that Ubuntu is framed on collective responsibility. It serves as the foundation for ethical leadership, nurturing a sense of community and shared values (Sipondo, 2025; Ngcetane-Vika & Pule, 2025). Ethical leadership is one of the positive leadership styles that prioritizes character and virtue (Iqbal & Parray, 2024). The literature portrays moral awareness as a construct foundational for ethical conduct (Yusnaini & Meirawati, 2023). It refers to the ability to recognize ethical issues. Moral courage goes beyond mere awareness; it translates moral awareness into ethical action. It denotes the willingness to act on one's ethical beliefs, even in the face of adversity (Mollaei et al., 2025). The framework suggests that moral courage moderates the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership. By examining the interplay of these constructs, governance challenges faced by urban councils in Zimbabwe can be mitigated. Enlightened by the reviewed literature and the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were posited:

1. H1: Moral awareness positively influences ethical leadership among leaders in urban councils.

2. H2: Moral awareness has a positive influence on Ubuntu among leaders in urban councils.
3. H3: Ubuntu positively influences ethical leadership among leaders in urban councils.
4. H4: Ubuntu mediates the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership among leaders in urban councils.
5. H5: Moral courage moderates the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership among leaders in urban councils.

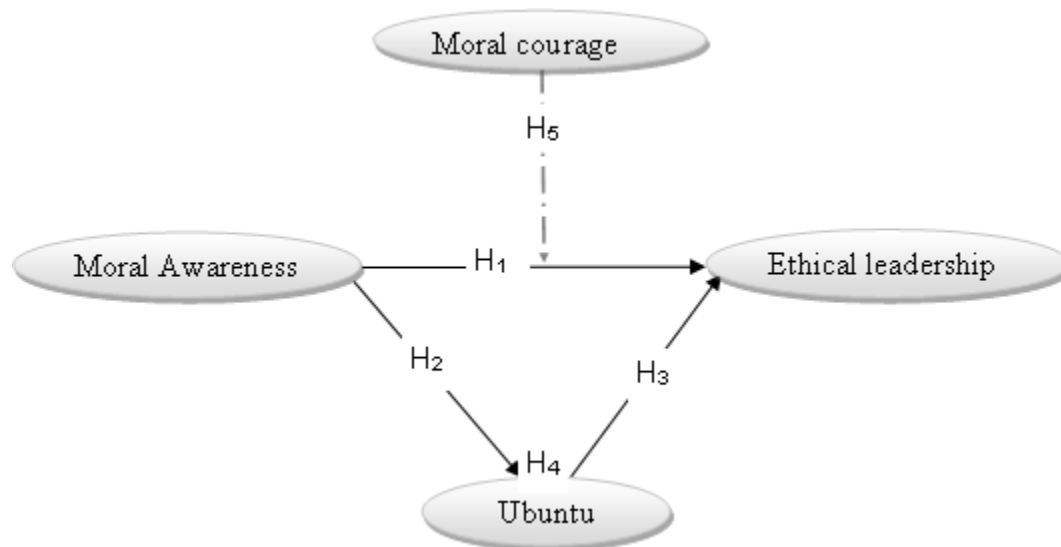


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Author (2025)

Methodology

Research philosophy

The study was anchored in the positivist paradigm, which affirms that knowledge is best acquired through observable phenomena and empirical evidence (Pretorius, 2024). Due to its emphasis on observable phenomena and quantifiable data, the positivism paradigm fitted the needs of the study, which had relationships and hypotheses that needed statistical analysis, such as the relationship between ethical leadership, moral awareness, and the mediating role of Ubuntu.

Research design

The study used a cross-sectional survey research design in line with the quantitative research strategy adopted. The cross-sectional research design allowed the researcher to collect data

composed of all the attributes of the sample at a single moment without revisiting the research site at a later stage. This was beneficial in terms of time and costs during the data collection process.

Population and target population

The population for this study comprised 406 senior managers, middle managers, and office employees within 6 urban councils in Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe. The target population of 324 was limited to office employees in these six urban councils in the province. The employees occupied clerical, first, and mid-level administrative roles. Senior management, which included town clerks and departmental directors, was excluded from this study. The exclusion was done to enable a bottom-up view of ethical leadership and related experiences.

Sampling frame and sample size

The study used a criterion-based purposive sampling method with proportionate representation to select the respondents who met the predefined criteria. Purposive sampling enables a researcher to collect data that aligns with the specific parameters and research objectives of a study, regardless of whether it is a qualitative or quantitative study (Memon et al, 2025). The purposive sampling method allowed the researcher to select the respondents who met the criterion of the target population. The high response rate was achieved partly as a result of the hand distribution and physical collection of the questionnaires.

Data collection instrument development

A Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was developed based on the literature. For items that measured ethical leadership (Johnson et al., 2023; Uluturk et al., 2023; Wadei et al., 2023). Ubuntu items (Chigangaidze, Matanga, and Katsuro, 2021; Marovah and Mutanga, 2023; Adewale, 2023), moral awareness (Mohi & Zhang, 2023), and Moral courage (Mollaei, Metanat, Javazm & Motie, 2025). Ethical Leadership was measured through 15 items. Moral courage was measured by 5 statements, as well as moral awareness. Ubuntu was measured through 6 items aimed at assessing the importance of Ubuntu principles. The items measuring the variables used a 5-point Likert scale with measures from 1. Strongly Disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly Agree. The questionnaires were hand-distributed and physically collected from March 2025 to July 2025. The high response rate achieved can be attributed to the hand distribution and physical collection of the questionnaires.

Reliability and Validity

The measurement instrument was validated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and reliability analysis before the hypotheses were tested. The CFA was done through AMOS version 21, and SPSS version 21, and reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficients with SPSS version 21.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies for the demographic variables. These descriptions were presented in tables. Inferential statistics utilized in this study included correlation analysis, moderation analysis, and hypothesis testing using regression analysis.

Results

Demographic profile of respondents

The results indicate a mature workforce made up of the age group 40-49 years (31.4%) which is assumed to have considerable experience working in urban councils. The age group of 30-39 years makes 27.3% of the respondents, which is a significant portion of the workforce in their early to mid-career stages. The demographic results further indicate that younger employees, those less than 30 years represent 22.2% of the respondents while older employees, those in the 60+ years range, are the least of the respondents at 4.1%. The distribution suggests a rather younger workforce with a mix of experienced individuals. Studies indicate that age and experience can influence ethical decision-making. Older employees are viewed as bringing more experience, which can lead to better ethical judgments (Hermayanti et al., 2024). Urban councils can benefit by having a mature workforce for informed and improved ethical judgments. While older individuals may have stronger ethical intentions, some studies indicate that age alone does not always predict better ethical judgments. In some cases, older adults are seen as more likely to make deontological, duty-bound decisions (Singh et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021).

