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EDITOR IN CHIEF'S NOTE

“We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom. The world henceforth will be run by synthesizers, people able to put together the right information at the right time, think critically about it, and make important choices wisely.” — Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998)

A journal issue is never just a collection of papers; it is a dialogue across disciplines, a meeting place of ideas, and a compass pointing to new horizons of inquiry. Each journal article is an invitation for scholars to adopt a particular thinking lane, tease it out and end up with their own intellectual curiosities that may result in a fresh trajectory of enquiries. After reading a journal article, the highest form of value addition and reward for an individual is to be inspired to imagine a better universe of human existence. This issue presents a kaleidoscope of articles with diverse themes such as ‘impact of board members’ attributes on corporate performance’, ‘corporate governance practices and the performance of state-owned enterprises’, ‘corruption in state-owned enterprises’, ‘impact of business ethics and corporate governance on public procurement’, ‘efficiency of fuel management on service delivery in local authorities’, ‘environmental impacts of ecotourism’, ‘colonial factor in prime tourist destination toponym’ and ‘challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in informal trading’.

It is my fervent belief that each of the articles in this issue makes a significant contribution not only to the existing board of knowledge but to challenging the status quo, thereby providing a compelling reason to re-think and chart an alternative course to meeting society’s fundamental aspirations of development.

Lest I distort the true import of articles contained herein, I humbly present this issue to you my fellow scholars, in the context and firm conviction of what Albert Einstein once said,

“A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labours of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received” ----- (Einstein, 1929).

He was echoing Isaac Newton’s famous metaphor of “standing on the shoulders of giants” to highlight that all intellectual and scientific progress builds cumulatively on the work of those who came before.

Editor in Chief

Patrick Walter Mamimine

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF BOARD MEMBERS' ATTRIBUTES ON CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the impact of public entity board attributes on organisational performance of state entities in Zimbabwe, guided by the Upper Echelon Theory. Boards have been criticised for scandals that contributed to persistent losses. A pragmatist philosophy, mixed methods approach, and cross-sectional survey design were adopted. The study targeted permanent secretaries, executive and non-executive board members, using a sample of 261 participants for quantitative data and 25 for qualitative data. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, with reliability tested using Cronbach's alpha (α). Analysis was conducted in SPSS Version 25 and AMOS Version 21. Findings showed that age, gender balance, limits on membership and tenure, strong leadership, and sound ethics significantly influence performance. Visionary leadership and ethical standards emerged as critical for public entity success. Gender diversity was linked to improved profitability, innovation, decision-making, and risk awareness, while age diversity brought innovation, risk-taking, and leadership continuity. The study recommends introducing an age diversity policy for boards to enhance energy and innovation. Future research could explore the effectiveness of board appointment systems in Zimbabwe's private sector.

Keywords: attributes, corporate performance, diversity, qualifications, state entities.

INTRODUCTION

Enterprises, whether in the private or public sector, have a mandate to achieve business success by upholding good corporate governance (Arries, 2014). A survey carried out in 2018 credited public entities for 20% of investment, 5% of employment, and over 40% of domestic output globally. Researches have concluded that in the majority of cases, government officials, board of directors and management are accountable and responsible for ineffective corporate governance structures and poor performance in public entities (Mashavave, 2017). The board of directors for public entities form the epitome of corporate governance, hence the survival of corporates is hinged on the effectiveness of boards and their controlling functions (Sifile et al., 2014; Munyede, 2021). That being the case, the OECD Guidelines for public entities (2015a) states that a public entity board should comprise a sufficient number of competent non-executive board members who are capable of independent judgement. Nevertheless, it is a

feature of public entities in Africa, Zimbabwe being no exception, that the appointment of board of directors is guided by politics, ethnicity and patronage which in most cases is detrimental to the organisations (Muregwi, 2018). Mazzucato et al. (2021) propounds that developed countries have not lacked policies, but dynamic capabilities inside the public sector to improve implementation of chosen strategic missions and related programmes, including digital capabilities. In South Africa, the SABC has experienced irregular appointments of unqualified top executive members and board chairpersons. In addition, senior government officials and members of parliament are on several cases part of the public entity boards (Mutize & Tefera, 2020).

In the Zimbabwe context, the country has more than 107 state entities that have the potential to contribute 40% of the gross domestic product (OAG of Zimbabwe Report, 2021). However, quite a number of state entities in Zimbabwe have had challenges related to board failure while others could not improve viability (Mashavave, 2017). The latest audit reports by the country's Treasury show that most public entities are unable to fulfill their organisational mandate, with 92 being technically insolvent.

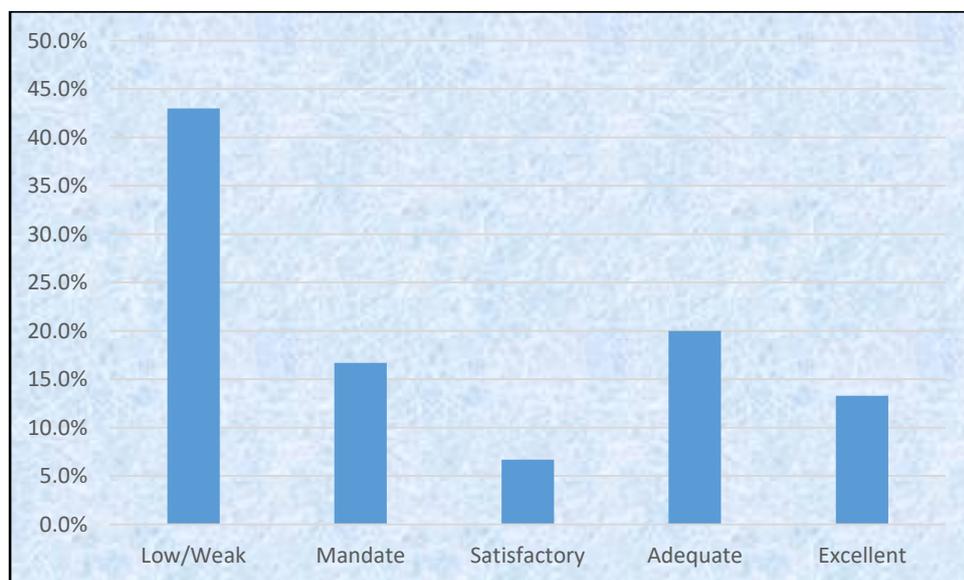


Figure 1 Rating of Ability to Fulfill Organizational Mandate by Zimbabwe Public Entities
 Source: Adopted from Southern African Parliamentary Support Trust (SAPST) Report (2019)

The main causes of corporate failures are hinged on poor corporate governance, with senior managers and directors often living large in the face of poor service delivery and a deplorable state of employee welfare (Chigudu, 2020). The numerous scandals taking place raise a question on the character, determination and capacity of the boards for public entities as well

as the resolve of the responsible ministries to resuscitate the entities. According to Mashavave (2017) and Maune (2015), board members for public entities are often appointed based on personal and political interests rather than prior qualifications and requisite business acumen. Some boards continue to violate the provisions of the Act on board tenure (Mthombeni et al., 2021). Moreso, the appointment of members of two other boards to public entity boards continue unabated which affect the effective discharge of duty by such board members. More often than not, these executive appointments have been riddled with cronyism, where appointment or disappointment of members is based on political expediency and rarely on pure merit (Zvavahera & Ndoda, 2014; Madekutsikwa, 2015; Chimbari, 2017).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Zimbabwean government through the responsible ministries has put in place boards to oversee the public entities and provide a strategic direction (Chirasha & Gauya, 2018). Nevertheless, most public entities have been drowned into scandals which have left them underperforming and recording losses over the years (Mthombeni et al., 2021; Moyo, 2016). More often than not, the appointment of members is rarely based on pure merit (Zvavahera & Ndoda, 2014), but rather on personal and political interests (Mashavave, 2017; Maune, 2015). However, no specific empirical studies have been conducted to establish the impact of board attributes on the corporate performance of Zimbabwe public entities. The research is therefore focused on interrogating whether the chosen board attributes could be the key factors that contribute to the corporate failure in most public entities in Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study's primary aim was to evaluate the impact of board attributes on the corporate performance of public entity boards in Zimbabwe.

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To evaluate the impact of board attributes on corporate performance of public entities.
- To evaluate the impact of board qualifications on corporate performance of public entities.
- To assess the effect of government policies on the relationship between board attributes and corporate performance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research sought to answer the following questions:

- What is the impact of board attributes on corporate performance of public entities?
- What is the impact of board qualifications on corporate performance of public entities?
- What is the impact of government policies on the relationship between board attributes and corporate performance of Zimbabwe public entities?

Research Hypothesis

The study sought to test the following research hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between board attributes and corporate performance of public entities in Zimbabwe.

H2: There is a positive relationship between prerequisite qualifications and corporate performance of public entities in Zimbabwe.

H3: Government policies moderate the relationship between public entity board appointment system and corporate performance.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Zimbabwe is situated in Southern Africa, covering an area of slightly above 390,000 square kilometers. It has a population of approximately 15 million with an annual growth rate of 3.5%. The country earned moderate GDP growth rates of 6.1% in 2022 to 5.0% in 2023, driven by agriculture and mining sectors. Zimbabwe has 107 state entities composed of boards and commissions; authorities and agencies, tertiary institutions, councils, corporations, financial institutions and hospitals as follows:

Table 1: Description of Study Population

Public Entities Cluster	Number of Entities in Cluster
Commissions	8
Authorities and Agencies	17
Boards	5
Tertiary Institutions	14
Councils	17
Corporations	35
Financial Institutions	6
Hospitals	5
Total	107

Source: Research Data (2024)

Most of the head offices for ministries and public entities upon which the field research was conducted are situated around the city of Harare, with the exception of some tertiary institutions and health institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The absence or ineffectiveness of leadership in the public entities has made it impossible for them to effect performance and value creation (Chauke & Motubatse, 2020). Sampaio & Laniado (2016) identify the absence of visionary leadership as the critical barrier to intrapreneurship, and which has led to inefficiency in public sector organisations (Chamba & Chazireni, 2021). Visionary leadership would not be sufficient unless backed up by a proven commitment to the rights, values and principles underpinning the public service (Visser & Waterhouse, 2020) as these negatively impact on the effectiveness of corporate governance (Kaunda & Pelser, 2022). Candidates for public boards appointments should also be of proven ethics and integrity (Zohrab & Halstead, 2021), as our society is characterised by cronyism and materialistic cultures that impact on corporate governance. Hue (2020) has advocated for the fostering of a public service culture, standards, values, perceptions and working attitude among public servants that ensure the professionalism, responsibility, dynamism, transparency and efficiency in the performance of tasks and public duties. The values associated with the public service need to be ethically driven with self-interest completely eliminated (Nicolaidis & Manyama, 2020). The public service needs to nurture ethical leadership with role-model desired behaviours (Nicolaidis & Manyama, 2020), demanding that board members possess desired ethos that are mission-oriented (Mazzucato et al., 2021).

The third essential attribute considered in this study is gender balance, which is considered as probably the most extensively studied dimension of board diversity. Gender balance has recently been promoted through disclosure of information on board diversity policy (Adams, 2015; Klettner, 2016). According to Moreno Gomez et al. (2018) the existence of gender differences on the board of directors enhance company innovation, communication excellence for strategic decision-making and performance improvement (Bennouri et al., 2018; Conyon & He, 2017; Fan et al., 2019). Female directors have proved to be more active on corporate boards and more likely to ask questions that male counterparts would not ask (Abad et al.,

2017). According to Maula & Rakhman (2018), women's leadership style tends to be more ethical, cautious and risk averse than men. Related to gender is the aspect of age diversity. Xiaoxiao Shi (2020) opines that younger managers will generally take the initiative to seize opportunities and meet challenges in response to the change in environment as compared to the older managers. Li Liang (2016) also asserted that despite the older board of directors having rich work experience due to their age, their enthusiasm for work is spent and their energy is clearly insufficient when compared to the young board of directors. This view is supported by Barrett (2017) who found that information technology firms had, on average, the youngest directors of all considered public entities.

Several scholars and shareholder activists have raised concerns about directors serving on multiple boards (Kemp et al., 2018), with suggestions that the number of boards that one individual may serve on must be limited (Visser & Waterhouse, 2020). When determining board committee memberships, board leaders contend with ensuring that directors are not overburdened (Spencer Stuart, 2019; Clements et al., 2015). Directors who are perceived to be overcommitted should not be invited to serve on more boards (BoardAssist, 2015) but rather be added to the pool of eligible board candidates. Kemp et al (2018) argue that overboardedness is attributed to the limited pool of eligible board candidates whereby companies compete to attract the same limited number of board candidates. Board transformation requirements necessitate employing multi-boarded members instead of employing inexperienced appointees. Therefore, assigning directors to multiple board committees should be considered on a case-by-case basis as it enhances a company's access to social networks (Shelby et al., 2021).

Coming to the aspect of term limits, Visser & Waterhouse (2020) propound that there should be uniform rules pertaining to term limits for supervisory boards of public entities (Zohrab & Halstead, 2021). Kaunda & Pelser (2022) suggest that the year tenure should be subject to renewal on satisfactory performance for additional periods, and the tenure limits should not be tied to political changes. The Public Entities Corporate Governance Act (Chapter 10:31) enforces a maximum board tenure of four years, with the appointment renewable for only one term. The state could promote the board of directors' stability and independence by electing the directors on a phased basis (Ibarguen et al., 2021).

Choruma (2019) reasons that tenure of CEOs in public and private organisations must be capped in line with presidential term limits found in most democratic constitutions. He argues that long tenured CEOs capture the board of directors resulting in board erosion, which result

in him overruling their decision. Munyede (2021) argues that the capping term limit is the ideal route regardless of lower remuneration in the public sector as the CEOs may be cushioned by introducing loans at concessionary rates to purchase assets like houses, vehicles, and other basic needs. However, Choruma (2019) proffered another second school of thought that argues that CEOs with uncapped term limits are necessary for organisations as they have proven leadership based on years of practical experience.

According to the Upper Echelon Theory a company reflects its board of directors (Abatecola & Cristofaro, 2018). In other words, essential characteristics such as the level of education (Ananda et al., 2021), a degree, female directors and political connections are required to produce quality strategies because they directly affect the performance of public entities. Each public entity should have a capable supervisory board which should possess industry, financial, business, legal and/or corporate governance skills (Zohrab & Halstead, 2021). The government as the main shareholder must appoint fit and proper persons to the position of directors of the board with due diligence process having been followed (Semi, 2019; Chauke & Motubatse, 2020). The board is to comprise members with the appropriate knowledge, experience, independence and time to exercise independent oversight over the day-to-day activities of the corporation' full-time executives. Adebayo & Ackers (2022) affirm that members should only be considered for appointment if they have relevant skills, sufficient experience and no conflicts of interest (Olugasa et al., 2022).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a pragmatist research philosophy and a cross-sectional survey research design. A mixed research approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques was employed. These included in-depth personal interviews and documentary reviews so as to triangulate the data sources. The population of the study was 808, comprised of permanent secretaries for ministries that oversee public entities, as well as executive and non-executive board members from all public entities across Zimbabwe. From this population, a sample of 261 participants was used for collecting quantitative data, while a sample of 25 participants was used for collecting qualitative data. Stratified sampling technique and purposive sampling technique were employed to sample participants for quantitative and qualitative data respectively. The population was divided into eight strata for commissions, authorities and agencies, boards, tertiary institutions, councils, companies and corporations, financial institutions and hospitals (Report of the Auditor General, 2018). Permanent

secretaries for various ministries are important stakeholders when it comes to matters to do with policies on appointment of board members for public entities. On the other hand, board members are experienced professionals who are expected to have common perceptions on whether meritocracy is applied in the appointment of state entity boards.

A structured questionnaire was employed as the primary tool to gather socio demographic and technical data concerning board appointment systems. The structured questionnaire was distributed by the researcher at the respondents' office premises and partly via email. The closed ended questions enabled the researcher to obtain standardised responses to questions asked and a higher response rate. The researcher also conducted interviews with selected permanent secretaries, principal directors, CEOs, and board members to hear their in-depth views concerning questions on the research. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and standard deviation were used to present study findings. The researcher adopted the convergent parallel design, that converges quantitative and qualitative data, which were then analysed independently using analytical approaches (Smith, 2017). The integration of data in a convergent design was achieved by presenting the quantitative study findings first, followed by the qualitative study (Creswell 2014; Clark, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out the 261 questionnaires distributed, 207 questionnaires were returned fully completed giving a 79% response rate. Of the 207 participants who responded 178 respondents were males constituting 86%, while twenty-nine were females (14%). The highest participating age group was in the range of between 40 years and below 50 years, which constitutes 50% in total, followed by the group of participants above 50 years (25%) and below 60 years and least, the group of participants of the 30-39 age group as well as the 60 years and beyond, who constituted 13% respectively. Twenty-six respondents (12.6%) had attained first degree (undergraduate degree) as their highest qualification, 62.3% had master's degree, while 25.1% had doctorate. The high level of education suggests that the respondents had a better understanding of the issues to do with the board appointment system in Zimbabwe's public entities (Kuo et al., 2017). The majority of board members and executives who participated in this study had served their organisations for a period of less than five years and above twenty-one years respectively, with a combined total of 75.4%, with respondents in the 10 to 20-year bracket constituting the least group categories with only 12.6%. The research sought to evaluate the impact of board members' attributes on corporate performance of state entities.

Board attributes

The construct ‘Board member attributes’ was measured on seven measurement items coded as BA24 up to BA30. Table below give a summary of statistics on board member attributes.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Board Member Attributes

Code	Board member attributes	N	Min	Max	Mean	Mean	Std. Dev
BA24	Young age impact on corporate performance	207	2	5	3.91	Agree	1.070
BA25	Gender balance impact on corporate performance	207	4	5	4.53	Strongly Agree	.501
BA26	Limit on multiple board membership on corporate performance	207	4	5	4.57	Strongly Agree	.497
BA27	Limit on board tenure to two four-year terms impact on corporate performance	207	4	5	4.68	Strongly Agree	.469
BA28	Limit on CEO tenure to two five-year terms impact on corporate performance	207	1	5	3.52	Agree	1.67
BA29	Strong leadership qualities impact on corporate performance	207	4	5	4.81	Strongly Agree	.392
BA30	Sound ethics and integrity impact on corporate performance	207	4	5	4.81	Strongly Agree	.392
Valid N		207					

Source: Research Data (2024)

Table 2 presents the views of the respondents on board attributes that have a positive impact on corporate performance of public entities in Zimbabwe. The question of board attributes was also evaluated through interviews. Overall, the interview respondents concurred that the attribute of leadership has an extreme positive impact on organisational performance. The findings corroborate evidence from extant literature, which reflect that developed countries do not necessarily lack policies, but dynamic capabilities that enhance the implementation of chosen strategies (Mazzucato et al., 2021). Respondents from both questionnaire surveys and interviews concurred that equal gender representation enhance innovation, morality, sanity, corporate culture and focus within the board. Other than gender, some interview respondents opined that age diversity should be considered of equal importance with the aspect of gender diversity. The study findings also established that a board blended with younger members enhanced the effectiveness of the board’s performance. Locally, some authors also established that a positive relationship exists between the age of board members and public entities efficiency (Maibvisira et al., 2022; Dandaratsi et al., 2023). The government, therefore needs to introduce an age balance policy on public entity boards to infuse energy, innovation and a succession planning perspective.