The gender distribution indicates that the majority of the respondents are female (61.8%), while males account for 38.4% of the respondents. This gender disparity may reflect the broader societal trends in Zimbabwe, where more women are increasingly participating in the workforce. It indicates a diverse perspective in leadership and decision-making in relation to moral awareness,

moral courage, and ethical leadership. The results show that the majority of the respondents have a Bachelor's degree (45.7%). Those with a national diploma and a master's degree each comprise 16.5%. This result indicates a well-educated workforce. The results show the presence of a PhD holder (0.3%), suggesting a very small representation of highly specialized professionals in these councils. Having a balanced gendered workforce within urban councils supports studies that have shown that gender diversity in organisations and in leadership can lead to improved organizational performance and ethical decision-making (Keller, 2024; Li & Mohammad, M. (2024). The same can be said with regard to educational levels. Literature often associates higher educational attainment with increased ethical awareness and decision-making abilities within organisations (Andersson et al., 2022). Having an educated employee means that urban councils have employees who are better equipped to navigate moral dilemmas and uphold ethical standards.

The employment demographics indicate that the majority of the respondents are permanent employees (80.3%) with a smaller proportion being on contract (17.5%) or casual (2.2%). This employment distribution indicates job stability within the urban councils. On the experience side, the experience distribution indicates that those with 5-10 years of experience making 36.8% of respondents, indicating a workforce that is comparatively experienced, mixed with new employees (28.6%) who have less than 5 years of experience. The results show that there are fewer employees who have 21 years and above experience. The tenure of employees in urban councils aligns with studies on job stability. Employees with a stable tenure can nurture a culture of ethical behaviour within organisations, as employees who feel secure are more likely to engage in ethical practices (Lee, Hur & Shin, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2024). Stability allows employees to focus on long-term goals rather than short-term gains, which is essential for nurturing ethical conditions with urban councils. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analysed to understand the sample composition as indicated in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Statistics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age		
Less than 30	70	22.2
30-39	86	27.3
40-49	99	31.4

50-59	47	14.9
60+	13	4.1
Gender		
Male	121	38.4
Female	194	61.8
Education level		
National Diploma	52	16.5
Higher National Diploma	28	8.9
Bachelor's degree	144	45.7
Master's degree	52	16.5
PhD	1	.3
Other	38	12.1
Employment type		
Contract	55	17.5
Casual	7	2.2
Permanent	253	80.3
Experience		
Less than 5 years	90	28.6
5-10 years	116	36.8
11-15 years	47	14.9
16-20 years	36	11.4
21 years and above	26	8.3

Source: Research (2025)

Reliability

Construct reliability was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha statistic. The results showed that the ethical leadership scale with 10 items ($\alpha = .973$), the moral awareness scale with five items ($\alpha = .916$), the moral courage scale with five items ($\alpha = .928$), Ubuntu scale with six items ($\alpha = .938$). Literature indicates that a Cronbach's alpha of .70 or higher is generally considered acceptable, indicating that the items are measuring the same underlying construct (Hussey et al., 2025; Pentapati et al., 2025; Yun, Ulang & Husain, 2023). The values for all the constructs were found to be reliable in relation to the accepted convention. The values exceeded this threshold, indicating

the reliability of the items in measuring their latent constructs. Reliability results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability test results

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Ethical leadership	10	.973
Moral awareness	5	.916
Moral courage	5	.928
Ubuntu	6	.938

Source: Research (2025)

Model fit indices

The measurement model showed a good fit as the value for CMIN/df fell between 0 and 3, with lower values indicating a better fit (Goretzko, Siemund & Sterner, 2023). In addition, the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Root Mean Square Residual (RMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were considered in determining the measurement model fit indices. The values for all the indices were within the convention (Goretzko, Siemund & Sterner, 2023), as indicated in Table 5. This strong relationship between the observed variables and their corresponding latent constructs was also supported by the results of the Cronbach's alpha reliability statistics in Table 3, which had high values ranging from .928 to .973.

Table 3: Measurement model fit indices

Fit Indices	Measurement model	Recommended values	Sources
CMIN/df	2.56	≤ 3.00	
GFI	0.935	> 0.90	
TLI	0.946	> 0.90	Goretzko, Siemund &
CFI	0.968	> 0.90	Sterner, 2023
RMR	0.03	< 0.05	
RMSEA	0.06	$0.05 \leq \text{RMSEA} < 0.08$	

Source: Research (2025)

Descriptive statistics of key variables**Table 4****Moral Awareness**

	Leaders in my council recognize unethical behaviour.	Leaders in my council actively seek information about ethical standards relevant to their roles.	Leaders in my council are aware of the potential consequences of unethical decisions for the council and the community.	Leaders in my council understand different perspectives when assessing ethical issues.	Leaders in my council regularly reflect on their own values and how they align with their professional responsibilities.	Averages /Mean
Std. Deviation	1.251	1.186	1.275	1.135	1.170	1.203
Mean	2.69	2.59	2.66	2.53	2.40	2.57

The mean scores for all statements related to moral awareness are low, ranging from 2.40 to 2.69 on a 5-point Likert scale. This indicates that the respondents have a general perception that leaders in the councils do not have the capabilities to recognize moral issues. This is indicated by the lowest mean score on the statement for reflecting on personal values (2.40), suggesting a noteworthy gap in leaders actively considering their ethical responsibilities in urban councils.

Table 5**Moral Courage**

	Leaders in my council speak up against unethical practices in my council.	Leaders in my council report a colleague if they see them engaging in	Leaders in my council take a stand against corrupt activities, even if it is unpopular	Leaders in my council challenge their colleagues when they believe an action is	Leaders in my council promote ethical behaviour among their colleagues, even if it	Averages /Mean
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		corrupt activities.	within the council.	morally wrong.	involves personal risk.	
Std. Deviation	1.158	1.151	1.096	1.082	1.114	1.120
Mean	2.36	2.26	2.24	2.16	2.16	2.24

Source: Research (2025)

The mean scores for statements related to moral courage range from 2.16 to 2.36 on a 5-point Likert scale, notably being on the lower end. This indicates a perceived lack of moral courage among leaders in the urban councils. The highest mean score for the statement about speaking up against unethical practices (2.36) still suggests that leaders lack the courage to speak or act against unethical issues. The lowest mean scores are on challenging colleagues (2.16) and promoting ethical behaviour despite personal risk (2.16), indicating a significant deficiency in moral courage in these areas.

Table 6: Ubuntu

	Embracing Ubuntu can influence council leaders to design policies that reflect their compassion for vulnerable members of society.	Adopting Ubuntu can encourage shared responsibility and accountability among employees.	Implementing Ubuntu principles can encourage council leaders to show genuine respect for all stakeholders, regardless of their status.	Demonstrating that Ubuntu can influence everyone in the council to take responsibility for the well- being of fellow employees and the community.	Practicing Ubuntu can encourage council leaders to show empathy and understanding of the needs of employees and citizens.	Principles of Ubuntu can enhance ethical decision- making in my council.	Averages /Mean
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Std. Deviation	.921	.967	.969	.827	.816	.806	.884
Mean	3.95	4.04	4.16	4.14	4.18	4.24	4.12

Source: Research (2025)

The results indicate that mean scores for statements related to Ubuntu are high, ranging from 4.04 to 4.24. This indicates strong perceptions among respondents that Ubuntu principles are influential in leadership practices within urban councils. The highest mean score is observed on the statement about enhancing ethical decision-making (4.24), suggesting that respondents strongly believe in the positive impact of Ubuntu for leaders in making ethical decisions. The results further indicate that all statements on Ubuntu reflect a positive view of its role in promoting compassion, responsibility, and respect within the councils. The standard deviations range from 0.806 to 0.969, indicating low variability in responses. This low variability suggests a consensus among respondents regarding the importance of Ubuntu principles in their urban councils.

Table 7: Mean and Standard Deviation of key variables Summarized

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ethical leadership	2.32	.863
Moral awareness	2.58	1.041
Moral courage	2.23	1.000
Ubuntu	4.12	.757

Source: Research (2025)

Correlation analysis

To examine the correlation among the variables, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. Pearson product correlation of moral awareness and ethical leadership was found to be strongly positive and statistically significant ($r = .844$, $p < .001$). This suggests that as moral awareness perceptions increase, ethical leadership behaviour would also increase. The same was done for moral awareness and moral courage ($r = .697$, $p < .001$) and moral awareness and ethical leadership ($r = .901$, $p < .001$); both were found to be strongly positive and statistically significant. Pearson product correlation of moral awareness and Ubuntu was found to be weak and negative but statistically significant ($r = -0.082$, $p < .148$), suggesting that as moral awareness increases, the

correlation with Ubuntu decreases. This suggested that Ubuntu may not predict moral awareness. The summarized statistics are indicated in Table 8.

Table 8: Correlation Statistics

Variable Pair	Correlation	
	Coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Moral awareness and Ethical leadership	.844	<0.001
Moral awareness and Moral courage	.697	<0.001
Moral courage and Ethical leadership	.901	<0.001
Moral Awareness and Ubuntu	-.082	<0.148

Source: Research (2025)

Regression analysis

A linear regression analysis was conducted to predict H1, H2, and H3. H1 predicted that moral awareness has a positive influence on ethical leadership in urban councils. Ethical leadership was regressed on predicting moral awareness to test the hypothesis. H1 was strongly supported. Moral awareness significantly predicted ethical leadership ($\beta = .844$, $R^2 = .712$, $p < 0.000$). These results indicated the positive effect of moral awareness on ethical leadership in urban councils, with a 71.2% of the variance in ethical leadership explained by moral awareness. H2: The hypothesis assumed that moral awareness influences Ubuntu. Moral awareness was regressed on predicting Ubuntu to test the hypothesis. H2 was not supported ($\beta = -.882$, $R^2 = .007$, $p < 0.148$). The $\beta = -.882$ indicates a strong negative relationship, as moral awareness increases, Ubuntu decreases. $R^2 = .007$ indicates that 0.7% of the variance in Ubuntu was explained by moral awareness, indicating insufficient evidence to support the hypothesis, $p < 0.148$, not statistically significant. H3: The hypothesis predicted that Ubuntu has a positive influence on ethical leadership in urban councils. Ethical leadership was regressed on predicting Ubuntu to test the hypothesis. H3 was not supported ($\beta = -0.136$, $R^2 = 0.018$, $p < 0.016$). The $\beta = -0.136$ indicated a weak negative relationship; higher Ubuntu is associated with lower ethical leadership. A weak positive effect of Ubuntu on performance and the $R^2 = 0.018$ indicates that only 1.8% of the variance in ethical leadership is explained by Ubuntu, whilst the $P < 0.016$ suggests that the relationship was statistically significant, suggesting a weak relationship. The summarized statistics are indicated in Table 9.

Table 9: Regression analysis statistics

Hypothesis	Path	Beta Coefficient	R ²	F	P-value
H1	Moral awareness → Ethical leadership	.844	.712	733.355	<0.000
H2	Moral awareness → Ubuntu	-.882	.007	2.107	<0.148
H3	Ubuntu → Ethical leadership	-.136	.018	5.868	<0.016

Source: Research (2025)

Mediation analysis

Mediation was run to test H4, which hypothesized that Ubuntu mediates the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership. To test this hypothesis, a series of regression analyses was conducted using SPSS using Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach of determining direct and indirect effects. The direct effect of moral awareness on ethical leadership was significant, $\beta = 0.844$, $p < .000$, indicating a strong relationship; an increase in moral awareness significantly led to an increase in ethical leadership. When Ubuntu was introduced as a dependent variable, it did not predict moral awareness ($\beta = -0.082$, $p < 0.148$) not statistically significant, indicating that higher moral awareness is not associated with Ubuntu principles. There is a negative relationship between Ubuntu and ethical leadership ($\beta = -0.067$), $p < 0.027$). The indirect effect of moral awareness on ethical leadership through Ubuntu ($\beta = -0.082$, $p < 0.027$) is statistically significant, but indicates a negative indirect effect, indicating that Ubuntu does not mediate this relationship. Thus, the mediation analysis result does not support hypothesis (H4). The direct effect of moral awareness on ethical leadership is strong, whilst the mediation effect through Ubuntu is weak, even though significant, indicating that there is a strong direct relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership. The summarised mediation statistics are indicated in Table 10, and in the path diagram is Figure 2.

Table 10: Mediation Analysis Statistics for H4

Effect Path	Std. Error	Coefficients β	P-value
Moral Awareness $\rightarrow$ Ethical leadership	.025	.844	<0.000
Moral Awareness $\rightarrow$ Ubuntu	.025	.838	<0.148
Ubuntu $\rightarrow$ Ethical leadership	.034	-.067	<0.027
Moral Awareness $\rightarrow$ Ubuntu $\rightarrow$ Ethical Leadership	.041	-.082	<0.027

Source: Research (2025)

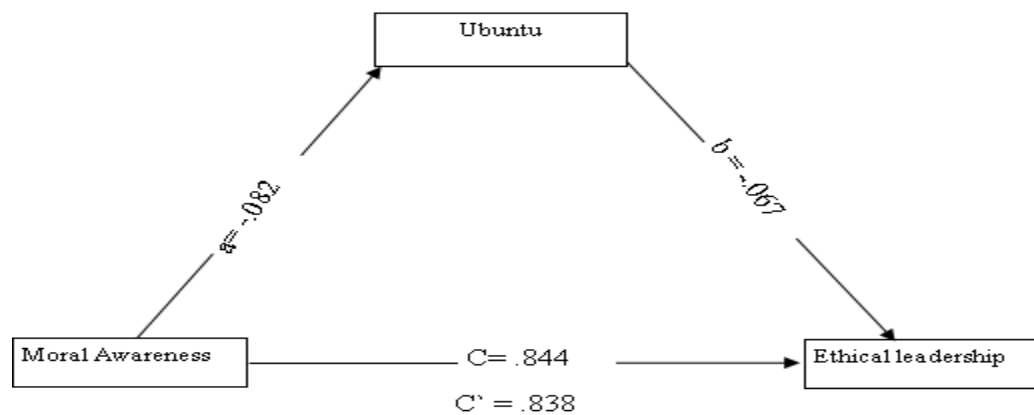


Figure 2: Mediation Analysis Path Diagram for H4

Note: Mediation equation:

$$C = C' + A * B \quad (.844 = .838 + -.082 * -.067)$$

Source: Research (2025)