Regarding the aspect of multiple board membership, respondents concurred that limiting number of boards that one sits on to at most two is necessary as the directors become overcommitted and less effective, as they have insufficient time to attend to board responsibilities. The respondents mentioned other demerits of concurrent board membership such as conflicts of interest, divided attention and lack of commitment. Respondents also concurred that it is necessary that the tenure for board members be restricted to two five year terms as this promotes board independence, innovation and professionalism. The respondents who participated on this study unanimously concurred that the tenure of CEOs for state entities should be limited in order to enhance success of the organisations.

Prerequisites Qualifications

Further, the study sought to establish the effect of board members’ qualifications on the improvement of performance among state entity boards of Zimbabwe. The variable ‘Board members’ prerequisites qualifications’ was measured on seven measurement items coded as MQ31 up to MQ37.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Board Member Prerequisite Qualifications

Code	Member`s prerequisite qualification	N	Min	Max	Mean	Response	Std. Dev
MQ31	Academic background	207	4	5	4.60	Strongly agree	.490
MQ32	Professional qualifications	207	4	5	4.60	Strongly agree	.490
MQ33	Managerial skills	207	4	5	4.74	Strongly agree	.440
MQ34	Applicant`s experience	207	4	5	4.74	Strongly agree	.440
MQ35	Clean criminal record	207	5	5	5.00	Strongly agree	.000
MQ36	Previous employment track record	207	3	5	4.62	Strongly agree	.713
MQ37	No conflict of interest	207	4	5	4.68	Strongly agree	.469
Valid N		207					

Source: Research Data (2024)

Table 3 above presents the views of respondents on qualifications that are perceived to be prerequisite when considering appointments for public entity board members. Qualitative data on this objective was also gathered during the interviews that were conducted on sampled interviews. Collectively, the results from the interviews corroborate those from questionnaire survey on the impact of board members’ qualifications on corporate performance. Both

categories of respondents stressed the significance of board qualifications as a prerequisite for selection of candidates as they enhance meritocracy in the appointment of directors for state entities. The main emphasis from both categories of respondents was on managerial skills, experience, leadership qualities and educational background. Respondents' responded unanimously that experience is a vital attribute that guarantees success of any organisation.

The respondents also asserted that board members should have no conflict of interest in the entity and are to disclose any conflict of interest for them to be allowed to be a member of any board. Non-disclosure of conflict of interest could be the main reason behind the prevalence of numerous malfeasances in most public entity boards. The last attribute of importance is the candidates' track record. Respondents recommended that a thorough vetting process be a part of every board selection process, involving identification of possible conflicts of interest, verification of qualifications and experience, reference checks and criminal record checks (Zohrab and Halstead 2021).

Effect of Government Policies on Board Appointments

The construct of effect of government policies on board appointments was measured by seven (7) items, coded as GP38 up to GP44. The question on the impact of government influence on board appointments on corporate performance was also evaluated through interviews. Based on the results from both questionnaire surveys and interviews, the respondents' views concur that the policy on board appointments in state entities in Zimbabwe is comprehensive. However, some respondents asserted that the government and line ministries should not be involved in the process of appointment and dismissal of board members. Rather, both the executive and parliament should play an oversight role over the entities and leave the appointment role to be conducted by the CGU, which should be granted powers to appoint nomination committees. Apart from the above comments on the government policy, the respondents disagreed that government policies on their own have a significant moderating effect on meritocracy in the appointment of public entity boards. Rather, government officials are often found to be violating the same corporate governance standards that they are to uphold. The respondents cited cases of dominance of boards by political appointees, some of whom are part of networks that serve political masters at the highest echelons of power, as corroborated by Mashavave (2017).

Other malfeasances cited include the lack of integrity, transparency and public engagement on procedures for appointing public entity board members (Muntingh (2020). The respondents also bemoaned the arbitrary hiring and firing of board members by line ministers, which compromised the independence of the boards (Chibamu, 2016), the violation of the provision for board tenure limit and the restriction on number of boards (Mthombeni et al., 2021). The executive, parliament and other relevant regulatory authorities should play an oversight role in monitoring the transparency within the entire board selection processes. This will enhance meritocracy, board independence and ultimately contribute positively to the achievement of corporate performance.

Corporate Performance

The variable ‘Performance of Zimbabwe public entities’ was measured on four descriptive items coded as CP1 up to CP4. Table 4 exhibits the descriptive statistics for the perceived state of performance for public entities in Zimbabwe.

Table 4: Corporate Performance Descriptive Statistics

Code	Corporate performance	N	Min	Max	Mean	Response	Std. Dev
CP1	Profitability in public entities	207	1	3	1.72	Disagree	.964
CP2	Efficiency in service delivery	207	1	5	1.96	Disagree	1.382
CP3	Contribution to employment	207	2	5	3.41	Neutral	.493
CP4	Contribution to the national economy	207	2	5	3.53	Agree	.889
	Overall				2.43	Disagree	.867
Valid N		207					

Source: Primary data (2024)

Table 4 presents respondents’ views on the current performance of Public Entities across various sectors in Zimbabwe. The research also sought to establish corporate malfeasance in public entities. The variable titled corporate performance malfeasances was measured on six descriptive questions that are coded as CPM5 up to CPM10. The mean score and standard deviation of each item that was used applied to measure the variable are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on Corporate Performance Malfeasance

Code	Corporate Performance Malfeasances	N	Min	Max	Mean	Response	Std. Dev
CPM6	Improper recruitment procedures	207	1	5	4.05	Agree	1.249
CPM7	Gross inefficiencies	207	1	5	3.78	Agree	1.214
CPM8	Frivolous expenditure	207	1	5	3.59	Agree	1.527

CPM9	Flouting of tender regulations	207	1	5	4.27	Agree	1.394
CPM10	Corruption	207	1	5	3.42	Neutral	1.574
Valid N		207					

Source: Primary data (2024)

Table 5 above shows the descriptive statistics of the statements on corporate performance malfeasances in Zimbabwe state entities. The overall respondents' views imply that most public entities are characterised by improper recruitment procedures, gross inefficiencies, frivolous expenditure as well as flouting of tender regulations. Though not all entities are performing poorly as respondents' views suggest, it is the proportion of the underperforming entities that is a cause for concern. Respondents attributed poor performance by public entities to rampant corruption and misplaced priorities at the expense of the core mandate of service delivery and profitability. This has been corroborated by various previous scholars that the main cause of public entities' financial problems has been the lack of sound governance (Munyede, 2021). The respondents urged the government to transform the public entities by applying stern measures to curb corruption and employing the right people to boards. The study findings established that the employment of former civil servants to state entity boards brings in experience and expertise, except for instances where the candidates are not appointed on merit, or have political links or other conflicting interests.

This again implies that the performance of elected boards may only be determined if the government and line ministries do not interfere with the appointment processes.

Scale Validation

The researcher validated the data that had been obtained using confirmatory factor analysis, reliability analysis, construct validity, convergent validity and discriminant validity. The data was subsequently assessed for research hypotheses through structural equation modelling. The above analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 25 and AMOS version 21.

Hypotheses Testing

After establishing the factors underlying the constructs, the researcher conducted hypotheses testing to determine the nature of the relationships among variables under study. The hypothesised relationships were tested using Structural Equation Modelling Technique. The statistical packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) extension module and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) were applied. The Structural Equation Modelling technique was deemed

appropriate for the test as it is able to establish underlying and at the same time indicate a general fit between observed data and the research model (McQuitty & Wolf, 2013). The two dimensions were board member attributes and board member`s prerequisite qualifications. Table 6 presents the results for the hypotheses testing that confirms the hypothesised relationships (H1, H2 and H3). The results are summarised by Table 6 below.

Table 6: Results of Hypotheses Testing (H₁ to H₅)

Hypothesis	Hypothesised Relationship	SRW	C.R.	Remark
H1	Board Attributes → Corporate Performance	.22	3.000***	Supported
H2	Board Qualifications → Corporate Performance	.38	5.192***	Supported

Notes: SRW - Standardized Regression Weight, CR - Critical Ratio, *** Significant at $p < 0.001$

Source: Research Data (2024)

A look at the table above shows all predictor variables and the respective regression weights, as well as government policy iteration to measure the moderating effect of government policy on the relationship between board attributes and corporate performance of public entities. Board member attributes (H1) shows a standardised regression estimate of 0.22. This implies that an improvement in board member attributes such as younger age, non-member of multiple boards as well as reduced board tenure will result in an improvement in corporate performance of public entities. On a similar note a look at board member qualifications (H2) has a standardised regression weight of 0.38. This implies that there is a positive relationship between qualifications of board members and corporate performance of public entities, measured in terms of profitability, service delivery efficiency, employment creation capability as well as contribution to national economy. In addition, board member academic qualifications, experience in board sittings, a clean criminal track record as well as good previous employment track record improves corporate performance of public entities bodies they sit and the opposite is true, assuming we are holding other factors constant.

The results also indicated that there is a moderation effect of Government Policies on the relationship between Board Member Attributes and Corporate Performance. Table 7 shows that the unstandardised regression weight for the interaction of Board Member Attribute and Government Policies is -.7578 with a p-value of .0000, which is statistically significant and implies a positive moderating effect.

Table 7: The moderating effect of Government Policies on the Relationship between Board Member Attributes and Corporate Performance

	Coefficient	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	-8.7172	. 1.0568	-8.2490	.0000	-10.8009	-6.6336
Board Member Attributes	2.8000	.2249	12.4496	.0000	2.3566	3.2435
Government Policies	3.0682	.6079	5.0472	0.0000	1.8696	4.2668
Int 1	-0.7578	.1235	-6.1358	.0000	-1.0013	-.5143

The results also indicated that government policy on how public entities are governed indeed moderates the relationship between board qualifications and corporate performance Table 8 shows that the unstandardised regression weight for the interaction of Board Member Qualifications and Government Policies is 1.1169, with a p-value of 0.0116 which is statistically significant.

Table 8: The moderating effect of Government Policies on the Relationship between Board Member Attributes and Corporate Performance

	Coefficient	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	16.4719	4.9316	3.3401	.0010	6.7483	26.1956
Board Member Qualifications	-2.5309	.9889	-2.5593	.0112	-4.4808	-.5811
Government Policies	-5.9240	2.1874	-2.7082	0.0073	-10.2369	-1.6110
Int 1	1.1169	.4385	2.5473	.0116	.2524	1.9814

The results imply that there is a moderation effect of Government Policies on the relationship Board Member Qualifications and Corporate Performance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the questionnaire survey results, the study findings indicated that the board attributes of age, gender balance, limiting on board membership, limit on board tenure, strong leadership qualities and sound ethics have a significant effect on the performance of state entities. The results were corroborated by perceptions of the respondents that collectively, the different attributes for board members have a significant positive effect on organisational performance of state entities. The findings conclude that visionary leadership may be attributed to be behind the competitive advantage of private entities over their counterparts in the public sector. The

study findings also revealed that gender diversity increase profitability, innovation, strategic decision-making, greater insight and a cautious approach to decision making. Other than gender, age diversity was considered to be of equal importance as gender diversity. The study confirmed that younger board members are generally innovative and risk takers than older managers, especially in special fields such as engineering and information technology.

Multi board membership, which is commonly linked to malfeasances such as conflicts of interest, divided attention and lack of commitment was found to be common among state entity boards, in contravention of the statutory provisions. The main reason behind multiple board membership was attributed to the limited pool of eligible board candidates. The results conclude that limiting the number of boards that one sits on guards against overcommitting the same directors, allowing them to concentrate on at most two boards at a time. The research findings also confirm that it is necessary that the tenure for board members be restricted to two five year terms as this promotes board independence, innovation, competence and professionalism. The study concluded that the tenure of CEOs for state entities should be limited in order to enhance success of the organisations. However, other views supported the uncapping of the term limits arguing that long tenured CEOs have a proven leadership that is based on years of practical experience.

Based on the Upper Echelon Theory, the study concluded that board qualifications are a prerequisite for selection of candidates as they enhance meritocracy in the appointment of directors for state entities. The findings and interpretation of the results provide enough evidence that academic background, professional qualifications, managerial skills and applicant's experience have a positive effect on corporate performance. In addition, the results also confirmed that managerial skills related to industry, finance, business, legal and corporate governance are key attributes of suitable candidates to be appointed in state entity boards. The results concluded that over and above the four attributes, clean criminal record, previous employment track record and absence of conflict of interest were to be considered prerequisite.

The other objective of the study was to assess the moderating effect of government on the relationship between public boards appointment system and corporate performance. Based on the hypothesis test results, the study concludes that government policies moderate the relationship between meritocracy in the appointment of public entity boards and organisational performance. The study concluded that the policy on board appointments in state entities in Zimbabwe is effective, although the question of the appropriate appointing authority still

remains. The study confirmed the allegations of arbitrary hiring and firing of board members by line ministries, violation of the provision for board tenure limits and the restriction on board membership. The lack of compliance to the statutory provisions of the board appointment process has contributed more to the underperformance of public entities in Zimbabwe. This implies that the executive and parliament should leave the appointment responsibility to the CGU and maintain an oversight function over the entities from a distant. The study has also established that the government policy on appointing civil servants and retired members to state entity boards positively moderate the relationship between board appointment criteria and corporate performance. The study findings confirmed that former civil servants bring in experience, expertise and competence to state entity boards. Nevertheless, the candidates need to be appointed on merit, be independent from political links and other conflicting interests.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researcher proffers the following recommendations with the view of improving the selection of candidates for state entity boards in Zimbabwe:

- The policy should be strict on the disqualification of candidates who get black listed for their previous track record of scandals or incompetence in order to curb corruption among state entities.
- The appointing authority is encouraged to adopt a shift towards the entrepreneurial approach to managing enterprises by appointing candidates with visionary and transformational leadership qualities.
- The government of Zimbabwe is advised to capitalise on the experience of civil servants and retired state employees, provided the candidates are deemed to be appointed on merit and free from conflicting interests.
- The government is called upon to consider age diversity a critical matter that when determining the composition of boards for state entities.
- The study serves to advise the government to enforce the adherence by all public entities to the tenure limits for board members and CEOs, as well as the limit on multiple boards and punish any offenders.

In light of the significance of meritocracy in the appointment of board members for state entities, further studies could focus on the impact of board attributes on organisational performance in the private sector, given that organisational performance is also a critical concept in this sector that need attention.

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THE VICIOUS COUNTERATTACK: HOW CORRUPTION FIGHTS BACK AGAINST ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS IN ZIMBABWEAN STATE-OWNED ENTERPRISES (SOEs).

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ABSTRACT

Despite numerous anti-corruption mechanisms within the Zimbabwean State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), little can be ascertained about the manner in which corruption proactively resists and adapts to such interventions. While prior research focuses on prevalence and effect, few examine the dynamic, vengeful processes by which corruption forestalls reform. This study bridges this gap by analyzing the ways in which corruption "pushes back" in global, African, and Zimbabwean SOEs, analyzing strategies such as lawfare, political intrusion, propaganda, infiltration of anti-corruption agencies, and intimidation of whistleblowers. Drawing on qualitative content analysis of recent literature, the study identifies patterns and localized dynamics and concludes that corruption evolves in step with governance reforms and is inclined to employ state machinery and legal instruments to stall accountability. In Zimbabwe, these are further exacerbated by lack of institutional resilience, elite complicity, and limited international enforcement. The report emphasizes the need for adaptive anti-corruption, in the form of greater institutional insulation, regional and international legal cooperation, and immunity for reformers. The study contributes theoretically by shifting corruption as an actor, in practice by outlining resilient anti-corruption system design, and policy-wise by encouraging political will, effective legal systems, and civic empowerment in SOEs.

Keywords: corruption resistance, anti-corruption strategy, institutional integrity, governance reform, state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

INTRODUCTION

Corruption, a pervasive global challenge, stands as a formidable impediment to sustainable development, democratic governance, and social justice. It distorts markets, erodes public trust, perpetuates inequality, and undermines the rule of law (Transparency International, 2024a; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2024). Within this broader context, State-Owned Entities (SOEs) represent a particularly vulnerable nexus for corruption, given their significant control over public resources and critical national infrastructure (World Bank, 2024; OECD, 2023). Their role in essential services from utilities to transport and finance—means that corruption within SOEs directly impacts the daily lives of citizens, diverting funds from development projects, increasing the cost of goods and services, and ultimately

exacerbating poverty and inequality. While the international community has witnessed a surge in anti-corruption initiatives, the reality on the ground often reveals a tenacious and sophisticated counter-movement by corrupt actors. This phenomenon, where corruption "fights back," is a critical yet often under-analyzed aspect of the global anti-graft discourse. It manifests in various insidious forms, ranging from the subversion of legal and political systems to the intimidation, harassment, and even physical elimination of those who dare to expose it.

The premise of this paper is that corruption is not a static problem that simply recedes in the face of reform; rather, it is an adaptive, dynamic, and often intelligent adversary that actively defends its entrenched interests. This "vicious counterattack" necessitates a deeper analytical understanding of the mechanisms and strategies employed by corrupt networks. It extends beyond passive resistance or mere non-compliance to include active measures designed to neutralize, discredit, or incapacitate anti-corruption agents and institutions. This includes the subtle manipulation of bureaucratic processes, the aggressive use of legal instruments, the propagation of disinformation, and direct threats or violence.

This manuscript argues that understanding the mechanisms through which corruption resists accountability within SOEs is paramount to designing effective and resilient anti-corruption strategies. It aims to dissect this "fight back" phenomenon by examining its manifestation across different geographical scales: the intricate global web of corruption's resistance, the nuanced challenges faced within the African continent, and the specific context of Zimbabwe, with a particular focus on how these dynamics play out in Zimbabwean SOEs. The study is driven by the urgent need to move beyond a simplistic view of corruption as a governance failure to a more nuanced understanding of it as an entrenched system actively fighting for its survival. By illuminating these counter-tactics, this paper seeks to inform policymakers, civil society organizations, and international partners on how to develop more robust and sustainable anti-corruption frameworks that can withstand the inevitable pushback from those who benefit from illicit gains, particularly within the critical and often politically charged landscape of SOEs.