Moderation analysis

We examined whether the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership is moderated by moral courage (H5) using multiple regression through Hayes Process Macro model number1in SPSS. We observed that the constant ($\beta = 0.7829$), the expected value of ethical leadership when both moral awareness and moral courage are zero, $p < 0.000$, indicates that the constant is statistically significant. Moral awareness ($\beta = 0.1702$), $p < 0.000$, shows a strong, significant relationship; for every one-unit increase in moral awareness, ethical leadership

increases by 0.1702 units. Moral courage ($\beta = 0.2387$), $p < 0.000$, confirms a significant effect with every one-unit increase in moral courage; ethical leadership increases by 0.2387 units. The Interaction Term (Int_1), $\beta = 0.0870$, $p < 0.000$, indicates a significant interaction. The combined effect of moral awareness and moral courage on ethical leadership is positive. As the product of moral awareness and moral courage increases, ethical leadership also increases by 0.0870 units. Therefore, H5 was supported. There is a strong positive relationship between both moral awareness and moral courage with ethical leadership. The interaction term also suggests that the impact of moral awareness on ethical leadership is enhanced by moral courage. The results highlight the importance of both moral awareness and moral courage in nurturing ethical leadership within urban councils. The summarized moderation results are indicated in Table 11.

Table 11: Moderation Analysis Statistics for H5

Variable	Effect	SE	t-value	p-value	95% LLCI	95% ULCI
Constant	.7829	.1058	7.4023	<0.000	0.5748	0.9910
Moral Awareness	.1702	.0378	4.4999	<0.000	0.0958	0.2446
Moral Courage	.2387	.0563	4.2391	<0.000	0.1279	0.3495
Int_1	.0870	.0159	5.4713	<0.000	0.0557	0.1182

Source: Research (2025)

Discussion of findings

The findings of the current study are in agreement with the literature that emphasizes moral awareness in influencing ethical leadership (Yue et al., 2022). Moral awareness allows leaders to identify ethical issues that may arise within their organizations (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). This consensus illustrates that leaders who are aware of ethical issues are better equipped to act in ways that adhere to expected ethical conduct within their organizations (Coffie et al., 2023). The role of moral awareness in translating ethical leadership into improved governance outcomes is attested by Mohi & Zhang (2023), who stated a positive relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership. Some scholars suggest that developing moral awareness is not as straightforward as one might think, which can be influenced by factors such as corruption and nepotism (Cardinal 2025; Romero, 2024).

The current study emphasizes the role of Ubuntu in enhancing moral awareness through its focus on relational values. This view aligns with the common assumption in ethical leadership literature in the African context. Scholars assert that moral awareness leads to better ethical practices (Chigangaidze et al., 2021). Furthermore, previous studies support the view that cultural orientations play a part in influencing leadership outcomes (Shneor et al., 2021). While the literature supports the idea that cultural and social values influence moral awareness (Yue, Men & Ci, 2022), the specific conditions through which cultural influences function may vary across different societies, as culture and norms are not the same. This becomes so in view of the findings of the current study. Whilst respondents perceived Ubuntu as a necessary framework that can enhance ethical leadership, the mediation result found no direct positive influence of Ubuntu on moral awareness and ethical leadership. This divergence may bolster the notion that the relationship between moral awareness and culturally embedded frameworks such as Ubuntu may not be as straightforward as assumed.

The current study introduced moral courage as a necessary component in translating moral awareness into action. While previous studies emphasize moral awareness itself, the assertion that moral courage is essential for sustaining ethical behaviour in the face of adversity diverges from the conventional focus on moral awareness alone. This addition introduces the assumption that moral awareness must be twined with courage for ethical behaviour to be realized within organizations. Some scholars put forward the issue of moral sensitivity being related to moral awareness (Formosa, 2021). This might explain the complexities in the relationship between moral awareness, ethical leadership, and Ubuntu. While the current study did not substantiate the influence of Ubuntu in this relationship, it could imply that moral sensitivity, the ability to interpret and act on ethical information, might be more relevant in promoting Ubuntu than focusing on moral awareness. If this assumption is correct, it then creates a new dimension for exploring how moral sensitivity could mediate or interact with moral awareness in promoting Ubuntu.

Similarly, literature posits that Ubuntu principles require leaders to be accountable not just to themselves but to their communities (Akpa-Inyang & Chima, 2021). However, the failure by the current study to substantiate this influence may raise questions about what additional factors might be necessary to bridge this gap. Furthermore, in view of the findings, we may conclude that culture influences how moral awareness is perceived. In societies where individualism is prevalent

(Ogunfowora et al., 2022), moral awareness may not lead to the expected communal or relational conduct inherent in Ubuntu. If so, this divergence is contrary to the assumption that moral awareness is a universal cognition that enhances collective ethical behaviour. While Ubuntu promotes a sense of community and shared responsibility, the finding that moral awareness does not significantly influence it suggests that there may be other mediating or moderating factors at play. This complexity is echoed in the literature (Rasheed et al., 2023).

The literature acknowledges the tension between the relational values of Ubuntu and the individualistic accountability systems prevalent in contemporary African governance systems (Aliye, 2020; Nicolaides & Dlodla, 2023; Sipondo, 2025). This divergence indicates that while Ubuntu is positively viewed, as it was appraised as so by the respondents, its application may be constrained by modern institutional challenges. The finding suggests that Ubuntu may not always translate into the ethical leadership practices expected in contemporary public institutions, particularly in the face of self-interested behaviour among leaders. This brings out the paradoxical nature of Ubuntu (Ahmed & Khan, 2024). This observation may reflect the complexities being exposed in an attempt to apply Ubuntu in modern African businesses and governance systems. This view is suggested in line with the current thinking that bridging traditional practices with modern governance frameworks is crucial (Chigangaidze et al., 2021; Marovah & Mutanga, 2023). The results challenge the status quo; it is not enough just to endorse Ubuntu as a viable relational framework. There must be a deliberate and concerted effort to integrate its principles into existing systems in a way that addresses contemporary ethical challenges.

The findings of the current study are in agreement with the literature that highlights the importance of moral courage in leadership. Studies indicate that moral courage is positively correlated with ethical decision-making abilities (Luo et al., 2023). This convergence suggests that leaders who possess moral courage are more likely to confront unethical decisions and advocate for ethical practices within their organizations. This reinforces moral courage as a crucial factor in enhancing ethical leadership. The literature suggests that moral courage serves as a buffer against moral distress and moral injury (Berdida & Grande, 2023). Not to be overlooked is a clear variance being suggested through the findings of this study. Western-centric perspectives on ethical leadership often emphasize individual traits and personal integrity (Mohi & Zhang, 2023), a view contrasting with Ubuntu, an African perspective which emphasizes relational responsibility and relational

ethics (Nicolaides & Dlodla, 2023; Sipondo, 2025). The integration of moral courage within the Ubuntu framework could yield different results and implications from those observed in individualistic cultures. This view may explain why the assumption that Ubuntu mediates the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership was not supported in the current study.

Implications for Institutional Practice

The findings of this study strengthen the importance of moral awareness in influencing ethical leadership. This relationship suggests that enhancing moral awareness among leaders can lead to improved ethical conduct within organizations. This has significant implications for urban councils and other public institutions, the need to cultivate moral awareness among all employees. Moreover, the study highlighted the complex interplay between moral awareness and factors such as corruption and nepotism, factors that can distort moral judgment.

The discussion on the role of Ubuntu in enhancing moral awareness also implied that cultural values have an influence on ethical leadership. While employees within urban councils perceived Ubuntu as a useful framework, the study revealed that its influence on moral awareness and ethical behaviour is not as straightforward as previously assumed. This suggests that urban councils need to adapt Ubuntu principles to contemporary governance frameworks (Marovah & Mutanga, 2023). Furthermore, the introduction of moral courage as a necessary component for translating moral awareness into observable conduct adds another level of complexity. Leaders must not only be morally aware but also possess the courage to act on that awareness even in the face of adversity (Luo et al., 2023). This necessitates a cultural shift within organizations that encourages moral courage, recognizing it as an essential requirement for ethical leadership to flourish (Hakimi et al., 2023). The divergence between Western-centric perspectives on ethical leadership and the communal values inherent in Ubuntu implies that a one sized which fits all to ethical leadership may not work. The findings call for a re-evaluation of ethical frameworks used in diverse cultural contexts. This cultural sensitivity is crucial for fostering an ethical leadership dynamic that is both effective and relevant in different governance systems (Chigangaidze et al., 2021; Wuta, 2025).

Implications to Theory

The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical discourse on the relationships between moral awareness, ethical leadership, and cultural frameworks such as Ubuntu. By reaffirming the consensus in the literature that moral awareness has an influence on ethical leadership, the study enhances existing theories that posit moral awareness as essential for leaders to identify and address ethical issues. This alignment reinforces the notion that ethical leadership is not simply a function of individual traits but is deeply rooted in the capacity to perceive and respond to ethical dilemmas. Furthermore, the study introduced moral courage as a critical factor that interacts with moral awareness to facilitate ethical conduct. This addition expands theoretical frameworks by suggesting that moral awareness alone is insufficient for ethical behaviour (Luo et al., 2023); it must be combined with the courage to act on that awareness.

The findings also highlighted the complexities associated with cultural influence on moral awareness and ethical leadership. While previous literature has often examined these concepts in predominantly Western contexts, this study emphasizes the need for theories that account for cultural variations, particularly in non-Western settings (Shneor et al., 2021). The limited support for the direct influence of Ubuntu on moral awareness and ethical leadership suggests that existing theories may require adaptation to incorporate contextual factors that affect ethical behaviour (Chigangaidze et al., 2021). Moreover, the divergence noted between individualistic and relational values in ethical leadership raises important questions about the universality of moral theories (Ogunfowora et al., 2022). The findings suggest that theories developed in Western contexts may fail to represent the intricacies of ethical leadership in societies that are predominated by relational relationships. This insight calls for the development of culturally sensitive frameworks that integrate communal values, such as those found in Ubuntu, into broader theories of ethical leadership.

Conclusion

The probe into the interplay between moral awareness, Ubuntu, ethical leadership, and moral courage has revealed critical insights that contribute to our comprehension of ethical leadership in the purview of urban councils. The study found that moral awareness plays an influential role in ethical leadership. Leaders with high levels of moral awareness are well prepared to recognize ethical problems and make the right decisions (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). However, while moral

awareness was found essential, its usefulness may be constrained by circumstantial factors, including organizational culture and individual behaviour that prioritize self-interest (Romero, 2024). Although the hypothesis on Ubuntu mediating the relationship between moral awareness and ethical leadership was not supported, the framework remains valuable for promoting ethical values (Aliye, 2020). The divergence in mediation highlights the complexities of integrating traditional values into contemporary governance. This divergence suggests that the current status of Ubuntu is a mere ideal framework that needs deliberate efforts to integrate its principles into contemporary business and governance systems in the African context (Nicolaidis & Dlodla, 2023). The current study underscores the need for cultivating moral courage in leaders, as it goes beyond making ethical decisions to also nurture a supportive ethical climate among employees (Hakimi et al., 2023; Pakizekho & Barkhordari-Sharifabad, 2022).

The interaction between moral awareness, Ubuntu, and moral courage revealed a complex relationship in shaping ethical leadership. The findings of this study have far-reaching repercussions for leadership development programmes in urban councils and other public institutions in Zimbabwe. There is a need for an approach that not only emphasizes ethical awareness and moral courage but also integrates Ubuntu principles to nurture a culture of collective responsibility and relational ethics (Nicolaidis & Dlodla, 2023). The study highlighted the intricacies and challenges in applying Ubuntu principles within contemporary Zimbabwean governance systems (Khan, 2023). Addressing these challenges will require commitment to promote ethical leadership that is aligned with both traditional values and modern governance realities in the African context. It is envisaged that such an integrated approach can lead to an enhanced ethical governance system within urban councils and benefit their communities at large (Wuta, 2025).

Future Research Directions

Building on the findings and discussions from the current study, there are issues that emerged and warrant further exploration to expand, deepen, and close the identified gaps. Future research should explore the specific mechanisms through which moral courage interacts with moral awareness to influence ethical leadership. There might be a need for longitudinal studies to aid our comprehension of the development of moral courage over time. In view of the limited influence

of Ubuntu on moral awareness and ethical leadership as revealed in the current study, more studies are required to explore the contribution of different cultural frameworks in shaping ethical leadership practices. We may benefit from comparative studies carried out across diverse cultural settings and find out how communal values and individualistic predispositions shape moral awareness and ethical behaviour.

The study suggested a possible link between moral sensitivity and the efficacy of Ubuntu in promoting ethical leadership. Future research should explore how moral sensitivity interacts with moral awareness and ethical leadership with a focus on culturally diverse settings. Future studies may look into how institutional policies influence ethical leadership. We envisage studies that explore how governance systems interact with the cultivation of moral awareness among leaders. There is a real need for future studies that focus on how to integrate Ubuntu principles into main stream contemporary governance frameworks, with reference to African governance systems. We may benefit much from case studies of institutions, if they do exist, institutions that have successfully blended traditional values with contemporary business practices.

Limitations

While this study has contributed valuable insights on moral awareness, Ubuntu, and ethical leadership, there are some deficiencies that have to be acknowledged to inform future research and highlight areas for improvement in methodology and scope. The study focused on a specific sample of employees from a particular region of urban councils in Zimbabwe, which may not be representative of all urban councils in Zimbabwe and beyond. This drawback may impact the generalization of the results to other regions, cultures, and different types of organizations.