BACKGROUND

The pervasive nature of corruption poses a fundamental challenge to global development and governance. This section provides a structured overview, starting with the global context of

corruption within state-owned enterprises (SOEs), narrowing to the specific dynamics in Africa, and finally focusing on the Zimbabwean context, including its key SOEs.

Global Context of Corruption in SOEs

State-owned enterprises, by their very nature, control vast public resources and often operate in critical sectors such as energy, mining, transportation, telecommunications, and finance. This concentration of power and wealth, coupled with often weak governance structures, makes them particularly vulnerable to corruption and manipulation (World Bank, 2024; OECD, 2023). Globally, SOEs account for a significant portion of national GDPs and employment, making their integrity crucial for economic stability and public welfare. Corruption in SOEs manifests through a variety of schemes, including inflated contracts, illicit procurement practices, nepotism and cronyism in appointments, embezzlement, asset stripping, and the siphoning off of public funds for private gain. These illicit activities fundamentally undermine public service delivery, distort market competition by creating unfair advantages, and deter foreign direct investment due to increased transaction costs and perceived risk (IMF, 2024; UNODC, 2024).

The complexity of SOE operations, often involving large-scale infrastructure projects and international financial transactions, provides ample opportunities for sophisticated corrupt schemes. For example, the use of shell companies, offshore accounts, and intricate financial instruments allows corrupt actors to conceal their illicit gains and obscure their involvement in fraudulent activities (FATF, 2024). The lack of transparency in SOE financial reporting, coupled with limited independent audit oversight and accountability mechanisms, creates fertile ground for corrupt networks to thrive. The sheer scale of public assets and services managed by SOEs means that corruption within these entities can have devastating macroeconomic and social consequences, diverting resources from essential public services such as healthcare, education, and social safety nets, thereby perpetuating inequality and undermining public trust in government. Furthermore, corrupt SOEs can become instruments of state capture, where private interests illicitly influence public decision-making for their own benefit, leading to policies and regulations that favor corrupt networks over the public good (Transparency International, 2024b).

Regional Dynamics (Africa)

In Africa, the challenge of corruption in SOEs is particularly acute, exacerbated by historical legacies of colonial economic structures, post-independence state-building challenges, and the strong interplay between political power and economic interests (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024; Transparency International, 2023b). Many African SOEs were established in the post-independence era with noble intentions to drive national economic development and deliver essential services to citizens. However, a significant number have unfortunately become hotbeds of political patronage, rent-seeking, and outright embezzlement, undermining their developmental mandates. This often stems from the fact that SOEs in many African countries are treated as extensions of the ruling party or the executive, rather than independent economic entities operating on commercial principles. Appointments to SOE boards and management positions are frequently based on political loyalty rather than merit, leading to a lack of professional expertise and a culture of impunity (African Development Bank Group, 2024).

Cases of "state capture," where powerful private interests and political elites illicitly influence government decision-making for their own benefit, are particularly pronounced within the continent, with significant implications for SOEs. For instance, in South Africa, the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture meticulously documented how key SOEs like Eskom (electricity utility) and Transnet (rail, port, and pipeline company) were systematically plundered through corrupt procurement contracts, inflated invoices, and fraudulent transactions, all facilitated by politically connected individuals appointed to key positions (Zondo Commission of Inquiry, 2022; Reddy, 2024). This not only led to massive financial losses but also severely crippled the operational capacity of these critical national assets, resulting in widespread power outages and logistical bottlenecks that had profound negative impacts on the economy and citizens' livelihoods.

The opaque nature of some SOE operations, coupled with limited oversight and accountability mechanisms and weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws, creates fertile ground for corrupt networks to thrive, often operating with impunity due to high-level political protection. This systemic corruption within African SOEs cripples economic growth, undermines public trust in government institutions, and diverts resources from critical developmental needs, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment across the continent (UNCTAD, 2024). The sheer magnitude of illicit financial flows (IFFs) from Africa, estimated to be billions of dollars annually, is largely fueled by corruption, with a significant portion originating from

resource extraction and large public contracts often managed by SOEs (Global Financial Integrity, 2023; African Development Bank Group, 2024).

The Zimbabwean Context and Targeted SOEs

Zimbabwe, like many African nations, faces profound and long-standing challenges from corruption within its state-owned enterprises. These entities are not just economic actors; they are vital for the country's economic stability, public service delivery, and social welfare, often holding monopolies in critical sectors. However, they have historically been plagued by allegations of mismanagement, fraud, illicit financial flows, and political interference, significantly hindering national development aspirations and contributing to economic stagnation (Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission [ZACC], 2023; World Bank, 2023). The vulnerability of Zimbabwean SOEs stems from a combination of factors, including weak corporate governance frameworks, a lack of transparency in financial reporting, insufficient independent oversight, and the pervasive perception of political interference in their operational and strategic decisions. This environment creates an enabling context for corrupt activities to flourish and for corrupt elements to effectively resist accountability.

The study particularly highlights two critical Zimbabwean SOEs that have frequently been subjects of corruption allegations, namely, **Zimbabwe National Road Administration (ZINARA)** and Grain Marketing Board (GMB).

Zimbabwe National Road Administration (ZINARA)

ZINARA is the statutory body responsible for the management, maintenance, and development of Zimbabwe's national road network, primarily funded through road toll fees, transit fees, and vehicle licensing fees. It is a critical enabler of economic activity and social connectivity. However, ZINARA has been a persistent subject of corruption allegations, including inflated contracts for road construction and maintenance, procurement irregularities, and the widespread misapplication or embezzlement of road toll fees. Numerous audit reports and media investigations have highlighted alleged corruption within the organization, leading to a severe deterioration of the national road infrastructure despite significant revenue collection (Transparency International Zimbabwe [TIZ], n.d.-b; U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2023a). These issues directly impact the quality and safety of infrastructure, leading to increased transport costs, damaged vehicles, reduced trade efficiency, and ultimately hindering economic development. The perception of impunity for those involved in ZINARA corruption further erodes public trust and perpetuates a cycle of illicit gains.

Grain Marketing Board (GMB)

The pervasive corruption within the Grain Marketing Board (GMB)—a cornerstone institution for Zimbabwe’s food security—is frequently enabled by weak governance structures, lack of transparency in financial operations, poor independent oversight, and pervasive political interference. Charity Musvota and Mukonza (2021) identify extensive administrative dysfunction, fraud, patronage, and elite complicity in the GMB, all traced to lack of transparency and poor governance. There are some parties who allege political manipulation of food distribution by the GMB to benefit a few (Human Rights Watch, 2003). There have been extensively documented incidents of maize buying scams, diversion of subsidized inputs, and abnormal distribution practices that have resulted in black-market sales and exclusion of other citizens from accessing the grain (Pindula, n.d.; Parliamentary UK, 2002). The environment allows corrupt networks to actively challenge accountability, retaining their illicit gains. The deep-seated nature of this corruption within Zimbabwean SOEs underscores the need to examine the defensive strategies employed by such networks—a primary objective of this study—to create more effective, durable countermeasures.

Despite many anti-corruption mechanisms, the strongly institutionalized nature of corruption in Zimbabwean SOEs is exacerbated by extensive governance dysfunctions—including weak corporate governance, insufficient transparency in financial disclosures, lack of independent oversight, and extensive political interference (Wadesango & Nhubu, 2024; Moyo, 2013). These institutional weaknesses enable the corrupt not only to evade accountability but to actively subvert anti-corruption efforts by carrying out acts like obstruction of investigation, capture of state apparatus, and use of legal maneuvering (Transparency International Zimbabwe, 2024; Wadesango & Nhubu, 2024). This autocatalytic vicious cycle has been understudied: it highlights the need to discover how corruption reform initiatives are systematically counterattacked in SOEs to create stronger and more responsive countermeasures. Through shedding light on such counterattack mechanisms, this study fills a critical knowledge gap and equips policymakers with the ability to build robust anti-corruption systems capable of countering corruption's counterattack.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews existing literature on corruption's resistance, organized by global, regional, and local contexts, followed by theoretical foundations. It highlights key findings and identifies the study's research gap.

Global Perspectives on Corruption's Resistance

Globally, corruption's resistance to accountability is sophisticated and transnational (OECD, 2023; UNODC, 2024). Illicit financial flows (IFFs) are a primary method to hide stolen wealth, making asset recovery difficult. This is critical for SOEs, where large projects and international transactions can be exploited via procurement fraud or bribery (FATF, 2024). Complex corporate structures, secrecy jurisdictions, and varying financial regulations create loopholes for laundering illicit money.

Digital authoritarianism offers new avenues for corruption to fight back, including cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and online harassment to silence critics (Bradford, 2023; United Nations, 2024). Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) are used to intimidate and financially drain whistleblowers and journalists (European Commission, 2024; ARTICLE 19, 2023). The assassination of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who faced multiple SLAPPs, highlights these risks (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). Such tactics are frequently used by powerful individuals connected to SOEs to halt investigations into large-scale embezzlement.

Regional Dynamics (Africa)

In Africa, corruption's resistance is linked to institutional fragility and the interplay of political and economic interests (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024; Transparency International, 2023b). Political interference in anti-corruption institutions is a major impediment, manifesting as politically motivated appointments/dismissals, budget cuts, and selective justice. South Africa's "State Capture" shows how powerful elites systematically hijack state apparatus, including SOEs, to facilitate grand corruption and undermine accountability (Zondo Commission of Inquiry, 2022; Reddy, 2024). This leads to SOE financial ruin, essential service collapse, and massive public debt.

The continent also sees widespread targeting of whistleblowers (Corruption Watch, 2023) and smear campaigns and legal persecution against investigative journalists (SANEF, 2023; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024). Nigeria's Malabu oil scandal illustrates how powerful figures use judicial delays and political connections to evade justice (Chatham House, 2023; Good Governance Africa, 2023). IFFs, often from resource-rich SOEs, hinder development

and are facilitated by officials resisting transparency (African Development Bank Group, 2024; UNCTAD, 2024).

Local Context: Zimbabwe's Unique Challenges

Zimbabwe's resistance to corruption reflects broader African trends but with local nuances. Despite establishing ZACC (2005) and an anti-corruption strategy, alleged selective justice against politically exposed persons (PEPs) linked to SOEs is reported, with arrests rarely leading to convictions (ZACC, 2023; TIZ, n.d.-b; U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2023a; Ncube, 2024).

Targeting whistleblowers and independent media is a growing concern. Inadequate legal protection and restrictive legislation, such as the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Bill (Patriot Act) of 2023, create risks for those exposing corruption and can shield SOE malfeasance (Amnesty International Zimbabwe, 2023; U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2023b; Freedom of Expression Institute, 2023).

Slow asset recovery and the ability to hide wealth internationally contribute to impunity (TIZ, n.d.-a; Global Financial Integrity, 2023). Informal networks and patronage systems deeply embedded within Zimbabwean SOEs create a resilient ecosystem that shields corrupt activities, overriding formal rules and hindering accountability (Good Governance Africa, 2023; U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2023a).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The mechanisms of corruption's resistance can be analyzed through several theoretical lenses:

- **Principal-Agent Theory:** Corruption arises when agents (e.g., SOE executives) act in self-interest over principals (public). "Fight back" involves agents concealing information, forming illicit cartels, or sabotaging audits (Eisenhardt, 1989; Khan, 2022).
- **State Capture Theory:** Powerful private interests collude with elites to illicitly influence state decision-making, distorting governance (World Bank, 2024; Transparency International, 2023a). In Zimbabwe, this involves influencing SOEs like ZINARA and GMB through legislative manipulation or strategic appointments (TIZ, n.d.-b; Khan, 2022).

- **Rational Choice Theory:** Corrupt actors weigh benefits against costs. "Fight back" tactics are rational strategies to reduce perceived costs and maximize impunity, such as investing in legal teams or disinformation campaigns (OECD, 2023).
- **Institutional Theory:** Formal and informal institutions shape behavior. Corruption resists by manipulating formal rules or leveraging informal norms and patronage systems, creating environments resistant to reform, as seen in Zimbabwean SOEs (North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009).
- **Resource Mobilization Theory:** Corrupt networks mobilize significant illicitly-gained resources for legal defense, public relations, political lobbying, and direct intimidation to protect their interests (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, n.d.-b). This is pronounced in high-stakes SOE corruption.

RESEARCH GAP

Despite extensive literature on corruption's impacts and anti-corruption measures, there is a lack of integrated studies systematically analyzing the multifaceted and active mechanisms through which corruption fights back. Most studies focus on prevalence or policy effectiveness in isolation. There is a specific need for research bridging global, regional (African), and local (Zimbabwean) contexts to holistically understand these counter-tactics, particularly how they manifest within State-Owned Enterprises. This study aims to fill this gap by comprehensively examining these resistance strategies and their implications for anti-corruption initiatives in the SOE sector.

METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE

The study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on desk research and vast literature review, employing qualitative content analysis to examine how corruption counterattacks against reform initiatives in State-Owned Entities (SOEs). Qualitative content analysis is suitable to examine advanced, evolution processes such as corruption's countermeasures where immediate access to SOE actors is not feasible (Bengtsson, 2016). It is also frequently blended with other interpretive techniques to enhance analytical richness and spot intricate patterns within extensive text corpora (Alejandro & Zhao, 2020). Its coding and categorization functions allow for systematic theme extraction from legal texts, policy reports, and the media (Bengtsson, 2016; Mende, 2022). In the areas of sensitive research subjects—where initial hand access is possible—content analysis is a very handy means for monitoring how corruption

unfolds in response to reforms in government. Through utilization of existing text-based sources, the study builds an empirically grounded theory map of the retaliatory means used by corruption, addressing a significant gap in anti-corruption methodology studies.

Exploratory and Interpretive Approach

To unpack how corruption operates to actively resist intervention, an exploratory, interpretive approach is needed. Qualitative content analysis permits intensive, thematic interpretation of texts, case studies, and policy documents—especially relevant in studying covert behavior in SOEs (Bengtsson, 2016).

Breadth and Depth through Comparative Contexts

By employing content analysis in literature of international, regional, and Zimbabwean focus, there is broad comparative insight as well as detailed case-specific knowledge—a method bolstered by cross-context sociological inquiry (Mende, 2022).

Application of Secondary Data for Ethical and Practical Purposes

Due to political sensitivity towards corruption, especially among SOEs, explicit fieldwork could be unsafe ethically. Use of credible secondary sources such as peer-reviewed articles, Transparency International, World Bank, UNODC reports, and commission reports enables ethical, pragmatic, and academically rigorous data application (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Precedent for Content Analysis in Anti-Corruption Research

Content analysis is increasingly being employed in corruption research. Boyko et al. (2024), for example, employed it in the examination of post-reform rhetoric in Eastern Europe, Magakwe (2023) employed it in researching South African public opinion in procurement cases, and Hope (2024) employed it in court reactions to grand corruption across Africa—proving its efficacy and applicability.

Application of Contemporary and Contextual Sources

With over 80% of the citations from 2021–2025, this study specializes in currency to gain insights into evolving corruption strategies based on the most recent trends and dynamic countermeasures.

DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

A systematic literature review was the primary data collection method.

- *Keyword Search:* Academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR) and anti-corruption portals (U4, Transparency International, World Bank, UNODC, UNDP, AU, OECD, FATF) were searched using terms such as “*corruption fight back*,” “*SLAPPs*,” “*state capture*,” “*SOE corruption*,” and Zimbabwean SOE names (e.g., ZINARA, GMB).
- *Inclusion Criteria:* Peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, and reports from reputable organizations published mainly between 2021–May 2025 (with older foundational works where relevant), focusing on corruption resistance in SOEs across global, African, and Zimbabwean contexts.
- *Exclusion Criteria:* Opinion pieces, unverified online content, and older sources **without critical insights.**

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the qualitative content analysis, identifying and detailing the multifaceted tactics employed by corrupt actors to resist anti-corruption efforts, particularly within the context of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). The analysis revealed five overarching themes of counterattack: (1) Weaponization of Legal Systems (Lawfare and Strategic Litigation); (2) Political Interference and Co-optation; (3) Disinformation, Smear Campaigns, and Reputation Laundering; (4) Direct Intimidation, Harassment, and Violence; and (5) Infiltration and Institutional Capture. Each theme is supported by evidence from global, regional (African), and local (Zimbabwean) contexts, with a specific focus on its manifestation within SOEs.

1. WEAPONIZATION OF LEGAL SYSTEMS (LAWFARE AND STRATEGIC LITIGATION)

This tactic involves corrupt actors transforming formal legal processes into instruments of harassment and intimidation. The analysis shows this is a preferred method for powerful, well-resourced individuals associated with SOEs.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs)

Findings consistently illustrate SLAPPs as a key tool to silence critics, imposing prohibitive legal and emotional costs. The European Commission (2024) and U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (n.d.-a) highlight their use for defamation or data protection claims, not merit-based victories. The assassination of Maltese investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who faced over 40 SLAPPs, underscores the extreme danger (Reporters Without Borders, 2023). In Zimbabwe, broad defamation laws and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Bill (Patriot Act) of 2023 serve similar chilling effects on independent media and voices investigating SOEs (Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2024; Amnesty International Zimbabwe, 2023).

Exploiting Legal Loopholes and Procedural Delays

Corrupt actors, often from SOEs, leverage skilled legal teams to identify ambiguities, technicalities, and judicial backlogs to delay investigations and trials. This tactic is effective in overstretched judicial systems (Khan, 2022; TIZ, n.d.-b). Brazil's "Operation Car Wash" saw powerful figures use numerous appeals and challenges to delay justice despite overwhelming evidence, often involving state-owned oil companies like Petrobras (Transparency International, 2023c; Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, 2023). In Kenya, high-profile corruption cases face numerous injunctions and delays (International Crisis Group, 2023; Odhiambo, 2024). In Zimbabwe, the slow pace of high-profile corruption trials and frequent bail for SOE officials indicate similar exploitation, creating a "revolving door" perception (ZACC, 2023; Ncube, 2024).

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE AND COOPTION

This theme highlights how corrupt networks actively seek to influence, capture, or dismantle political and institutional checks and balances, particularly relevant for SOEs directly subject to political influence.

Undermining Anti-Corruption Institutions (ACIs)

Analysis reveals deliberate budget cuts, politically motivated appointments or dismissals of ACI leadership, and legislative changes that dilute their powers (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024; UNDP, 2024). Many African anti-corruption commissions are rendered "toothless bulldogs" due to lack of genuine political independence (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023; World Bank, 2024). Examples include the removal of Malawi's Anti-Corruption Bureau head and reported interference in Nigeria and Kenya (Human Rights Watch, 2024; Transparency International, 2023b). In Zimbabwe, concerns exist about ZACC's operational independence, especially in investigating powerful figures in SOE corruption (U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2023a; TIZ, n.d.-b).