The research used a cross-sectional research which captured data at a single moment. This design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between moral awareness, Ubuntu, and ethical leadership. To address this limitation, longitudinal studies are recommended to track changes over time. The study depended on individual-reported measures of moral awareness and ethical leadership through survey questionnaires, a measure that may be subject to bias. Respondents may have overvalued their moral awareness and ethical practices. The study employed a quantitative method to evaluate connections between the variables. Incorporating qualitative insights could have enriched the understanding of how moral awareness and Ubuntu are perceived and implemented in practice. Future research should integrate qualitative research approaches such as

interviews and focus groups to capture the finer details that cannot be captured through a quantitative methodology.

Recommendations

To nurture moral awareness and ethical leadership, there is a need for mandatory ethics training programmes for all leaders and employees within urban councils (Mohi & Zhang, 2023). Urban councils should establish policies and frameworks that clearly detail ethical decision-making to guide leaders in their roles (Coffie et al., 2023). There is a need for Urban councils to create and nurture an organizational culture that encourages open dialogue on ethical issues within their institutions (Chigangaidze et al., 2021; Nicolaidis & Dlodla, 2023). This can be achieved through an open-door policy where leaders are accessible and approachable whenever employees have any ethical issues to present. This can further be strengthened through setting up mechanisms that guarantee confidential reporting of unethical behaviour (Akpa-Inyang & Chima, 2021). This might include the need for a clear and well-publicized policy on whistleblower protection.

Urban councils are encouraged to institute ethical committees mandated to provide guidance and oversight on all matters to ethical issues (Aliye, 2020). Such committees could be the arm tasked in advocating for policies that protect leaders within urban councils from undue political interference on issues that require ethical decision-making.

Urban councils are advised to value and reward those leaders and employees who demonstrate and uphold ethical values (Luo et al., 2023). These recognition incentives may encourage a culture of accountability. Leaders who exemplify ethical behaviour should be celebrated, their actions should be publicized as desired examples for others to follow (Berdida & Grande, 2023; Pardhi & Suri, 2024). Further so, leaders who violate ethical values should be held accountable for their conduct (Rasheed et al., 2023). The consequences for the violations of such ethical conduct should be clearly laid out. The sanctions for such violations should be deterrent enough and executed swiftly.

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The impact of tax incentives on foreign direct investment attraction: a literature review for Southern African Development Community (SADC) and beyond.

Gumisai Jacob Gutu¹, Obert Sifile² & Edson Gwangwava²

¹Arrupe Jesuit University, Zimbabwe (Corresponding author: jacob.gutu@aju.ac.zw)

² Chinhoyi University of Technology, Zimbabwe

Abstract

The efficiency of tax incentives in luring foreign direct investment (FDI) to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) area is investigated in this research, which puts its conclusions in a worldwide perspective. It analyses important elements impacting the effectiveness of tax incentive regimes via a thorough literature study, such as investor views, institutional quality, and economic circumstances. While tax incentives may greatly increase foreign direct investment inflows, comparative studies show that their efficacy varies by area, with Southeast Asia and the EU showing more constant performance. Mentioned in this study are best practices for designing tax incentives, focusing on sector targeting, transparency, and conformity to international norms. However, there are still gaps in our knowledge of these incentives' long-term effects, which call for further sector-specific and longitudinal studies in the future. Furthermore, the importance of non-tax considerations in FDI choices is emphasised, supporting a comprehensive strategy that balances tax breaks and revenue requirements. In the end, the analysis offers insightful information to SADC policymakers who want to establish efficient tax incentive schemes that draw in foreign capital and support long-term economic growth.

Keywords: Economic Development, Foreign Direct Investment, Policy Analysis, Race to the bottom, Tax breaks, Tax Incentives.

Introduction

Economic development depends heavily on foreign direct investment (FDI), especially in emerging nations like the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It is a key factor in the development of jobs, technological transfer, and capital influx (Shafiq et al., 2021). Tax

incentives are a common tactic used by governments to entice foreign direct investment. These incentives, which include tax holidays, exemptions, and lower corporate income tax rates, are intended to make a host nation's investment environment more attractive (Silajdzic & Mehic, 2022). However, there is still much disagreement among academics and decision-makers over the efficacy of such incentives.

Examining the effect of tax incentives on FDI attractiveness is made possible by the SADC region, which is distinguished by its varied economic landscapes and differing degrees of institutional ability. According to recent research, tax incentives may be quite successful in luring in foreign capital, but their efficacy is often reliant on other elements, including political stability, governance quality, and the general state of the economy (Camara, 2023; Boly et al., 2020). For example, because of the country's wider political and economic issues, tax breaks in Uganda's oil and gas industry were shown to have little effect on drawing foreign direct investment (FDI) (Dorcas, 2023).

There are still a lot of unanswered questions about tax incentives and foreign direct investment, especially when it comes to the SADC area. According to certain research, tax incentives cannot always provide the intended outcomes. For instance, Bobenič Hintošová et al. (2021) discovered that fiscal incentives had the opposite effect of financial incentives, which had a favourable impact on FDI inflows into Slovakia. This discrepancy emphasises the need to have a sophisticated grasp of how various tax incentive kinds interact with regional institutional frameworks and economic circumstances.

Furthermore, research that looks at how tax incentives directly affect foreign direct investment often overlooks the possible indirect impacts on macroeconomic factors like tax revenue and economic development (Sebele-Mpofu et al., 2022). As an illustration of the intricate link between tax policy and economic consequences, Celani et al. (2022) contend that while foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows may increase tax income, this relationship may not hold in nations with abundant natural resources.

With an emphasis on the SADC area and beyond, this study aims to add to the current conversation by performing a thorough literature analysis on the effect of tax incentives on FDI attractiveness. The study would examine a range of empirical research, theoretical models, and policy ramifications related to foreign direct investment and tax incentives. The purpose of this study is

to identify gaps in the literature and suggest future research areas that might improve our knowledge of how well tax incentives work to draw foreign direct investment (FDI) to developing nations by synthesising the body of current research.

The continued use of tax incentives as a means of luring foreign direct investment raises serious concerns regarding their true efficacy and long-term effects on economic growth. Although these incentives have been widely implemented in SADC countries, the outcomes have been uneven, with several countries having little success in drawing significant foreign direct investment inflows (Kusumaningtyas & Kalimanzila, 2023). Concerns are raised by this discrepancy about the opportunity costs of tax incentives, especially concerning possible government revenue losses and the durability of economic development (Mukhtarov et al., 2020).

Additionally, the intended advantages of tax incentives are undermined by the intricacy of tax regimes and the lack of transparency, which often discourages prospective investors (Davies et al., 2021). The situation is further complicated by differences in the efficiency of tax policies under various political regimes, as noted by Abille et al. (2020), which implies that the political environment has a major impact on how tax incentives affect foreign direct investment. Furthermore, corruption and inefficiency brought on by a weak institutional structure may outweigh the benefits of tax incentives (Hynes et al., 2021).