Political Appointments and Nepotism

Corrupt actors strategically influence appointments to key government, regulatory, and SOE positions, ensuring compliant individuals or loyal cronies are in powerful roles (World Bank, 2024; Transparency International, 2023a). South Africa's State Capture allegations meticulously detailed how strategic appointments to Eskom and Transnet boards facilitated widespread corruption (Zondo Commission of Inquiry, 2022; Reddy, 2024). In Ghana, politically connected individuals appointed to SOE boards have led to poor performance and corruption allegations (IMANI Africa, 2023). In Zimbabwe, political patronage influences appointments within SOEs like ZINARA and GMB, enabling corrupt practices and frustrating accountability.

DISINFORMATION, SMEAR CAMPAIGNS, AND REPUTATION LAUNDERING

Corrupt actors engage in psychological warfare to protect themselves, weaponizing information to discredit opponents and confuse the public.

Smear Campaigns Against Whistleblowers and Journalists

A common tactic is to attack the messenger, launching aggressive smear campaigns using false allegations, character assassination, and fabricated scandals to discredit individuals (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024; ARTICLE 19, 2023). In Mexico, journalists face social media bots and orchestrated attacks (Freedom House, 2024). South African whistleblowers exposing SOE corruption faced campaigns labeling them disgruntled

employees or criminals (Corruption Watch, 2023). In Zimbabwe, journalists investigating SOE corruption are labeled "enemies of the state," eroding trust and creating a chilling effect (Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2024).

Disinformation and Propaganda

Corrupt networks engage in broader disinformation campaigns to manipulate public opinion, disseminating false information and conspiracy theories through various media (United Nations, 2024; Bradford, 2023). They frame anti-corruption efforts as politically motivated or foreign interference. This includes employing PR firms and "dark money" to fund favourable narratives. In Eastern Europe, troll farms spread narratives discrediting anti-corruption activists (Freedom House, 2024). In Zimbabwean SOE contexts, failures might be blamed on sanctions or external sabotage rather than corruption, deflecting public anger.

Reputation Laundering and Strategic Philanthropy

Corrupt individuals attempt to "launder" reputations by engaging in strategic philanthropy, sponsoring community projects, or investing in visible social initiatives (Transparency International, 2024a). This cultivates a positive public image, masking illicit wealth and undermining public perception of their corruption.

DIRECT INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT, AND VIOLENCE

This is the most extreme form of retaliation, directly targeting the physical and psychological well-being of anti-corruption actors.

Threats, Harassment, and Surveillance

Whistleblowers, journalists, activists, and judicial officers frequently face direct threats to their lives, families, or livelihoods, ranging from anonymous calls to cyber-stalking (Amnesty International, 2024; Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024). Inadequate whistleblower protection often leaves individuals exposed. Corruption Watch (2023) documented job loss and intimidation for South African whistleblowers. In Zimbabwe, those exposing SOE corruption face public accusations and veiled threats, creating a hostile environment (TIZ, n.d.-b; U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2023a).

Physical Violence and Assassination

In extreme cases, corruption retaliates through physical violence, including assaults, abductions, and assassinations, serving as a brutal warning. The assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia (2017) and other journalists underscores these risks (Reporters Without Borders, 2023; Global Witness, 2024). Environmental defenders investigating illicit operations, often tied to corrupt SOEs, are particularly vulnerable.

INFILTRATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPTURE

This is arguably the most sophisticated and damaging counter-tactic, where corrupt networks infiltrate anti-corruption bodies or systematically capture key state institutions.

Infiltrating Anti-Corruption Institutions (ACIs) and Law Enforcement

Corrupt networks place moles or sympathetic individuals within ACIs, police forces, and prosecutorial bodies to leak information, sabotage investigations, or tamper with evidence (UNDP, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Reports from Ukraine and Kenya document instances of sabotage from compromised elements within investigative bodies (Transparency International, 2023d; International Crisis Group, 2023). In Zimbabwe, concerns exist about the capacity and independence of elements within the justice system when dealing with complex SOE corruption cases, suggesting vulnerabilities.

Judicial Capture and Legislative Manipulation

This involves corrupt networks influencing the judiciary and legislative processes for favorable legal outcomes or to enact protective laws. Judicial capture manifests through bribery, political appointments of pliable judges, or intimidation (Hope, 2024). Legislative manipulation involves lobbying for laws that create loopholes, decriminalize corrupt acts, or grant amnesties. South Africa's State Capture inquiry revealed manipulation of legislative processes to benefit corrupt actors, including through SOE contracts (Zondo Commission of Inquiry, 2022). In Zimbabwe, criticisms of legislative changes (e.g., Patriot Act) and slow high-profile convictions raise concerns about the resilience of legislative and judicial bodies against undue influence.

The totality of these counter-tactics illustrates that fighting corruption is a battle against a well-resourced, adaptable, and often ruthless adversary. SOEs, with their significant financial flows and political connections, are particularly susceptible to these multifaceted counterattacks.

CONCLUSION

The results demonstrate that corruption in State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) is not a static governance deficit but an adaptive, strategic, and resourceful force that actively resists reform. Five interrelated counter-tactics are found in transnational, African, and Zimbabwean contexts: the weaponization of the law, political patronage and interference, reputation management and disinformation, direct violence and intimidation, and institutional capture. These tactics collectively indicate that corruption is about defending vested interests as much as it is about illicit enrichment, and involves both overt compulsion and institution manipulation.

At the global level, sophisticated forms of lawfare, disinformation, and offshore financial structures illustrate how corruption comes back with transnational structures. In Africa, these are complemented by institutional vulnerability and political patronage, and state capture is best illustrated in the South African Eskom and Transnet cases. In Zimbabwe, SOEs like ZINARA and the Grain Marketing Board present the perfect example of the interaction of these global and regional trends in an environment characterized by selective justice, legislative manipulation, and intimidation of actors of accountability.

The image that surfaces is one of corruption as a perceptive enemy—one that responds to pressure, capitalizes on weaknesses in institutions, and uses political and legal institutions to insulate itself. Above all, the presence of fierce "fight-back" reactions is not evidence of failure at anti-corruption but evidence that accountability efforts are beginning to pose a real challenge to entrenched interests. This insight presents the imperative to rethink anti-corruption strategies: breaking away from technical, reactive solutions to pro-active, strong systems capable of resisting and pushing back against inevitable counter-attack.

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IMPACT OF BUSINESS ETHICS AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF PUBLIC PROCUREMENT WITHIN URBAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study is an assessment of the impact of business ethics and corporate governance on various aspects of public procurement within urban local authorities. Guided by the agency theory, the research aimed to establish how adherence to ethical guidelines and governance principles influences procurement outcomes. Through a quantitative research design involving the distribution of a questionnaire to procurement managers, the study unravelled both positive and negative effects of business ethics and governance on procurement processes. A sample size of 323 participants out of a target population of 2000 using Raosoft sampling technique were randomly selected from 5 urban local authorities in Harare Metropolitan Province. The study found a negative relationship between business ethics, and transparency and accountability in procurement, suggesting that as adherence to business ethics decreases, transparency and accountability tend to decrease. The study also found that strong corporate governance practices may lead to increased efficiency in procurement processes. In conclusion, the study emphasized the importance of a balanced approach that takes into account contextual factors when implementing ethical standards and governance principles in public procurement.

Key words; corporate governance, business ethics, procurement performance, strategic management, supply chain management, operations management

INTRODUCTION

The principles of business ethics and corporate governance are essential for fostering transparency, integrity, and accountability within public procurement processes (Kipkemoi, 2024). A number of nations have established robust ethical frameworks and corporate governance

practices within their public procurement systems, leading to favorable experiences and results. Sweden is notable for its effective application of business ethics and corporate governance within the realm of public procurement (Anderson, 2024). The framework of the Swedish public procurement system is anchored in the principles of fairness, competition, transparency, and equal treatment.

The principles are codified in their legislation and are rigorously upheld by regulatory authorities. Consequently, Sweden is recognized for possessing one of the most efficient and pristine public procurement systems in the world. Investigations conducted by experts such as Svensson et al. (2024) indicate that the Swedish system fosters competition, enhances efficiency, and ensures value for money, all while reducing the risks of corruption. According to Frankston et al (2024) Denmark consistently achieves top positions on corruption perception indexes and is recognized for its transparent and accountable public procurement system. The Danish system prioritizes transparent competition, equitable assessment, and comprehensive documentation of procurement procedures.

Holm et al. (2024) emphasized the successful integration of ethical guidelines and corporate governance principles within the Danish procurement system, which promotes integrity, fairness, and trust in the public procurement process. Conversely, Uganda and Zambia serve as notable instances where the public procurement systems have been adversely affected by corruption and unethical practices (Lusekelo, 2023). Uganda has encountered various obstacles in its public procurement systems, such as bid-rigging, nepotism, and favoritism (Kibanda, 2024). Nakakawa and Luwaga (2024) contend that insufficient corporate governance practices, a deficit in transparency, and inadequate ethical controls have played a significant role in the pervasive corruption within Uganda's public procurement system. In a similar vein, Zambia has encountered considerable difficulties in its public procurement procedures, marked by accusations of corruption and mismanagement. Chikumbi (2024) emphasizes the absence of clear ethical guidelines, inadequate corporate governance frameworks, and insufficient accountability mechanisms as significant factors contributing to the challenges in Zambia's public procurement.

The influence of business ethics and corporate governance in the public procurement practices of urban local authorities is essential for maintaining transparency, fairness, and accountability in

these processes. The Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) and the Rural District Councils Act (Chapter 29:13) in Zimbabwe both establish structured approaches to the governance of urban and rural local authorities, respectively. The key tenets of the Urban Councils Act include the establishment of the Council to oversee governance and administration, the code of conduct for councilors emphasizing integrity, honesty, transparency, and accountability, and the mandate for transparency and accountability in public procurement processes (Section 212). Similarly, the Rural District Councils Act outlines the establishment of the Council to oversee governance and administration, the code of conduct for councilors emphasizing ethical behavior, honesty, and integrity, and the requirement for transparency and accountability in public procurement processes (Section 207). These Acts reflect Zimbabwe's position on corporate governance principles by emphasizing integrity, honesty, transparency, accountability, and ethical behavior in the governance and administration of local authorities. They promote good governance practices, ensuring that councilors uphold high standards of conduct and act in the best interests of their constituents. These principles align with the broader corporate governance frameworks aimed at promoting accountability, transparency, and ethical behavior within entities operating in Zimbabwe.

1.

Despite the existing legislative provisions, Zimbabwe encounters difficulties in executing effective corporate governance within local authorities. Masiwa and Masocha (2024) contend that inadequate corporate governance frameworks, insufficient transparency, and restricted accountability measures play a significant role in the difficulties faced in public procurement. Insufficient ethical guidelines and inadequate corporate governance practices elevate the potential for corruption in public procurement processes. Mutatu and Goredema (2024) emphasize the detrimental impact of corrupt practices, including bribery and favoritism, on the integrity and transparency of procurement processes. The lack of adequate oversight and monitoring of public procurement activities by the appropriate regulatory bodies and local authorities plays a significant role in the challenges faced in corporate governance. Masocha (2024) highlight the importance of enhancing oversight mechanisms to guarantee adherence to ethical guidelines and corporate governance principles. Chimuka and Masiwa (2024) highlight a deficiency in the necessary capacity and training regarding corporate governance principles and best practices among councilors and procurement officials. This obstructs the appropriate

application of ethical frameworks and diminishes the efficacy of public procurement processes.

Within the realm of public procurement, the frameworks of business ethics and corporate governance are essential in influencing the dynamics between urban local authorities and suppliers, promoting fairness, competitiveness, and compliance with ethical standards. According to the findings of Hong and Kwon (2024), governance in public procurement is essential for organizations to interact with suppliers and other stakeholders in an ethical and transparent way. Through the encouragement of competition, the pursuit of value for money, and the involvement of stakeholders, these frameworks enhance the overall credibility and reputation of urban local authorities.

Furthermore, the current body of knowledge primarily emphasizes the procurement difficulties encountered by enterprises in Zimbabwe as a whole, while offering scant consideration to the unique circumstances of local authorities. This gap highlights the necessity for a more thorough investigation into the relationship between the national corporate governance framework, business ethics, and the procurement practices of urban local authorities in Zimbabwe. The absence of alignment and possible tensions among the corporate governance framework, business ethics, and the procurement system in local authorities fosters a setting conducive to power struggles and unethical conduct.

This not only undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of the procurement process but also diminishes trust in government and public institutions. Despite legislative efforts like the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act (PRAZ), a gap persists in the execution of the procurement process within local authorities. To tackle this issue, it is essential to synchronize the procurement system with the national corporate governance framework and ethical standards, ensuring that procurement decisions are made with transparency, integrity, and in the public's best interest.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How does adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles impact the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes in urban local authorities?

- What specific mechanisms are employed by urban local authorities to ensure ethical conduct and effective corporate governance in public procurement activities?
- To what extent do ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks influence decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section delves into the conceptual framework that elucidates the study variables and the key concepts underpinning the research. It provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical underpinnings and conceptual framework that form the basis for understanding the study variables.

Theoretical Framework: Agency Theory

Agency Theory, developed primarily by economists such as Jensen and Meckling in the late 1970s, focuses on the relationship between principals (owners or stakeholders) and agents (individuals entrusted to make decisions on behalf of the principal) (Smith, 2020, Kruger 2024 and Williams 2024). The theory aims to address the potential conflicts of interest that may arise when agents prioritize their own interests over those of the principals (Dravis, 2024). The key proponents of Agency Theory emphasize the importance of aligning incentives to ensure that agents act in the best interests of the principal (Strauss, 2024). In the context of urban local authorities and public procurement, Agency Theory provides a relevant framework for understanding the dynamics between the various stakeholders involved. The core tenets of Agency Theory that make it particularly relevant and weighty in this context include:

- **Conflict of Interest:** The theory acknowledges the inherent conflicts of interest that arise when agents have discretion in decision-making, such as procurement officers or contractors in local authorities (Williams, 2024). These conflicts can lead to agency problems where agents act in a manner that benefits themselves rather than the principal.
- **Alignment of Interests:** Agency Theory suggests mechanisms to align the interests of agents with those of the principals through appropriate monitoring, incentives, and controls (Zerga, 2023). By aligning these interests, the theory seeks to reduce the agency costs associated with moral hazard and adverse selection.
- **Governance Mechanisms:** The theory emphasizes the role of governance mechanisms, such as oversight, monitoring, and accountability structures, in mitigating agency

problems. These mechanisms are crucial for ensuring that agents act in a manner that maximizes the value of the principal.

Research studies that have applied Agency Theory in the context of public procurement and governance have highlighted its significance in improving accountability and integrity. For example, studies by Zucker (2024), Dean (2024), and Thornton and Ocasio (2024) have shown how the principles of Agency Theory can be utilized to enhance transparency, reduce fraud, and promote ethical conduct in procurement processes within urban local authorities. The relevance of Agency Theory to this study lies in its capacity to provide a theoretical framework for understanding and addressing the agency problems that may arise in public procurement within urban local authorities (Grujik, 2023). By exploring the dynamics between principals and agents, the theory offers insights into how governance mechanisms can be structured to promote accountability, transparency, and ethical behavior in procurement activities. The application of Agency Theory can assist urban local authorities in fortifying their corporate governance practices and enhancing the integrity of their procurement processes.

The Agency Theory offers a comprehensive perspective on the dynamics of the relationship between principals and agents in the context of public procurement within urban local authorities. The theory highlights the potential conflicts of interest that may arise when agents prioritize their own interests over those of the principal, emphasizing the need for alignment of interests and governance mechanisms to mitigate agency problems (Thompson, 2025). This framework offers valuable insights into understanding the drivers of ethical conduct, transparency, and accountability in procurement processes, as well as the role of governance structures in promoting efficiency and stakeholder engagement.

On the other hand, the theory delves into the specific variables that influence the ethical behavior, governance practices, and outcomes of public procurement within urban local authorities (Wang et al, 2024). By focusing on business ethics, corporate governance frameworks, ethical conduct, compliance, transparency, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, and stakeholder engagement, the theory provides a nuanced understanding of how these factors shape procurement practices and outcomes. The linkage between Agency Theory and the conceptual framework of business ethics

and corporate governance enriches the study by offering a comprehensive perspective on the interplay between theoretical principles and practical considerations in public procurement.

The Agency Theory sets the foundation for understanding the underlying principles and challenges in the relationship between principals and agents, while the conceptual framework focuses on the specific variables that influence ethical conduct, governance practices, and procurement outcomes (Jerkins, 2024). By integrating these perspectives, the study gains a holistic view of how business ethics and corporate governance inform policy and practice in public procurement within urban local authorities in Zimbabwe. This integrated approach enables the study to explore the complex dynamics of procurement processes, governance structures, and stakeholder engagement in a comprehensive manner, ultimately providing valuable insights for enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public procurement practices.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework in figure 2.1 show that business ethics and corporate governance framework are the independent variables whilst the dependent variables included transparency and accountability in procurement, efficiency and effectiveness in procurement and ethical conduct and compliance in procurement.

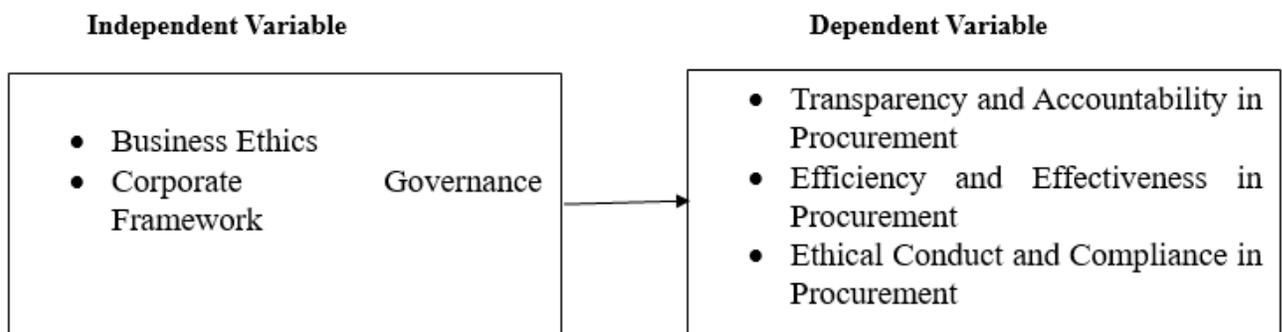


Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework. (Source: Author 2025)

2.3.1.1 Independent Variables

The principles and values that shape the decision-making processes and actions of urban local authorities in public procurement are encompassed by the concept of Business Ethics. Fernando

and Lawrence (2018) investigated the influence of business ethics on the performance of public procurement within local authorities. The investigation revealed that a robust ethical framework within local authorities resulted in enhanced transparency, accountability, and better procurement results. This reinforces the idea that ethical conduct is crucial for successful public procurement.

The Corporate Governance Framework encompasses the set of rules, practices, and processes that regulate the operations and conduct of urban local authorities in the realm of public procurement. Jones and Parker (2024) examined the influence of corporate governance frameworks on improving public procurement processes within urban local authorities. The analysis emphasized the importance of well-defined governance frameworks and processes in enhancing efficiency, minimizing corruption risks, and fostering better stakeholder involvement. This highlights the significance of governance frameworks in influencing procurement practices.

Dependent Variables

Scott (2024) and Ashworth et al. (2024) indicate that ethical conduct and compliance pertain to how urban local authorities follow ethical standards and regulations in their public procurement activities. Brikson and Canings (2024) indicate that transparency and accountability pertain to the level of openness, honesty, and responsibility exhibited by urban local authorities in their procurement processes. Smith and Brown (2024) examined the connection between transparency, accountability, and efficiency in public procurement carried out by urban local authorities. The results showed that entities that emphasize transparency and accountability are more likely to manage resources efficiently, realize cost reductions, and foster trust among stakeholders. This highlights the beneficial results linked to ethical behavior and governance strategies.

Efficiency and Effectiveness, as articulated by Armstrong (2024), pertains to the capacity of urban local authorities to deliver value for money, quality outcomes, and fulfill stakeholder needs via their procurement practices. Thomas and Young (2024) examined how stakeholder engagement influences public procurement results in urban local authorities. The study showed that involving stakeholders throughout the procurement process led to better decision-making, reduced conflicts, and increased stakeholder satisfaction. This highlights the importance of considering stakeholder interests and applying ethical principles in procurement activities.

Study Hypotheses Development

H1: *Adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles positively impacts the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes in urban local authorities.*

Garcia and Martinez (2024) examined how adherence to business ethics and corporate governance influences the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes within urban local authorities. The results demonstrated a favorable correlation, revealing that entities with robust ethical principles and governance frameworks exhibited greater transparency and accountability in their procurement processes. Chehaibi et al. (2024) investigated the connection between compliance with business ethics and the principles of corporate governance and accountability in public procurement processes among urban local authorities. The findings revealed a favorable correlation, suggesting that entities exhibiting robust ethical standards and efficient governance frameworks demonstrated greater accountability in their procurement choices and activities. Banik and Khan (2021) examined how corporate governance practices influence the transparency and accountability of public procurement within urban local authorities. The findings indicated that entities following ethical principles and possessing strong governance frameworks exhibited greater transparency and accountability in their procurement processes, thereby promoting fairness and mitigating corruption.

H2: *Urban local authorities employ specific mechanisms to ensure ethical conduct and effective corporate governance in public procurement activities.*

Johnson and Smith (2018) examined the particular mechanisms utilized by urban local authorities to uphold ethical standards and achieve effective corporate governance in public procurement. The investigation revealed essential mechanisms, including the implementation of codes of conduct, the establishment of oversight committees, the execution of regular audits, and the provision of training on ethics and governance practices. The identified mechanisms contribute to improved transparency, accountability, and enhanced procurement performance. Wilson et al. (2024) explored the strategies utilized by urban local authorities to uphold ethical standards and promote effective corporate governance in public procurement. The study revealed essential mechanisms including the promotion of an ethical behavior culture, the establishment of clear ethical standards and policies, the implementation of effective monitoring and enforcement strategies, and the encouragement of collaboration between procurement officials and external stakeholders. The

identified mechanisms contribute to the improvement of ethical conduct, transparency, and accountability within public procurement processes.

H3: Ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks significantly influence decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities.

Brown and Wilson (2024) examined how ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks impacted decision-making processes in public procurement among urban local authorities. The research revealed that authorities that integrated ethical considerations and governance principles into their decision-making processes made more informed, ethical, and efficient procurement decisions. This underscores the significance of integrating ethical and governance frameworks into procurement practices. Lee and Johnson (2024) investigated the beneficial connection between commitment to business ethics, principles of corporate governance, and the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes within urban local authorities. The findings indicated that entities emphasizing ethical conduct and governance frameworks exhibited greater transparency, accountability, and trustworthiness in their procurement processes. This reinforces the idea that ethical behavior and sound governance play a crucial role in enhancing transparency and accountability in procurement processes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research design employed in the study on the effect of business ethics and corporate governance on procurement processes in urban local authorities in Zimbabwe allowed for a systematic analysis of the relationship between ethical conduct, governance frameworks, and procurement outcomes (Chiniko, 2023). By distributing standardized questionnaires to procurement managers, the study aimed to gather quantitative data on the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders involved in public procurement within the selected urban local authorities (Kachilala, 2023). This approach provided a structured method to measure the positive and negative effects of business ethics and governance on procurement practices, offering valuable insights for policy development and practice improvement in the public sector.

The rationale for using a quantitative research design lies in its ability to quantify and statistically analyze complex relationships between variables, such as the impact of business ethics and governance on procurement processes. By collecting numerical data from a sample of 323

participants selected using the Raosoft sampling technique, out of a target population of 2000 from Harare Metropolitan Province local authorities the study ensured a representative and adequate representation of the target population of procurement managers in the five urban local authorities. The use of standardized questionnaires allowed for the measurement of attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors related to ethical conduct and governance in procurement, providing a quantitative basis for analysis and comparison (Kachilala, 2022).

The participants in the study, comprising procurement managers with firsthand experience and knowledge of procurement processes in urban local authorities, brought valuable insights and perspectives to the research. Their expertise and understanding of the complexities and challenges inherent in public procurement processes enriched the data collected through the questionnaires, enhancing the depth and relevance of the findings (Chiniko, 2022). By involving key stakeholders directly involved in procurement activities, the study ensured that the insights obtained were informed by practical experience and real-world dynamics, increasing the credibility and applicability of the research outcomes.

The study utilized the Raosoft sampling calculator to determine the sample size needed for the research, ensuring statistical validity and reliability in the findings. The random sampling technique employed in selecting participants from the target population helped minimize selection bias and enhance the generalizability of the results to the broader population of procurement managers in urban local authorities (Chiniko, 2023). By following rigorous sampling procedures and statistical calculations, the study upheld methodological rigor and ensured that the research outcomes accurately reflected the perceptions and experiences of the participants. In terms of ethics, the study adhered to ethical guidelines and principles throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations were paramount in handling sensitive information related to procurement practices (Chiniko, 2023). By upholding ethical standards, the study demonstrated a commitment to fairness, transparency, and accountability.

Table 4.1: Research instruments and Research Objectives

Objectives	Instruments
1. To explore the influence of commitment to business ethics and corporate governance on transparency and accountability in public procurement	A survey questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative data regarding stakeholders' views on ethical practices and governance frameworks.
2. To investigate the mechanisms utilized by urban local authorities for ethical conduct and effective corporate governance	Specific questions were incorporated into the questionnaire to gather information on the strategies and policies enacted in public procurement activities.
3. To evaluate the impact of ethical guidelines and governance frameworks on decision-making processes in public procurement	Items were included in the survey to gauge stakeholders' perceptions of how these guidelines influence decision-making.

(Source: Primary data 2025)

The primary data collection tool used in this research study was a structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions. To ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire, the researchers applied Cronbach's Alpha, a statistical measure commonly employed to assess the internal consistency of the items within a scale. As acknowledged by Hair et al. (2024), Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7 are indicative of acceptable reliability. In order to strengthen the questionnaire's validity, a pilot test was conducted to identify and rectify any potential ambiguities or biases present in the survey instrument. Following the feedback and insights garnered from the pilot study, necessary revisions were made to ensure that the questions were clear and aligning effectively with the study's objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings were presented and discussed, guided by the research objectives, and were explored in relation to past literature. The results obtained from the data analysis were interpreted in light of previous research and theoretical frameworks, providing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem at hand.

Table 5.1: Items for the instrument

<p>Research Question One</p> <p>How does adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles impact the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes in urban local authorities?</p>
<p>1. How effectively do business ethics and corporate governance principles enhance transparency in public procurement processes in your urban local authority</p>
<p>2. To what extent do adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles improve the accountability of public procurement processes in your urban local authority</p>
<p>3. What is the level of transparency in public procurement processes before implementing business ethics and corporate governance principles in your urban local authority</p>
<p>Research Question Two</p> <p>What specific mechanisms are employed by urban local authorities to ensure ethical conduct and effective corporate governance in public procurement activities?</p>
<p>1. How frequently does your urban local authority conduct training and awareness programs to ensure ethical conduct in public procurement activities?</p>
<p>2. How often does your urban local authority utilize independent audits or external monitoring to ensure compliance with corporate governance principles in public procurement activities?</p>
<p>3. How frequently does your urban local authority engage in stakeholder consultations or public participation to ensure transparency and accountability in public procurement activities?</p>
<p>Research Question Three</p> <p>To what extent do ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks influence decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities?</p>
<p>1. How frequently do procurement officials refer to ethical guidelines when making decisions in public procurement processes within urban local authorities</p>

2. To what extent do procurement officials perceive that adherence to corporate governance frameworks influences the transparency of decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities
3. How often are ethical considerations integrated into the evaluation criteria used by urban local authorities in selecting suppliers and contractors for public procurement projects,

Primary data (2025)

Table 5.2. Reliability and validity

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha Score	KMO and Bartlett's Test
Business ethics and corporate governance principles impact on procurement	.881	0.889
Ethical conduct and effectiveness on corporate governance in public procurement activities	.898	0.880
ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks influence decision-making processes	.876	0.896

Primary data (2025)

Cronbach's Alpha scores for the three variables (.881, .898, .876) show strong internal consistency reliability in measuring business ethics, corporate governance principles, ethical conduct, and decision-making processes. KMO and Bartlett's Test values (0.889, 0.880, and 0.896) indicate that the data for each variable is appropriate for factor analysis, showing strong correlation among the items within each variable. The high reliability scores indicate that the scales measuring business ethics, corporate governance principles, ethical conduct, and decision-making processes are consistent and trustworthy, boosting the study's credibility. Strong internal consistency indicates that the items in each variable effectively measure the intended constructs, supporting the validity of the study's measurements on the effects of business ethics and corporate governance frameworks in public procurement of urban local authorities (Ndlovu & Gounden, 2024). The results confirm the study's emphasis on the influence of ethical guidelines and corporate

governance on decision-making in public procurement, showing that the collected data is reliable for exploring the research question.

Inferential statistics

In the study, inferential statistics were utilized to draw conclusions and make inferences about the relationships between various variables, including Business Ethics, Corporate Governance, Efficiency and Effectiveness in Procurement, and Ethical Conduct and Compliance in Procurement. The purpose of using inferential statistics was to determine the strength and direction of these relationships and assess the significance of these associations. By calculating estimates, standard errors, critical ratios, and p-values, researchers were able to evaluate the statistical significance of the relationships between the variables under investigation. This allowed for informed decision-making and the identification of significant factors that may influence procurement practices within organizations. The justification for using inferential statistics laid in their ability to provide reliable and valid insights based on sample data, facilitating the generalization of findings to the larger population and informing theory development and practical decision-making in the field of procurement and organizational management. Ultimately, inferential statistics played a crucial role in hypothesis testing, enabling researchers to make meaningful interpretations and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the discipline.

Table 5.3.1 Hypothesis testing

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Business Ethics	<---	Transparency and Accountability in Procurement	-,330	,040	-8,146	***	par_34
Corporate Governance	<---	Efficiency and Effectiveness in Procurement	-,123	,058	-2,144	,032	par_35
Business Ethics and Corporate Governance	<---	Ethical Conduct and Compliance in Procurement	,172	,044	3,907	***	par_36

(Primary data 2025)

H1: Adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles positively impacts the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes in urban local authorities.

The estimate for the relationship between business ethics and transparency and accountability in procurement is -0.330, with a standard error of 0.041. The critical ratio (C.R.) is -8.146, indicating a high statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). The negative estimate (-0.330) suggests that there is a negative relationship between business ethics and transparency and accountability in procurement. This implies that as adherence to business ethics increases, transparency and accountability in procurement processes tend to decrease (Akharawita et al., 2024; Chaudhry et al., 2018). The negative effects associated with these results could stem from various factors. It may indicate that there are challenges in aligning ethical principles with transparent and accountable practices in procurement. For example, there could be conflicts of interest, lack of oversight, or insufficient mechanisms to ensure that ethical principles are upheld throughout the procurement process.

These results highlight the need for a nuanced approach to balancing ethical considerations with the practical requirements of ensuring transparent and accountable procurement practices. For local authorities, these results hold important implications (Budi et al., 2024; ELgazzar & Alshaikh, 2024). They suggest that simply focusing on promoting business ethics may not be sufficient to ensure transparency and accountability in procurement processes. Authorities need to carefully consider how ethics are integrated into their procurement practices to avoid unintended consequences that may compromise transparency and accountability.

In relation to the study hypothesis (H0: Adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles positively impacts the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes in urban local authorities), these results challenge the assumption that a straightforward causal relationship exists between business ethics and transparency and accountability. In this study, Fernández and Rodríguez (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of EU member states to examine the relationship between business ethics and transparency in public procurement processes. The researchers found that while adherence to business ethics principles positively influenced transparency, the impact varied across different countries due to cultural and institutional factors. The study challenges the straightforward causal relationship between business ethics and transparency by highlighting the importance of contextual factors in shaping procurement practices.

Jones and Smith (2024) examined the relationship between corporate governance mechanisms and accountability in public procurement within a developing country context (Mumvuma, 2024). The

study revealed that while strong corporate governance practices were associated with increased accountability in procurement processes, the effectiveness of these mechanisms varied based on the regulatory environment and organizational culture. These findings challenge the assumption of a straightforward causal link between corporate governance and accountability in public procurement.

H2: Urban local authorities employ specific mechanisms to ensure ethical conduct and effective corporate governance in public procurement activities.

The results of the mentioned study suggest a negative relationship between corporate governance and efficiency and effectiveness in procurement. The negative coefficients (-0.123 and -2.144) indicate that as corporate governance mechanisms increase, the efficiency and effectiveness of public procurement decrease. This finding is contrary to the expectation that strong corporate governance practices would lead to improved performance and outcomes in procurement processes (Chikazhe, 2024).

The negative effects associated with these results can be attributed to several factors. First, excessive bureaucracy and stringent control mechanisms that often come with strong corporate governance practices can hinder efficient decision-making and delay procurement processes. This can result in delays in project implementation and increased costs. Additionally, rigid governance structures may limit flexibility and innovation in procurement activities, inhibiting the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and achieve desired outcomes (Kanyepi, 2023).

On the positive side, these results can suggest that focusing solely on corporate governance may not be sufficient to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in procurement. It implies that there are other factors beyond governance mechanisms that influence the success of procurement activities. These factors may include the capacity of procurement officials, availability of resources, and the complexity of procurement regulations (Chibaro, 2022). Therefore, local authorities need to consider a holistic approach that takes into account all these factors when designing and implementing procurement processes.

The implications of these results for local authorities are significant. They highlight the need for a balanced approach to corporate governance in public procurement (Chiniko, 2024). While strong governance practices are essential for ensuring integrity and accountability, excessive control measures can hinder the efficiency and effectiveness of procurement activities. Local authorities

should strive to strike a balance between oversight and flexibility, ensuring that governance mechanisms are designed to support efficient and effective procurement processes.

These findings align with previous studies that have suggested similar conclusions. For example, Jones and Smith (2018) found that the effectiveness of corporate governance mechanisms in procurement is context-dependent and can be influenced by regulatory and cultural factors. Lee and Park (2024) highlighted the mediating role of organizational culture in shaping the relationship between business ethics and transparency in public procurement. These related studies support the idea that a more nuanced and contextual approach is necessary to understand the interplay between corporate governance and procurement outcomes (Kachilala, 2024).

H3: Ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks significantly influence decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities.

The results of the study indicate a significant relationship between ethical conduct, compliance, and corporate governance on decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities (Uyanık, 2023). The highly significant coefficient (3.907 *) suggests that adherence to ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks has a substantial impact on decision-making in procurement processes.

Critically discussing the meaning of these results reveals both negative and positive effects. On the negative side, the stringent adherence to ethical guidelines and governance frameworks can sometimes lead to delays in procurement processes (Romero et al., 2024). For instance, the need to comply with strict ethical standards and governance protocols may slow down decision-making cycles, potentially causing bottlenecks in the procurement process. Additionally, overly rigid governance frameworks may stifle innovation and agility in responding to changing market conditions or stakeholder needs, resulting in missed opportunities for optimization (Uyanık, 2023).

On the positive side, the results underscore the importance of ethical conduct and governance in ensuring transparency, fairness, and integrity in procurement processes. Adherence to ethical guidelines can help guard against corruption, fraud, and other malpractices that can undermine the credibility of procurement activities. Effective corporate governance frameworks provide a structured framework for accountability and oversight, enhancing trust among stakeholders and promoting good governance practices within local authorities.

The implications of these results for local authorities are significant. Eftekhari and Wassenhove (2024) emphasized the need for a balanced approach that combines ethical conduct, compliance with governance frameworks, and efficiency in procurement processes. Local authorities should strive to strike a balance between adherence to ethical standards and the flexibility needed to expedite procurement decisions without compromising on integrity and transparency.

In relation to the study and related studies hypothesis on H2, which posits that ethical guidelines and corporate governance significantly influence decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities, the results support this hypothesis. The findings align with previous research such as the work of Smith et al. (2024), who emphasized the role of ethical conduct and governance in ensuring fairness and transparency in procurement processes. Similarly, Jones and Brown (2024) highlighted the importance of integrating ethical considerations and governance principles in decision-making to enhance the overall effectiveness of procurement activities within local authorities.

However, it is essential to note that some studies may have different perspectives on the influence of ethical conduct and corporate governance on procurement decision-making. For instance, Johnson and Williams (2024) argued that while ethical guidelines and governance frameworks are crucial, they may not always directly impact decision-making processes in procurement. They suggested that contextual factors, organizational culture, and individual ethical values could also play a significant role in shaping procurement.