To address these important concerns, this study conducts a comprehensive literature review that looks at how tax incentives affect the attractiveness of foreign direct investment (FDI), emphasising actual data, theoretical understandings, and policy suggestions. This research aims to provide policymakers and stakeholders with useful information for promoting sustainable economic development via better FDI strategies by identifying the elements that affect the efficacy of tax incentives in the SADC area and beyond. The paper answers the question: What is the impact of tax incentives on foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction in SADC countries?

Methodology

The research looked at how tax incentives affect the attraction of foreign direct investment (FDI) using a systematic literature review technique. With an emphasis on SADC nations and other developing areas, this strategy included a thorough search for pertinent scholarly publications, reports, and empirical research published in peer-reviewed journals. Databases like Google

Scholar, JSTOR, and specialised publications in finance and economics were used to gather data. Relevance to tax incentives, foreign direct investment, and economic growth was one of the selection criteria, along with methodological soundness and empirical support. Numerous tax incentives, their efficacy, and the contextual elements affecting their results were all explored in the review. The results of the chosen studies were categorised and synthesised using thematic analysis. Finding important themes, patterns, and gaps in the body of research on tax incentives and foreign direct investment was part of this. To identify optimal practices and areas that need further investigation, the analysis also took into account the methodological techniques used in earlier studies. The technique sought to provide policymakers and stakeholders in the SADC region and beyond with a comprehensive knowledge of the link between tax incentives and foreign direct investment by incorporating findings from various research.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two primary theories that elucidate the relationship between tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction: the Tax Competition Theory and the Institutional Quality Theory.

Tax Competition Theory

According to the Tax Competition Theory, nations use competitive strategies to entice foreign direct investment (FDI) by providing advantageous tax regimes, including tax incentives like holidays, exemptions, and lower rates. According to this idea, foreign investors who want to optimise their returns on investment are more drawn to jurisdictions with lower tax burdens (Clausing et al., 2021). However, the larger institutional and economic environment often affects how effective tax incentives are. For example, tax incentives may draw foreign direct investment (FDI) at first, but variables like political stability and the calibre of governance affect their long-term viability (Undie et al., 2020). According to this idea, tax incentives might lead to a race to the bottom in which nations keep lowering their tax rates, which could jeopardise public revenue and long-term economic viability (Silajdzic & Mehic, 2022).

Institutional Quality Theory

The efficiency of tax incentives is shaped by institutional frameworks and governance, according to institutional quality theory. Strong institutions, which are defined by openness, the rule of law, and efficient regulatory frameworks, increase the appeal of tax incentives by offering a stable investment environment, claims this idea (Kusumaningtyas & Kalimanzila, 2023). The advantages of tax incentives may be offset by low institutional quality, as investors may believe that corruption and inefficiency provide greater risks (Hynes et al., 2021). This idea emphasises how crucial it is to combine tax breaks with strong institutional changes to foster an atmosphere that attracts foreign direct investment.

Literature Review

Global Perspectives on Tax Incentives and FDI

The link between tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI) has been the subject of several studies, with a variety of results highlighting the intricate nature of this relationship. Although tax incentives are often used as a tactic to attract foreign direct investment, their efficacy is frequently dependent on several contextual circumstances.

Positive Correlations between Tax Incentives and FDI

Numerous studies show that tax incentives and foreign direct investment inflows are positively correlated. For example, Appiah-Kubi et al.'s (2021) study, which examined data from 40 African nations, discovered that extended tax breaks and reduced corporate income tax rates greatly increase the appeal of foreign direct investment. Their results highlight how important tax incentives are in influencing investor choices, especially in emerging nations where there is fierce rivalry for foreign direct investment. Similarly, Silajdzic & Mehic (2022) pointed out that lowering corporate income tax may be a useful strategy to encourage foreign direct investment (FDI) in less developed transition countries, particularly when paired with other beneficial economic policies.

The Role of Non-Tax Factors

On the other hand, some research highlights that tax breaks may not be enough to attract foreign direct investment. More important variables are often mentioned, including market size, political stability, and infrastructural quality. Shafiq et al. (2021), for example, pointed out that while tax incentives were important in Pakistan, the overall economic climate, which included GDP growth and trade openness, had a greater impact on FDI inflows. This view is supported by Bobenič Hintošová et al. (2021), who discovered that although fiscal incentives had a negative association with FDI, they had a beneficial influence, indicating that the business climate as a whole is essential for drawing in foreign investment.

The Importance of Institutional Quality

Another important element affecting the efficacy of tax incentives is institutional quality. Siregar & Patunru (2021) contend that by offering a secure and open investment environment, reputable institutions may increase the effect of tax incentives. On the other hand, even in the presence of alluring tax incentives, bad administration may discourage investment. The Institutional Quality Theory, which holds that robust regulatory frameworks are necessary to optimise the advantages of tax incentives, is consistent with this conclusion (Abille & Mumuni, 2023).

Thus, international views on tax incentives and foreign direct investment show a complex environment in which incentives are important but need to be combined with a strong institutional framework and advantageous economic circumstances to produce the intended results. To increase the efficacy of their programs, SADC authorities must consider these larger factors when they contemplate tax incentives as a means of luring foreign investment.

Tax Incentives in the SADC Region

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) area provides a unique context for examining how well tax incentives draw in foreign direct investment (FDI). This section examines empirical research with a particular focus on SADC nations, emphasising the many ways in which tax incentive regimes have been implemented and the resulting results.

Effectiveness of Tax Incentives

Although their efficacy varies by nation, empirical research has shown that tax incentives in the SADC area may have a major impact on foreign direct investment inflows. For example, Boly et al. (2020) discovered that lower corporate income tax rates might increase foreign direct investment inflows, especially in countries that are strategically located in the area. According to their study, tax incentives may work as a stimulant to draw in investment, but other elements like macroeconomic stability and institutional quality often mitigate their effects.

However, a study by Edo et al. (2020) highlights that there are considerable differences in the efficiency of tax policies between the region's democratic and military administrations. According to their research, tax factors had a stronger effect on foreign direct investment (FDI) under military rule than under democratic rule, suggesting that political context is a significant factor in determining how well tax incentive programs work.

Disparities in Implementation

There are significant differences in how tax incentives are implemented across SADC nations. To draw in foreign direct investment (FDI), certain nations, including Botswana and Namibia, have implemented extensive tax incentive schemes that provide a range of special rates and exemptions (Dang & Nguyen, 2021). On the other hand, countries like Zimbabwe have had trouble attracting foreign investors due to uneven policy implementation and a lack of transparency (Camara, 2023). Potential investors may become unsure as a result of this inconsistent policy execution, which would undermine the intended advantages of tax incentives.

Challenges and Considerations

In the SADC area, governance problems and general economic circumstances can undermine the efficacy of tax incentives. According to research by Sebele-Mpofu et al. (2022), tax incentives are meant to boost economic development, but if they are not used carefully, they may also make problems like inequality and revenue loss worse. The report highlights the need for a well-rounded strategy that includes tax incentives as a component of a larger economic plan that also includes governance enhancements and institutional changes.