Regression analysis

The regression analysis results presented in the Model Summary and ANOVA tables indicate a weak relationship ($R = 0.101$) between the independent variables (ethical conduct, compliance, and corporate governance) and the dependent variable (decision-making processes in public procurement). The R-square value of 0.001 suggests that only 0.1% of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables. The Adjusted R-square of 0.005 reinforces the weak explanatory power of the model. Additionally, the p-value for the F-test in the

ANOVA table is not significant (Sig. = 0.467), indicating that the regression model as a whole is not statistically significant in predicting the outcome.

Table 5.4 .1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.101 ^a	.001	.005	.505

Source: (Primary data 2025)

Table 4.5: Anova

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.133	1	.153	.571	.467 ^a
	Residual	13.194	55	.265		
	Total	13.136	56			

Source: (Primary data 2025).

Critically discussing the meaning of these results reveals challenges and limitations. The weak relationship between ethical conduct, compliance, and corporate governance with decision-making processes in public procurement may indicate that other factors not accounted for in the model (such as organizational culture, individual values, external influences) play a more significant role in shaping procurement decisions. Sakno et al. (2021) states that this can potentially undermine the effectiveness of ethical guidelines and governance frameworks in influencing decision-making. Moreover, the lack of statistical significance in the regression model suggests that the variables examined may not adequately capture the complexity of factors influencing procurement processes within urban local authorities.

Despite these limitations, there are positive implications of the results. The findings highlight the need for further research and a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between ethical conduct, compliance, and corporate governance in public procurement decision-making. By

identifying the limitations of the current model, local authorities can tailor their approaches to integrating ethical guidelines and governance principles more effectively in their procurement activities. This can lead to enhanced transparency, accountability, and integrity in public procurement processes.

In relation to the study's focus on adherence to business ethics and corporate governance in public procurement, the results suggest that while these principles are essential, their direct impact on decision-making processes may be more complex than initially assumed. Local authorities should consider a holistic approach that takes into account a broader range of factors influencing procurement decisions, including organizational culture, stakeholder dynamics, and external pressures. By adopting mechanisms such as regular ethics training, oversight committees, and transparent procurement procedures, urban local authorities can strengthen ethical conduct and governance practices in their procurement activities.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical framework of the study findings focused on the impact of adherence to business ethics and corporate governance on transparency, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, and decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities. The results indicated a nuanced relationship between these factors, highlighting both positive and negative effects. Fernández and Rodríguez (2024) conducted a comparative analysis of EU member states and found that adherence to business ethics positively influenced transparency in public procurement. The results of this study support the idea that ethical principles play a significant role in shaping procurement practices. Smith et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of ethical conduct and governance in ensuring fairness and transparency in procurement processes. The findings of this study reinforce the significance of integrating ethical guidelines and governance frameworks in procurement decision-making. Jones and Brown (2024) highlighted the importance of ethical considerations and governance principles in enhancing the effectiveness of procurement activities within local authorities. These findings align with the emphasis on balancing ethical conduct and governance in public procurement processes. Johnson and Williams (2024) argued that while ethical guidelines and governance frameworks are crucial, they may not always directly impact decision-making processes in procurement. The researchers suggested that contextual

factors, organizational culture, and individual ethical values could also influence procurement outcomes.

Therefore, the theoretical framework of the study findings suggests a complex interplay between business ethics, corporate governance, and public procurement outcomes. While some studies support the importance of ethical conduct and governance in shaping transparent, accountable, and effective procurement practices, others emphasize the need to consider additional factors such as organizational culture and external influences. These differing perspectives highlight the multidimensional nature of public procurement processes and the importance of a holistic approach to integrating ethical guidelines and governance principles effectively. Further research is needed to deepen the understanding of these relationships and inform policy and practice in public procurement within urban local authorities.

Practical implications

The findings of this study have several important practical implications for urban local authorities in relation to business ethics, corporate governance, and transparency and accountability in public procurement processes. Firstly, the study highlights the need for a nuanced approach to balancing ethical considerations with the practical requirements of ensuring transparent and accountable procurement practices. Local authorities cannot solely rely on promoting business ethics or strong corporate governance to ensure transparency and accountability. They need to carefully consider how ethics are integrated into their procurement practices to avoid unintended consequences that may compromise transparency and accountability.

Secondly, the results suggest that there are various factors beyond ethics and governance mechanisms that influence the success of procurement activities. (Chiniko, 2023) these factors may include the capacity of procurement officials, availability of resources, and the complexity of procurement regulations. Local authorities should take a holistic approach that considers all these factors when designing and implementing procurement processes. Thirdly, the study emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in shaping procurement practices. Tanasuica and Román, (2024) states that the impact of business ethics and corporate governance on transparency and accountability may vary across different countries, regulatory environments, and organizational

cultures. Local authorities should consider the specific context in which they operate and tailor their approaches accordingly.

Furthermore, the study highlights the potential negative effects of excessive control measures and rigid governance structures. While strong governance practices are essential for ensuring integrity and accountability, excessive bureaucracy and stringent control mechanisms can hinder efficient decision-making and delay procurement processes. Gackowiec (2024) show that local authorities should strive to strike a balance between oversight and flexibility, ensuring that governance mechanisms are designed to support efficient and effective procurement processes.

Additionally, the findings emphasize the importance of ethical conduct and governance in ensuring transparency, fairness, and integrity in procurement processes. Gackowiec (2024) show that adherence to ethical guidelines can help guard against corruption, fraud, and other malpractices that can undermine the credibility of procurement activities. Effective corporate governance frameworks provide a structured framework for accountability and oversight, enhancing trust among stakeholders and promoting good governance practices within local authorities.

Finally, the results of the regression analysis suggest that the relationship between ethical conduct, compliance, and corporate governance with decision-making processes in public procurement is weak. This indicates that other factors not accounted for in the model may play a more significant role in shaping procurement decisions. Munuhwa et al (2024) who alludes to the view that local authorities should consider these factors, such as organizational culture, individual values, and external influences, to enhance the effectiveness of ethical guidelines and governance frameworks in influencing decision-making.

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EXAMINING THE EFFICIENCY OF FUEL MANAGEMENT ON SERVICE DELIVERY WITHIN LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine the efficiency of fuel management on service delivery within local authorities in Zimbabwe. A quantitative methodology accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was deployed to collect data from four local authorities within Harare Metropolitan Province. The stratified random sampling technique was utilized to define the sample of 347 participants, with the aid of RAOSOFT sample size calculator. SPSS (version 20) software was used for analysing data. The study findings indicate that, inefficient fuel management processes significantly contributed to poor service delivery. Also, the results showed a significant positive correlation between efficient fuel management practices and service delivery. It therefore follows that; enhanced service delivery tends to correlate positively with improved fuel management practices. The results suggest that prioritizing efficient fuel management processes optimizes resource allocation which in turn enhance service delivery performance within local authorities. Consequently, the study recommends the implementation of electronic fuel monitoring systems to streamline fuel management process thereby improving transparency and accountability.

Keywords: fuel management, service delivery, local authorities, efficiency, Zimbabwe.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fuel management generally represents a significant share of the fleet management expenditure, which is projected to be around 30 to 40% of the overall fleet operating costs (Barun, 2021). In developed countries like the United States, fuel economy is an important consideration in federal fleet replacement plans (Bentley &Hodge, 2020). In this regard, it is essential to comprehend how fuel management and service delivery are related for a number of reasons; including cost reduction, operational effectiveness and service dependability. Accurately monitoring fuel consumption and undertaking regular fuel storage capacity inspections assist local authorities in allocating the resources more efficiently and controlling expenditures. Harcourt and Lawson (2024) observes that efficient fuel management procedures improve operational efficiency by ensuring that vehicles have enough fuel to deliver services reliably

and on schedule. This underscores the importance of fuel management in the context of fleet operations and service delivery.

Globally, fuel management procedures are crucial for improving effective fleet management operations. The implementation of fuel saving techniques and utilization of technology to ensure precise monitoring and usage control is a fundamental aspect of global fleet management best practices (Verma, et al., 2021; Oluwashola & Ige, 2022). A study conducted by Rashid and Lugaric (2018) on green fleet management for public sector organisations within United Arab Emirates recognized the wide spread use advanced fuel tracking systems that leverage technologies like Global Position System (GPS) tracking of fuel usage. These computerized systems facilitate the monitoring of real time fuel consumption and uncover inefficiencies within the fuel management system (Romero et al., 2024). In addition, computerized fuel systems frequently generated reports which help to keep track of fuel usage patterns, and in turn improving fleet management. The analysis of fuel consumption data helps in making informed decisions pertaining fuel distribution and allocation thereby enhance service delivery.

In contrast to local authorities within the developed nations, most public sector organisations in countries such as Tanzania face numerous challenges in effective fuel management. Mismanagement of fuel is rampant which mostly characterised by lack of proper monitoring, accountability and corruptions, resulting in fuel theft and misuse (Ally, 2020). Despite the persisting issues throughout many African nations stemming from inadequate resources and capacity restrictions, in Kenya some public sector organisation have made notable strides in effective fuel management. In particular, the Kenyan Parliamentary Service Commission utilize electronic fuel card systems which records critical data, including the quantity of fuel issued and refuelling time for every particular vehicle (Kanuku & Ng'eno, 2023). The use of these electronic fuel card technology plays a pivotal role for effective tracking of fuel consumption, data administration and documentation thereby improving fleet management efficiency. As a result, the electronic transmission of this data facilitates for real-time access of fuel records, which promotes effective fuel management operations.

Fuel management within local authorities in Zimbabwe has exhibited numerous issues, including deficiencies in accountability and transparency to effectively monitoring fuel consumption resulting in considerable obstacles that adversely affect service delivery. These issues have a direct impact on the community since they may contribute to hindrance of access to necessary services, which could endanger public safety. For instance, garbage accumulation,

poor water supply management, health services have severely affected the community exposing them to health hazards and hindering them access to services. In addition, several of local authorities in Zimbabwe fail to adequately account for fuel allocated for assigned projects (Auditor General Report, 2021). For example, despite maintaining a fuel record, the Marondera council failed to account for around 10 000 litres of fuel (Zim Eye, 2022). Similarly, Bindura council was unable to account for over 1 000 litres of petrol earmarked for Zimbabwe National Roads Authority (ZINARA) projects (ibid). If the issue of inefficient fuel mismanagement fails to be addressed, it goes on to affect the efficiency and dependability of crucial services that local authorities deliver, which will compromise the of community's well-being. The severity of these operational challenges encountered by local authorities in Zimbabwe necessitates the researcher to assess fuel management approaches and their influence on service delivery.

Prior research conducted by Manawa et al. (2020), Kajongwe et al. (2021), and Chiparo et al. (2022), has concentrated on green fleet management, vehicle fleet management, and public service delivery broadly. However, there is scarcity of research clearly addresses the practical knowledge gap that relates to the challenges surrounding fuel administration procedures within local authorities and the detrimental effect that it has on service delivery. Therefore, the study aimed to fill this practical gap by providing tailored recommendations to improve fuel management and service delivery within local authorities in Zimbabwe. Specifically, the study sort to assess the efficacy of the existing fuel management approaches employed by local authorities; evaluate the extent to which fuel management procedures affect service delivery and recommend suggest strategies to optimize fuel management effectiveness within local authorities in Zimbabwe.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides an overview of the literature relates to fuel management and service delivery and justify the basis upon which of hypothesis were developed.

Fuel management

Fuel management entails a comprehensive procedures and techniques meant to efficiently monitor, usage, and control fuel (Aflabo et al., 2020). According to Romero et al. (2024) fuel management is a strategic approach through which tracking and monitoring fuel consumption helps to attain cost effective fleet management operations. These definitions explicitly show that fuel management is an integral element within fleet management system, incorporating

fundamental activities for efficient control and optimization of fuel usage. Verma et al. (2021) reiterates that accurate record keeping and the establishment of control mechanisms helps to safeguard fuel inventories. In addition, regular monitoring of fuel usage patterns and consumption assists in recognizing inefficiencies and detecting prospective issues within the entire fuel management process. Petrović and Vujanovic (2024) highlight the significance of real-time fuel monitoring systems which offer precise information usage and consumption, facilitating informed decisions regarding fuel efficiency. In order to promote transparency and accountability within the fuel management system, Zhang et al. (2021) advocates the implementation of electronic fuel management systems that simplifies monitoring and tracking of fuel usage. Therefore, the adoption of comprehensive monitoring, documentation, administration and control mechanisms are essential in enhancing operation and mitigating the possibilities of fuel theft and unauthorized usage.

Service delivery

Within the context of local authorities, service delivery pertains to public services. Service delivery is the mechanism through which the local or state bodies provide a broad spectrum of services such as health services, water supply, refuse collection, public infrastructure development and maintenance (Sawaneh, 2022). The distinction between effective service delivery and ineffective service delivery lies in the provision of high-quality, dependable, timely, and consistent services to users (Mamokhere, 2022; Pareek & Sole, 2022; Rulashe & Ijeoma, 2022). Consequently, failure to prioritize the aspects relating to quality, dependable, timely, and consistent results in poor service delivery, which in turn affects the socio-economic welfare of the residents. Overall, the concept of good service delivery speaks to the extent to which “services provided by the listed sectors meet or exceed the expectations of beneficiaries (general public)” (Shittu 2020, p1). For this to be realised, an inter-agency and inter-departmental approach is key; this therefore entails that concerned departments must effectively coordinate to meet service goals.

In Zimbabwe however, service delivery is the direct contrast of the ideal characterisation above, it is mainly shaped by the principal agent relationship, the end user is rarely seen as a customer but rather a subject not entitled. It therefore follows that the governance approaches in Zimbabwe local authorities are not hinged on the need to effectively meet the needs of the ratepayers. As noted by Marumahoko et al. (2020) local authority service delivery in Zimbabwe is not a function of developmental governance. Such a scenario is compounded by a

combination of intertwined factors, including inadequate human and financial resources, corruption and mismanagement, political interference, rapid population growth, and poor economic performance (Chikwariro et al., 2021; Maibeki et al., 2022; Mupandanyama, 2023). Given this, it is critical to emphasise that, efficient management of resources including fuel is part of the puzzle. The existence of inefficient fuel management procedures further compounds the already existent crisis of governance and service delivery.

Hypothesis development

Effective fuel management is essential for optimizing service delivery. A study conducted by Harcourt and Lawson (2024) on oil and gas companies in Nigeria underscored the critical role of effective fuel monitoring, consumption, record-keeping, and control mechanism in improving organisational operations. Accurate monitoring of fuel usage and consumption contributes to improved operational efficiency and organisational performance, through detecting challenges such as fuel theft and vehicle misuse (Kanyepe, 2023). Moreover, Aflabo et al. (2020) underscore that efficient fuel monitoring is crucial for ensuring uninterrupted service delivery. The adoption of fuel-efficient techniques within an organization results in cost savings and resource optimization, as fuel is utilized effectively, hence enhancing service reliability and ensuring timely delivery (Mehmood, 2021; Chaudhari et al., 2024). Similar to this, a study by Koba, and Svystun (2021) found that reliable fuel documentation helps organizations monitor fuel usage trends, pinpoint areas for development, and efficiently schedule fuel procurement. In this regard, maintaining of accurate records on fuel usage allows local authorities to manage to reduce fleet management costs, and effectively allocate sufficient fuel for service delivery needs. Furthermore, Farahpoor et al. (2024) underscores the need for data driven fuel management control systems for enabling reliable and effective operations. Drawing on the empirical analysis, the study thus posited that fuel management procedures positively affect service delivery by local authorities.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a quantitative methodology grounded by the positivist philosophy. The quantitative technique assisted the researcher in achieving objective measurement, statistical analysis, comparisons, and data generalizability (Taherdoost, 2022; Ghanad, 2023). Moreover, positivism facilitates the establishment of relationships between variables, enabling researchers to formulate hypotheses and generalize the results to broader contexts (Ali, 2024). The study utilized a cross-sectional design, which involved collecting data from four (4) selected local

authorities within the Harare Metropolitan province in Zimbabwe. This design was selected due to its abilities for concurrent collection of extensive data, which proved to be economical for the researchers (Cvetkovic-Vega et al., 2020). Furthermore, by using a cross-sectional approach, the researchers were able to provide detailed information concerning how fuel management and service delivery interact within local authorities.

A total of 3500 participants comprised the study population, from which a sample size of 347 employees was selected by means of Raosoft sample size calculator. The online Raosoft sample size calculator was utilized because of its simplicity, accuracy and the ability to provide instant results. Participants were subsequently chosen from the four (4) local authorities through stratified random sampling. This sampling technique guaranteed adequate representation and enhanced coverage of the respondents, which was consistent with the recommendations by (Iliyasu &Etikan, 2021). Data collection processes took place from September 2024 to October 2024, with respondents selected from different departments including transport, administration, procurement, finance and engineering from the selected local authorities in the Harare Metropolitan Province. This approach allowed the researchers to gather insights from individuals across different levels of management, which included managers, officers, supervisors, mechanics, drivers, and clerks, thereby capturing diverse perspectives.

A structured questionnaire was employed to gather quantitative data. A questionnaire was considered ideal for data collection because of its ability to collect of statistical data from a huge size of respondents in a manner that is economical (Taherdoost, 2022; Hochwaldet al., 2023). The questionnaire was distributed electronically to the participants via email and mobile platforms where necessary, allowing the respondents to complete it whenever it was convenient. The questionnaire also contained a cover letter soliciting informed consent with the objective of safeguarding the anonymity of the respondents. The questionnaire utilized closed-ended questions, allowing the respondents to select their answers from a 5-point Likert scale comprising of 1 =Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral OR Uncertain, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The 5-point Likert scale was utilized because it enabled standardized measurement and straightforward comparison of result. The questionnaire consisted of two (2) sections, detailed in table 1, encompassing Fuel Management (FM) and Service Delivery (SD).