As a result, the SADC region offers a challenging environment for attracting FDI and tax advantages. Disparities in implementation and efficacy highlight the need for comprehensive plans that take into account the larger economic and political settings in which these incentives work, even if they may be quite successful in luring foreign investment.

Comparative Analysis with Other Regions

A comparative study across several locations is necessary to comprehend how well tax incentives draw in foreign direct investment (FDI). This section contextualises the results from the SADC area by discussing how investor views, regulatory frameworks, and economic circumstances all affect how successful tax incentives are internationally.

Variability in Effectiveness across Regions

According to research, there may be significant regional variations in how well tax incentives attract foreign direct investment. For example, research from Southeast Asia has shown that nations like Vietnam and Malaysia successfully use tax breaks to attract significant foreign direct investment, using their advantageous locations and expanding markets (Shafiq et al., 2021). These countries provide customised incentives that fit their unique economic objectives, which have led to large international capital inflows.

On the other hand, research on the EU paints a more nuanced picture. According to Bobenič Hintošová et al. (2021), fiscal incentives sometimes had the opposite effect from the beneficial impact they had on FDI inflows in Slovakia. This suggests that the interaction of tax incentives with other elements, such as infrastructure quality and regulatory stability, may have a significant impact on investment choices in more developed areas. The disparity in these locations' tax incentive efficacy emphasises the need for a supportive environment that goes beyond simple financial incentives.

Role of Regulatory Environments

The effectiveness of tax incentives is significantly influenced by the regulatory environment. According to Obafemi et al. (2021), nations with robust institutional frameworks—which are defined by openness and efficient administration—generally see greater results from their tax incentive initiatives. For instance, compared to areas with poorer governance systems, East Asia's

strong regulatory frameworks have increased the efficacy of tax incentives and encouraged bigger FDI inflows.

On the other hand, in the SADC area, issues with institutional quality and governance may compromise the potential advantages of tax incentives (Camara, 2023). This discrepancy emphasises how SADC nations must fix institutional flaws to maximise the efficacy of their tax incentive programs.

Investor Perceptions

The effect of tax incentives is also greatly influenced by investor views. According to research by Muthitacharoen (2020), tax incentives are often weighed alongside the stability and predictability of the economic climate by international investors. Potential investors may be scared off by alluring tax offers in areas known for their political unpredictability or uneven implementation of policies, like certain portions of Africa (Kyari, 2020).

As a result, a comparison of tax incentives in various geographical areas shows that a mix of investor attitudes, legal frameworks, and economic situations significantly affects how successful they are. The SADC region's results, which highlight notable governance and implementation issues, highlight the need for an all-encompassing strategy that incorporates tax incentives within a larger plan to increase overall investment appeal.

Investor motivation

For some investors, the primary factors influencing their choice of FDI destination may be their own goals rather than the tax breaks provided by the host government. The "OLI" (Ownership, Location, and Internalisation) framework, which was suggested by Dunning in 1979, is based on three key broad factors: internalisation (I) advantages, host market internal locational advantages (L), and organisational particular ownership advantage (O).

Dunning (1993) also develops the four strategic reasons that multinational enterprises (MNEs) take into account while establishing their foreign businesses based on this eclectic theory. The motivations are divided into four categories: market-seeking, efficiency-seeking, resource-seeking, and strategic-asset or capability-seeking foreign direct investment.

Therefore, this theory makes it abundantly evident that a government has little to do in the areas of resource-seeking FDI, market-seeking FDI, and strategic-asset or capability-seeking FDI because, if a country has any of the aforementioned FDI, investors would naturally invest there, whether or not tax incentives are provided. In order to attract efficiency-seeking foreign direct investment, the host country only needs to supply the necessary administrative efficiency, not tax breaks.

Policy Implications

Best Practices for Tax Incentive Design

For tax incentives to be successful in luring foreign direct investment (FDI), they must be designed and implemented according to best practices. According to the research, openness, focused incentives, and conformity to global standards are important factors. Governments must clearly explain the requirements and advantages of tax incentives as transparent procedures boost investor trust, according to Mosquera Valderrama (2020). Additionally, the effect of these incentives might be maximised by focusing on certain industries with strong development potential. For example, because of their potential to spur economic growth, industries like technology and renewable energy are often given priority (Güzel, 2020). Additionally, following global guidelines like those established by the OECD may assist in guaranteeing competitive tax incentives while lowering the possibility of detrimental tax competition.

Balancing Incentives with Revenue Needs

Governments have to strike a careful balance between guaranteeing sufficient revenue collection and offering tax benefits. Over-reliance on tax breaks may result in large revenue losses, which would jeopardise the development of infrastructure and public services (Danzman & Slaski, 2022). A comprehensive approach to economic policy that incorporates tax incentives with more comprehensive fiscal solutions is crucial, as Kumar (2020) emphasises. To ensure that tax policies support sustained economic development without jeopardising public finances, this entails weighing the long-term economic advantages of luring foreign direct investment against the state's immediate income demands (Coulibaly & Camara, 2022). In the end, a well-rounded strategy will promote national development objectives and increase the efficacy of tax incentives.

Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Directions

Even while the amount of study on tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI) is increasing, there are still a lot of unanswered questions, especially about their long-term effects. The majority of research focuses on transient FDI inflows, raising concerns about the long-term viability and efficacy of these incentives. To evaluate how tax incentives affect FDI choices throughout several economic cycles and provide insights into their long-term consequences, longitudinal research is required (Ugwu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, a lot of current research takes a one-size-fits-all approach, ignoring the particular dynamics of certain industries. To learn more about how tax incentives work in other sectors, including manufacturing, technology, and agriculture, future research should focus on sector-specific analysis. According to Akanbi (2020), this focused approach could provide subtle insights that help guide the creation of more successful policies.

Finally, more research should be done on the influence of non-tax elements, including institutional frameworks, infrastructural quality, and political stability. According to research by Casella & Souillard (2022), these variables often have a greater impact on FDI choices than tax incentives. Knowing how they interact with tax laws can provide policymakers with a more complete picture of the investment environment and help them create all-encompassing plans to draw in foreign capital.

Conclusion

The intricate connection between tax incentives and foreign direct investment (FDI), especially in the SADC area, is highlighted in this paper. Although tax incentives may be very important in luring foreign direct investment (FDI), several variables, such as investor views, institutional quality, and economic circumstances, affect how successful they are. Successful tax incentive programs are often defined by openness, focused strategies, and conformity to international norms, according to the comparison study with other locations.

There are still a lot of unanswered questions in the literature, however, especially about the long-term effects of tax incentives and the part non-tax variables play in investment choices. To understand the complex impacts of tax incentives across many businesses, future research should concentrate on sector-specific analysis and longitudinal studies. To ensure sustainable economic

development without jeopardising public resources, a comprehensive strategy is also required to strike a balance between the requirement to generate income and the supply of tax incentives.

In the end, SADC officials need to take these findings into account when creating tax incentive schemes that not only draw in foreign capital but also support more general objectives for economic growth. SADC nations may become more competitive in the international investment market by combining sound institutional frameworks with tax policies.

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