Table 1. Statement for the questionnaire	
Fuel Management	
Code	Questionnaire statement
FM_1	The current fuel management system within the local authority effectively monitors fuel usage for vehicles and equipment
FM_2	Fuel consumption records are regularly updated and reconciled
FM_3	The fuel consumption records are effective in identifying and addressing inefficiencies in fuel management system in local authorities
FM_4	The local authority has well-established procedures for detecting fuel theft
FM_5	The local authority actively implements fuel-saving measures to enhance overall fuel management efficiency.
Service Delivery	
SD_1	There is poor service delivery within local authorities due to ineffective fuel management
SD_2	Mismanagement of fuel hinders the timeliness of service delivery in local authorities
SD_3	Inadequate fuel management frequently leads to disruptions in the provision of essential services in local authorities
SD_4	Insufficient fuel management often results in reduced access to service delivery
SD_5	Inefficient fuel management practices negatively affect the quality and reliability of services provided in local authorities

Source: Authors (2025)

The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20 for analysing the collected data, that included conducting reliability and validity test, analysing descriptive statistics and testing the hypothesis using correlation analysis. Conversely, to confirm the questionnaire's validity, the researchers undertook a pilot test, utilizing participant comments as a foundation for developing and validating the instrument. Lastly, research ethics were maintained throughout the study by ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, as well as informed consent.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test which was used for establishing sampling adequacy, while Cronbach's alpha and convergent validity tests were used to test for reliability and validity of the study.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

The study used the KMO and Bartlett's Test for the establishing the sample adequacy as presented in table 2. The KMO measure of sample adequacy for the study was 0.849 that was above the recommended KMO value of 0.7 which is regarded as appropriate (Nkansah, 2018). Therefore, in this study the value of 0.849 indicated that the study variables had a degree of correlation.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.849
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	35395.322
	Df	153
	Sig.	.000

Source: Research Data (Authors, 2025)

Furthermore, the reliability statistics presented in Table 3 show the internal consistency of the two study variables, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.899 and 0.883 for fuel management and service delivery respectively. The reliability statistics show high reliability amongst all the study variables as recommended that good reliability score should be greater than 0.7 (Sürücü & Maslakçı, 2020). Therefore, the study results were reliable as exhibited by Cronbach's alpha values in Table 3.

Table 3. Reliability statistics		
Variable	Cronbach Alpha items	Number of Items
Fuel Management	.899	5
Service Delivery	.883	5

Source: Research Data (Authors, 2025).

Convergent validity test results

The findings presented in table 4 regarding convergent validity indicate that both the fuel management and service delivery constructs exhibit robust factor loadings, reflecting a significant correlation between the constructs which were being assessed. The reliability values for individual items for the constructs were above minimum threshold, indicating that each item had a crucial role in enhancing the reliability (Ali, 2024). Additionally, the Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency within

each construct (Ghanad, 2023). The composite reliability values were high, thereby reinforcing the convergent validity.

Table 4. Convergent validity					
Construct	Item	Standard factor Loading	Individual Item reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability
Fuel Management	FM_1	0.879	0.817	0.899	0.780
	FM_2	0.765	0.721		
	FM_3	0.871	0.840		
	FM_4	0.714			
	FM_5	0.746			
Service Delivery	SD_1	0.762	0.811	0.883	0.841
	SD_2	0.714	0.860		
	SD_3	0.850	0.841		
	SD_4	0.723	0.794		
	SD_5	0.766	0.810		

Source: Research Data (Authors, 2025)

4.3 Descriptive statistics

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics related to the fuel management and service delivery.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FM_1	284	1.00	5.00	2.111	1.166
FM_2	284	1.00	5.00	3.198	1.016
FM_3	284	1.00	5.00	2.532	1.531
FM_4	284	1.00	5.00	1.567	1.197
FM_5	284	1.00	5.00	2.209	1.127
MEAN				2.323	1.207
SD_1	284	1.00	5.00	3.156	1.352
SD_2	284	1.00	5.00	4.124	1.206
SD_3	284	1.00	5.00	4.987	1.464
SD_4	284	1.00	5.00	4.692	1.292
SD_5	284	1.00	5.00	4.890	1.185
MEAN				4.370	1.300
Valid N (listwise)	284				

Source: Research Data (Authors, 2025)

Fuel management

Table 5 present the descriptive statistics of fuel management which shows a low mean score of 2.323 and standard deviation value of 1.207. This indicates the inefficiency of fuel management processes within local authorities in Zimbabwe. The findings point to numerous challenges emanating from the use of poor fuel monitoring and lack of robust systems for regular updating and reconciling fuel consumption records. Inefficient fuel management has in turn contributed to delays and disruptions of service delivery within local authorities. Chaudhari et al. (2024)

underscore the importance of investing in fuel management technologies which fosters effective fuel management. In addition, studies by Rashid and Lugaric (2018); Oluwashola and Ige (2022), contends that poor tracking of fuel consumption results inaccurate fuel records that are prone to misuse and thereby contributing to high operational costs. A study by Chiparo et al. (2022) concur that inefficient fuel management results increase fleet management costs, decreased operational performance and delays in service provision.

Service delivery

Table 5 show a high mean score of 4.370 and standard deviation of 1.300, points to poor service delivery as a result of mismanaged fuel. The findings revealed that poor service delivery has resulted in delays and disruptions to services such as refuse collection and waste water management as supported by (Marumahoko et al., 2020). In addition, the findings reveal the inefficiencies in fuel allocation, distribution, ineffective scheduling and planning. These shortcomings have compromised timely provision of services, which have affected the livelihoods of the resident. Furthermore, studies by Munuhwa et al. (2020), Maibeki et al. (2022) acknowledged that local authorities in Zimbabwe are characterized by poor service delivery which is affected has impacted on the livelihood of the entire population. According to Auditor General Report (2019) service delivery has been on the decline, because most local authorities in Zimbabwe failed to maintain accurate records of fuel consumption that resulted in misappropriation of fuel. Therefore, the results show a continuous cycle of poor service delivery that has been necessitated by poor fuel management and the need for improvements in fuel management system.

Hypothesis testing

Table 6 provides the correlation coefficients, which were used to test the study hypothesis.

Table 6. Correlation coefficients for the study variables

		FM	SD
FM	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 .003* 284	
SD	Pearson correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 .000*** 284	1 .000* 284

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data (Authors, 2025)

The results in table 6 of the hypothesis testing show that there was a significant positive correlation between fuel management and service delivery within local authorities in Zimbabwe. The Pearson correlation coefficient between Fleet Management (FM) and Service Delivery (SD) was 0.03, significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. Therefore, the hypothesis results show that there was a strong and positive relationship between efficient fuel management and service delivery within local authorities in Zimbabwe. This means that when fuel management practices are improved, there tends to be an improvement in service delivery. The results highlight the importance of local authorities in Zimbabwe placing strategic emphasis on enhancing fuel management practices to positively influence service delivery. Prioritizing fuel management leads to more efficient resource allocation and better service delivery performance.

The findings concur with the past studies by Kajongwe (2021) and Chiparo et al. (2022) which states that effective fuel management practices enhance service delivery. Whereas Rashid and Lugarić (2018) reiterate that the integration of technology within fuel management system improves operational efficiency. In addition, study conducted by Kanyepe (2023) within the mining sector in Zimbabwe found out that fuel management practices positively influence organizational performance. Additionally, Aflabo et al. (2020) states that, effective fuel management enhances the timeliness and reliability of service delivery. Adequate fuel supply guarantees vehicle availability, which can enhance service delivery through the provision of timely and dependable services. The results of hypothesis testing offer strong evidence supporting the positive correlation between fuel management and service delivery in local authorities in Zimbabwe. The findings highlight the necessity of emphasizing efficient fuel management practices as a crucial element in enhancing service delivery.

CONCLUSION

The study sheds more light on the critical relationship between fuel management processes and service delivery within local authorities in Zimbabwe. The results underscore that effective fuel management significantly influences service delivery, thereby stressing the importance for local authorities to concentrate on improving fuel management procedures in order to improve service delivery. The study revealed that local authorities are characterized by poor fuel management processes which significantly affects prompt and dependable provision of service delivery. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing practical insights into how local authorities can streamline their fuel management processes in order to enhance service delivery.

The findings have significant implications for management within local authorities, highlighting the necessity of investing in fuel management technologies that monitor fuel usage accurately and identifying inefficient within the processes, thereby minimising fuel theft. In addition, there is need for local authorities to consider implementing electronic fuel monitoring systems to improve transparency and accountability within the entire fuel management process. In terms of policy implications, the local authorities must emphasize fuel management as a critical component of their operational plan to enhance fuel use and service delivery performance.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides valuable insights pertaining to the relationship between fuel management and service delivery within local authorities in Zimbabwe, it was necessary to recognize some limitations. Firstly, the study focused on local authorities within the Harare Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe, and this limits the generalizing the findings to different economic sectors. Secondly, the study utilized self-reported data from questionnaire responds which could be biased and inaccurate. Finally, the study did not take into account external issues such as political intervention and economic restrictions, which could have an influence on fuel management procedures and service delivery within local authorities. Despite these limitations, the study addresses them by utilizing a large sample size to ensure a thorough comprehension of fuel management and service delivery. Consequently, these limitations create opportunities for future research of such nature to be undertaken in diverse contexts within Zimbabwe and other nations to enhance the generalizability of the findings. In addition, future research needs to be undertaken to explore the influence of external factors, including economic constraints and political interference, on fuel management practices and service delivery in local authorities in Zimbabwe.

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF ECOTOURISM IN ZIMBABWE'S NATIONAL PARKS

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ABSTRACT

With a focus on sustainability and conservation, ecotourism has developed into a major driver of global economic growth. But it's still unclear how it impacts on national parks, especially in Zimbabwe. With a focus on Mana Pools and Hwange National Parks, this study analyzes the environmental effects of ecotourism operations in Zimbabwe's national parks. The research employed qualitative methodology, using in-depth interviews with main stakeholders, including local community members and park authorities. Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the data, revealing both positive and negative effects of ecotourism. Findings indicate that ecotourism activities, such as guided safaris, canoeing, birdwatching, and cultural tourism, generate revenue for conservation and community development. However, these activities also present environmental problems, such as pollution, disturbance of wildlife, and habitat degradation. Techniques like strengthening community involvement, enforcing visitor carrying capacities, and upgrading infrastructure were suggested as ways to lessen these effects. The study emphasizes the necessity of well-balanced ecotourism regulations that uphold socioeconomic advantages while giving ecological integrity top priority. Adopting certification programs, enhancing environmental education, and cultivating alliances for sustainable management are some of the recommendations.

Key Words: Ecotourism, National Parks & Environmental impacts.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a major contributor to global economic growth. Ecotourism has become a crucial component that prioritizes environmental conservation and sustainability. Snyman (2014) posits that ecotourism is widely known to be a responsible travel practice aimed at preserving ecosystems while fostering economic benefits. However, ecotourism poses various negative challenges that require critical evaluation. This study sought to interrogate the notion that ecotourism genuinely serves as a sustainable conservation approach or contributes greatly to environment degradation. This study sought to identify gaps in the conservation practices of ecotourism and propose evidence-based recommendations for minimizing the negative impacts.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

According to Mishra and Kumar (2024) ecotourism has grown rapidly in recent years, increasing by an estimated 20% every year and greatly assisting community growth and nature conservation. Even so, although ecotourism is very helpful, it has also brought up concerns about its impact on nature, different species, and nearby cultures (Reed, 2020; Warinda et al., 2024). Following incorrect ecotourism techniques has damaged natural habitats, exploited nearby communities, and added to the level of carbon emissions. Several countries have noted the concerning effects of ecotourism on the environment.

In Finland and the UK, overcrowding in national parks has led to soil erosion, disturbed wildlife, and increased litter, even in strict nature reserves (Hill & Gale, 2021). Several scholars believe that advertising ecotourism in Europe can mislead people, as some companies promote it as eco-friendly without enforcing strict environmental standards (Gossling, 2021). Constructing tourist facilities in remote areas has fragmented habitats and altered ecological processes, particularly in regions like the Alps and the Scottish Highlands (Jones & Newsome, 2020; Jones et al., 2024). The points above highlight the concern among academics that, without effective regulation and local community involvement, ecotourism might do more harm to the environment than good. For this reason, it is advisable to examine ecotourism in detail, especially in regions where the ecosystem is unstable and authorities lack consistency.

Many African countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa, have benefited from their efforts to preserve the environment (Novelli, 2021). However, these countries face issues such as wild animals being unable to move freely, illegal tourism activities, and environmental damage due to frequent human activity in national parks (Spenceley, 2020). Maintaining a balance between conservation and tourism development is a primary concern for ecotourism.

Due to its stunning outdoor scenery, rich wildlife, and cultural landmarks, Zimbabwe is an excellent destination for ecotourism. Many tourists visit Hwange National Park and Mana Pools each year, which supports Zimbabwe's economy and promotes conservation. However, many experts now believe that increased tourism in these protected areas can harm the ecosystem. The growth of ecotourism in Zimbabwe is thought to contribute to pollution, disturb wildlife, and destroy their habitats. In addition, people dumping garbage and driving off-road in protected areas are harming the region's ecological diversity (Mudzengi, Mutanga, Muboko, & Gandiwa, 2021).

This situation regarding ecotourism in Zimbabwe's national parks has led people to question whether ecotourism is truly environmentally friendly. It has been reported that more and more species are losing their habitats, indicating that it is time to take urgent action, (Buckley, 2021). Without sufficient management and mitigation efforts, the ecology of Zimbabwe's protected areas will be adversely affected, which will diminish their capacity to support tourism. The goal of this study is to review and suggest actions that will enhance ecotourism conservation in Zimbabwe.

Ecotourism has been promoted as a sustainable conservation form of tourism, however, its actual effect on Zimbabwe's national parks remains uncertain (Chikodzi et al., 2023). According to Gandiwa (2021), the increase of human traffic and activity in protected areas has led to biodiversity loss and habitat destruction. Regardless of the economic benefits, increased tourism activities in parks like Mana Pools and Hwange National Park have raised questions of ecosystem ineffective management strategies and ecosystem imbalances. Already, exciting studies have assessed general economic impacts, therefore, there is limited research on the effectiveness of Zimbabwe's ecotourism policies, theoretical contributions, and practical conservation strategies. Therefore, this study using a qualitative research methodology to examine ecotourism practices, monitoring frameworks, and stakeholder engagement. The findings of this study will provide an enhanced practical implementation, policy recommendations, and contribute to ecotourism theory by pinpointing the best practices for sustainable conservation and community involvement, as well as consulting conservation experts. The study findings may help to create a balanced environment and tourism policies that will benefit Zimbabwe's parks and add to global knowledge.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the study was to assess the environmental impacts of ecotourism activities in Zimbabwe's national parks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review explores key aspects of ecotourism in national parks and protected areas. It examines the range of activities, including safaris, guided walks, eco-lodging, birdwatching, marine tourism, adventure experiences, and cultural tours. It considers sustainability challenges such as ecological impacts, carrying capacity, and over-tourism. The review also addresses strategies from other countries to promote sustainable practices and community involvement. Finally, it highlights the

role of policy, governance, and economic and political factors in ensuring effective ecotourism management.

ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES DONE IN NATIONAL PARKS

Ecotourism has been a rising trend in the 20th century and has become a tool that helps foster sustainability and conservation. According to Buckley (2023), national parks worldwide serve as primary sites for ecotourism activities such as wildlife safaris, eco-lodging, marine ecotourism, guided nature walks, birdwatching, adventure tourism, and cultural tourism.

Wildlife safari rides

Safari game rides are one of the famous ecotourism activities done in Africa; however, countries in South America and Asia are also known for such activities of observing wildlife in their natural habitats. African countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Zimbabwe are known for their extensive game ride experiences. These attract millions of tourists who are eager to see the big five (elephant, leopard, lion, rhino, and buffalo) stated by (Lawton, 2022). Lawton continues to state that parks such as Serengeti National Park in Tanzania have structured safari drives that help tourists experience different ecological ecosystems while generating revenue and fostering sustainability and conservation

According to O'Neal (2024). states that in North America, parks such as Yellowstone National Park offer similar Activities and experiences, such as viewing unique species such as the bison, wolves, and bears in their natural habitats. This way of ecotourism helps generate revenue, helping foster revenue in a certain country; however, according to Spenceley (2020), the rapid increase of wildlife tourism will lead to negative consequences such as habitat decline, increased human and wildlife conflicts, and depletion of natural resources

Hiking and Guided nature walks

This activity is somewhat similar to safari game rides, whereby it's a low-impact activity that helps visitors to get intimate experiences with the wildlife and landscapes by walking instead of the vehicle-based drives, allowing for a slower and immersive interaction and appreciation of the natural beauty. According to Buckley (2021), effective guided ecotours in Costa Rica's Colorado National Park have been luring tourists, therefore increasing their revenue. Trained naturalists educate tourists on the importance of the fauna and flora of the region. There are similar practices

in countries such as Australia's Daintree rainforest, they have guided treks that educate on conservation of their rainforest and indigenous heritage

Nature walks are a way of reducing our carbon footprint on the environment; however, they are not without their concerns. (Tilman, 2017) states that poorly managed hiking and trails might lead to the destruction of vegetation, soil erosion, and disturbance of wildlife. He continues to state that an influx of visitors can cause increased waste and human traffic, affecting fragile ecosystems.

Eco-lodging

The use of environmentally friendly housing is another current trend in the 20th century. In countries such as Botswana, they have the Okavango Delta and Lodges such as the Sandibe Safari that run on solar energy and have installed strict waste management systems (Honey & Krantz, 2021). There are also similar activities in Costa Rica's Monteverde Cloud Forest; they use rainwater harvesting strategies and composting toilets, which will attract eco-friendly tourists and conservationists, according to Novelli (2021). As shown, Eco-lodging promotes sustainability; it also generates revenue in the process by attracting a large number of eco-friendly tourists. However, Weaver (2020) warns that the increase of tourism infrastructures in protected places will lead to deforestation and water overuse if not managed properly

Birdwatching

Birdwatching has now become a common ecotourism activity done in various national parks around the world. Scholars such as Buckley (2023) state the importance of the Galapagos Islands, where tourists observe different and rare bird species. In Africa, we have parks such as Bwindi Impenetrable National Park that attract tourists seeking to watch the rare shoebill stock. In Zimbabwe, we have our own *Kuimbayeshiri* bird park. Not only do these parks generate revenue, but they also educate tourists about the different types of birds and explain their importance to the ecosystem, as well as why we should avoid their extinction (Weaver & Jin, 2020). However, an increase in birdwatchers will lead to a disruption in breeding patterns and nesting sites.

Marine Ecotourism Activities

There are new marine activities in the coastal and marine parks, such as the Turtle Rehabilitation Center in Hervey Bay, whale watching, and the Dolphin Superpod off California. In countries such

as Australia and Indonesia, they have state-of-the-art marine and coral reef activities (Hughes, 2022). Marine ecotourism activities help raise awareness of the oceans and their ecosystems; they also help provide economic benefits (Rockstrom, 2021). Craig (2020) states that uncontrolled diving can cause pollution, coral bleaching, and habitat destruction. He continues to state that boat traffic in whale watching areas disturbs marine mammal migrations and mating patterns.

Adventure sustainable activities in tourism

Adventure sustainable activities are activities that are exciting and daring that give a sense of adrenaline, fulfilling today's need without affecting future generation needs due to conservation and limited effect on their surrounding environment (Zimmermann, 2016). Adventure activities such as kayaking, zip-lining, and mountain climbing have become popular in national parks. In Nepal, Sagarmatha National Park offers a sustainable trekking program to Mountain Everest while integrating waste management strategies to minimize ecological damage, according to Brown (2022). Filho (2018) states that in Canada's Banff National Park, they have controlled water rafting that reduces disturbance on the aquatic ecosystem. Although adventure activities help the host economies, scholars such as Sachs (2015) warns that mass participation leads to ecological degradation.

Cultural and indigenous preservation tourism

Cultural tourism has become a trend in the 20th century (Queirós, 2015), it's about engaging in the different cultures and indigenous activities of the travel destination while promoting sustainability (Rahman, 2018). In the Amazon Rainforest, they have eco-tours conducted by indigenous tribes that educate tourists on rainforest preservation and sustainable living (Garnett, 2015). According to Venter (2021) states that in Kenya, the Maasai Mara integrates Maasai-led ecotours while visitors learn about traditional practices for conservation. Cultural tourism conserves and fosters sustainability as well as heritage appreciation, it can also be regarded as a way to exploit and commercialize cultural traditions (Stonza, 2022)

Ecotourism activities widely vary in different national parks across the globe, as suggested by the above remarks. These activities prove to be educational while generating revenue for local communities and conservation projects (Buckley, 2023), however, these activities do not come

without their challenges that affect the ecological and ecosystem aspects of the host area (Fennell, 2022).

ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY IN PROTECTED AREAS

Ecotourism has been set as a substitute for mass tourism; it aims to balance economic benefits for local host communities and environmental conservation. Moreover, the growing number of tourists in protected areas such as national parks has increased concerns and questions about their true sustainability. Ecotourism promotes conservation initiatives by generating revenue, but it also contributes to environmental destruction if not properly managed (Buckley, 2023). At this point we examine the interactions of environmental sustainability and ecotourism in protected areas by highlighting both benefits and challenges.

The role of ecotourism in sustainability and conservation

Ecotourism is seen as a mechanism to fund sustainable practices and conservation projects. (Fennell, 2022) states that money generated by ecotourism activities like guided tours, park entry fees, and ecolodges helps generate finance for habitat restoration, wildlife protection, and antipoaching programs. Reports have shown that well-managed parks like Costa Rica's Monteverde Cloud Forest, ecotourism played a significant role in preserving biodiversity and fostering economic growth of the local community (Weave & Lawton, 2022). Buckley (2021) states that without careful regulation, Ecotourism will contribute to environmental destruction and not conservation. Raising questions about whether ecotourism is truly sustainable or rather a less harmful way of mass tourism.

Ecotourism footprint on the Ecological environment

Ecotourism aims to reduce tourism's negative impacts on the environment. (Spenceley, 2020) states that even well-managed ecotourism activities have consequences. He goes on to state that wildlife safaris, hiking, and ecolodges, if not properly managed, will contribute to wildlife disturbance, soil erosion, and vegetation loss. Reports from Yellowstone National Park show that human presence alters natural feeding patterns and movements of species such as bison and wolves (Cassidy, 2020).

Marine-based ecotourism activities like scuba diving and snorkeling risk delicate ecosystems like coral reefs (Rockstrom, 2017). He continues to highlight that coral bleaching and pollution in trafficked areas like the Great Barrier Reef increase because of unsustainable practices; therefore, a need for stricter tourism environmental policies.

Carrying capacity and over-tourism in national parks

The biggest challenges in ecotourism are how to manage the carrying capacity in national parks to make sure that the intended number of visitors does not exceed, to ensure the environment's sustainability. Novelli (2021) states that many national parks are facing over-tourism, and it is causing a strain on the ecology. Machu Picchu in Peru has put in place strict tourist limits to minimize foot traffic on the fragile landscape (Cassidy, 2020).

In Tanzania, the Serengeti, demand for activities such as safari drives resulted in demand for off-road driving, leading to degradation and soil compaction (Musika, 2022). Weaver (2020) suggests implementing strict regulations like timed visits in designated routes to minimize such impacts while fostering quality tourism.

STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Buckley (2023) suggests implementing Eco certification programs requiring tourism operations to follow strict sustainability criteria, for example, Costa Rica's certification for sustainable tourism (CST), and also like Botswana's green safari program. (Fennell, 2022) states that the importance of community-based tourism (CBT), local communities will be directly involved, which will benefit them economically. This approach has been a success in Namibia's conservancies, Ecotourism revenue is invested in local development and wildlife conservation

Ecotourism serves as a substitute for mass tourism while providing economic benefits and promoting environmental awareness. Moreover, if not properly managed it can lead to ecological, biodiversity, and resource depletion. Scholars such as Fennel (2022) suggest balancing conservation priorities and tourism growth through regulatory frameworks. Ecotourism should be guided by sustainability principles, prioritizing long-term ecological benefits over short-term economic benefits, which will ensure the protection of national parks.

THE ROLE OF POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IN SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT

One important approach for balancing commercial growth and environmental preservation is ecotourism. Ecotourism is important to national parks and in other protected areas due to it supports conservation, creates sustainable job opportunities, and helps preserve the environment.

Territorial disputes, habitat destruction, and dwindling resources in ecotourism destinations can still result from ineffective government regulations and policies (Fennell, 2017). Effective laws, well-crafted policies, and active involvement from governments, conservation organizations, and the local community are essential for successful ecotourism governance. This section explores how governance and policy can preserve ecotourism's positive social and environmental impacts.

Governance Frameworks for Ecotourism in National Parks

For ecotourism to continue in national parks and protected places, good governance is necessary. According to Buckley (2020) governance controls the trends, policies and choices about both conservation and tourism. Effective governance decisions guarantee that ecotourism stakeholders stay involved and that safety and conservation regulations are followed and that tourism is not overdone.

Spenceley (2021), states that multi-level collaboration between governmental entities, non-governmental organizations, travel agencies and locals is essential for ecotourism governance. Official plans concentrate on visitor numbers, environmental effects and the use of sustainable building materials to manage ecotourism in Canada and Australia (Weaver, 2022). The environment often suffers as a result of bad governance. Due to insufficient enforcement of preservation policies, illegal cataloging, excessive travel, and habitat demolition present problems for national parks in developing countries (Honey, 2016). To guarantee that national parks stay pristine, governments must apply stricter laws and hold officials more responsible and cooperative.

International and National Policies in Ecotourism Regulation

Bad governance usually has negative impacts on the environment. National parks that are in developing nations face challenges from overtourism and habitat destruction as a result of inadequate enforcement of preservation policies (Honey, 2016). Governments must enforce

stronger legislation and hold officials accountable, transparent, and cooperative so as to ensure that national parks remain original.

At a national level, governments are central in putting rules governing ecotourism into effect. It is stated by Honey (2020) that certain countries have implemented ecotourism laws that strike a balance between economic growth and environmental preservation. For instance, the protection area management plans and conservation easements have been successfully established in several nations, guaranteeing that tourism does not surpass the carrying capacity of delicate ecosystems (Fennell, 2021).

There are differences in the way policies are applied from one region to another. There are some countries where it is difficult to carry out ecotourism policies due to a limited government capacity and various economic interests (Buckley, 2020). To ensure ecotourism helps with conservation for many years, governments should update environmental rules, offer sustainable tourism investment and cooperate with conservation organizations.

Community Involvement in Policy Development and Decision-Making

Involving the community in decision-making is one of the most important components of sustainable ecotourism governance. According to Fennell (2015), involving local communities in tourism management guarantees that the advantages of ecotourism are shared fairly and improves the efficacy of conservation initiatives. Conflicts between conservation officials and locals who rely on natural resources for their livelihoods frequently occur in areas where local populations are left out of policy debates (Spenceley, 2017).

Co-managed national parks and ecotourism revenue-sharing schemes are examples of community-based conservation efforts that have proven effective in many nations. Weaver (2014) points out that conservation results have greatly improved in nations where indigenous groups have been granted ownership rights over ecotourism companies. Local communities are more likely to support conservation efforts and participate when they are actively involved in governance institutions.

There are still issues despite these achievements. According to Buckley (2016), in many areas, community involvement is restricted to consultation, with actual decision-making authority being centralized in governmental bodies and global conservation groups. More authority over tourism

income, park administration, and conservation planning must be given to local communities for community-based government to be genuinely successful.

Regulatory Mechanisms and Compliance in Ecotourism Management

To guarantee that ecotourism operators adhere to sustainability concepts and environmental requirements, regulatory measures are necessary. National parks frequently employ licensing programs, environmental impact assessments (EIAs), and ecotourism certification schemes to control tourism activities (Honey, 2020). For instance, ecotourism operators must fulfill stringent environmental requirements to be certified by Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST) program (Fennell, 2021). In a similar vein, South Africa has implemented tourism sustainability criteria that support conservation-based tourism models, eco-friendly lodging, and responsible wildlife interactions.

Nonetheless, Weaver (2014) cautions that when enforcement is lax, regulatory measures frequently fail. Political meddling, resource scarcity, and corruption make it difficult for conservation officials to keep an eye on adherence to environmental laws in many developing nations. Off-road driving, unlawful wildlife encounters, and uncontrolled tourist facility construction are examples of unsustainable tourism activities that continue to endanger national parks. Governments must therefore support environmental monitoring systems, give park rangers more money, and punish tourism companies that break conservation rules severely to improve regulatory compliance (Buckley, 2016).

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES IN ECOTOURISM GOVERNANCE

Political and economic factors that impede conservation efforts frequently influence ecotourism governance. Buckley (2016) contends that rather than long-term environmental sustainability, short-term economic objectives drive ecotourism policies in many nations. Governments that depend significantly on tourism-related income could be reluctant to enforce stringent rules on ecotourism companies for fear of deterring foreign investment.

Political unrest makes managing ecotourism much more difficult. Spenceley (2017) points out that political leadership in certain nations might alter conservation policies, making it challenging to develop long-term sustainability plans. Politically influenced national parks frequently find it difficult to enforce environmental laws, which results in unchecked visitor growth.

The efficacy of regulatory procedures, policy execution, and governance frameworks determines how long ecotourism in national parks can survive. Weak governance systems and laxly implemented regulations can result in environmental damage and unsustainable tourism activities, even while ecotourism can promote conservation and provide financial advantages.

Researchers like Fennell (2017), Buckley (2016), and Honey (2016) stress the significance of community engagement, stringent regulatory enforcement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration in ecotourism governance. Successful ecotourism management by nations like Australia, Canada, and Costa Rica shows that robust governance frameworks can strike a balance between environmental preservation and economic expansion.

In spite of a large body of research on ecotourism activities, sustainable practices, policy mechanisms, and governance systems in national parks and protected areas, gaps exist. Most research is narrow in that it treats ecological effects, economic advantages, or policy matters in isolation, with scant work looking at the combined interaction of these in selected local contexts. Furthermore, while cross-border examples can serve as valuable learning experiences, there is limited empirical data on the implementation, monitoring, and experiences of ecotourism interventions in lesser-studied national parks, particularly in developing countries such as Zimbabwe. This lacuna warrants a context-specific, empirical study that examines the effectiveness of ecotourism activities, sustainability practices, and governing systems in driving conservation, as well as benefiting local communities. Thus, this study applies a qualitative research methodology to examine these elements in further detail and provide insight that can be applied to inform better ecotourism management practices.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative approach which allowed for the use of conversational, open-ended communication to gather in-depth information by allowing respondents to freely express themselves on the issue. We interviewed stakeholders which included local communities and park authorities. Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the data, revealing both positive and negative effects of ecotourism. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes, and all were conducted face-to-face. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data were broken down into parts for coding and theme deriving. For ethical considerations, participants received complete information about the questions they would be asked, the purpose of the data, and any potential

repercussions. In addition, they signed agreement forms to participate in the study and were free to withdraw at any given time. For reliability of findings, various respondents were interviewed in order to compare the authenticity of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports the findings of the study, showing critical issues identified by interviewing park authorities and members of society regarding ecotourism activities in Zimbabwean national parks. The issues of concern are the type of ecotourism activities conducted, their impacts on wildlife and habitats, and environmental degradation implications resulting from tourism. The study also discusses strategies currently employed to minimize their impacts, including monitoring, education of tourists, and community involvement. Together, they give an overall picture of how ecotourism works in terms of biodiversity, local people, and conservation management, and this provides the context for discussion and analysis.

ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES BEING CARRIED OUT IN NATIONAL PARKS IN ZIMBABWE

Based on the responses from park authorities and community members, several key themes emerged, which are Activities Done Under Ecotourism, Impacts of Activities on Wildlife, Ecotourism Activities Responsible for Affecting Wildlife, Types of Ecotourism Activities Available, and Role of Interpretation and Education in Activities. Before exploring these themes, it is important to note that while most respondents showed a reasonable understanding of the concept of nature-based tourism, their interpretations varied. Despite the diversity in responses, a common thread was evident: nature-based tourism refers to forms of tourism centered around natural environments, particularly activities that allow tourists to interact with and appreciate biodiversity. Respondents described it in terms of wildlife viewing, natural scenery appreciation, and environmentally grounded travel experiences.

It's all about letting people experience the wilderness and the species that live in it—safaris, guided walks, and nature-based recreation (Interview Respondent PA1).

Nature tourism includes wildlife watching, fishing, and even cultural visits—all of it is rooted in our natural biodiversity (Interview Respondent CMI).

To me, it means taking visitors into wild, undisturbed areas and teaching them about what lives there, especially birds, animals, and trees (Interview Respondent PA2).

These views align with the understanding of nature-based tourism as a broad concept that encompasses tourism activities tied directly to natural ecosystems and biodiversity (Buckley, 2009).

However, some respondents gave vague interpretations.

I think it's about outdoor things... like hiking and seeing nice view (Interview Respondent CM3).

It has to do with nature, but I think it's just going to places like Victoria Falls (Interview Respondent CM2).

Such unclear responses suggest possible knowledge gaps or limited engagement with ecotourism definitions. According to Robertson and Watts (2016), understanding and participation in tourism often depend on individuals' connection to and involvement with natural settings. Still, the overall responses largely affirmed a consensus around nature-based tourism being rooted in biodiversity-focused experiences.

Impacts of Activities on Wildlife

Evidence from the study highlights ecotourism activities have a number of impacts. Such sentiments can be captured in the narratives provided below:

(Respondent PA1) mentioned that walking safaris, trips on the Zambezi River, and guided rides are ways to introduce guests to the wildlife in the park. Similarly,

(Respondent CM1) explained that nature walks, boat trips, and animal and river viewing make up a big part of the tourist experience.

They show that experiencing wildlife plays an important role in ecotourism in Mana Pools. However, although tourists come and spend increases, these activities can harm the park's biodiversity. After studying this as a university student, I understand that landscapes that are used for ecotourism can still interfere with animal behavior, damaging their habitats.

Uncontrolled tourism can lead to habitat disturbance, excessive noise, and long-term landscape degradation, according to Chigwanda and Mutasa (2021). These results support the respondents' observations and emphasize how important it is to keep an eye on and control how visitors interact with wildlife. Ecotourism aims to preserve the environment, but it also exposes it to human activity regularly, which presents a difficult management problem.

This theme exemplifies the fundamental contradiction of ecotourism: it seeks to preserve nature while necessitating close proximity to it. Therefore, to make sure that tourism pressure doesn't compromise conservation goals, efficient oversight and conscientious visitor behavior are essential.

Types of Ecotourism Activities Available

Some of the activities suggested by the respondents were walking safaris, canoeing, game drives, bird watching, nature walks, photographic safaris, cultural exchanges, and fishing. These activities involve both types of tourism, consumptive and non-consumptive. Respondent PA1 pointed out canoeing and game drives, and respondent CM2 mentioned camping and fishing.

The park's biodiversity draws in visitors from many different fields of ecotourism. According to Nyathi and Mlambo (2024), more activities for tourists can make both visitors and the economy happier, but these activities must be checked by environmental assessments to keep the environment safe.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES IN NATIONAL PARKS IN ZIMBABWE

The researchers assessed the environmental impacts of ecotourism activities being conducted in Zimbabwe's national parks, with a specific focus on Mana Pools National Park. The guiding research question was: Do ecotourism activities affect local wildlife or biodiversity, and if so, how? Based on responses from both park authorities and community members, several themes emerged, namely: impacts of activities on wildlife, ecotourism activities responsible for affecting wildlife, effects on wildlife behavior, impacts on habitat integrity, impacts on biodiversity, and positive environmental contributions of ecotourism. Before delving into these themes, it is essential to acknowledge that respondents generally understood the principle of ecotourism, identifying it as a form of tourism that emphasizes the conservation of biodiversity and responsible enjoyment of nature. However, their insights revealed growing concerns about unintended environmental consequences resulting from ecotourism activities.

Some disturbances occur, especially with increased human presence near nesting or breeding sites. Sometimes the noise from boats or vehicles scares away birds or animals (Interview Respondent PA6).

Occasionally, animals change their movement patterns due to frequent tourist visits (Interview Respondent PA7).

We have seen some areas where plants get trampled because visitors don't always stay on paths (Interview Respondent CM7)

These comments reflect a shared concern that ecotourism, while beneficial in many ways, can disrupt local wildlife and ecosystems if not managed effectively. Disturbances such as noise pollution, trampling of vegetation, and increased human-wildlife interaction were frequently mentioned as threats to biodiversity. Such findings support existing literature, which suggests that without proper regulation, even environmentally focused tourism can pose ecological risks (Chigwanda & Mutasa, 2021). Respondents also identified specific activities that tend to have greater environmental impacts.

Canoeing and walking safaris, if not well managed, can disturb hippos and elephants along the riverbanks. Camping in the wrong places sometimes leaves waste that harms animals (Interview Respondent PA1).

Game drives off established tracks can damage fragile vegetation (Interview Respondent PA2)

Fishing tours occasionally affect fish populations if regulations are not followed (Interview Respondent CM2).

These examples indicate that although ecotourism promotes appreciation of wildlife, certain high-contact activities, particularly those conducted without strict supervision, can result in habitat degradation, behavioral shifts in animals, and pollution. Literature supports these concerns, noting that increased tourist activity in sensitive areas can lead to erosion, litter accumulation, and disturbance of breeding or feeding sites (Buckley, 2020)

Respondents further elaborated on how ecotourism activities affected wildlife behavior and habitat integrity:

Animals may become habituated to humans, which can increase risks from poaching or conflicts. We notice animals coming closer sometimes, but others run away faster (Respondent PA3).

Some species avoid busy tourist spots, altering their natural feeding or breeding behaviors (Respondent PA4).

Trampling of vegetation near trails is a concern and requires ongoing management (Respondent PA5).

Despite these negative impacts, some respondents acknowledged positive environmental outcomes of ecotourism. They emphasized that tourism has helped fund conservation efforts, increased awareness, and supported community-led environmental initiatives.

Ecotourism has raised funding for anti-poaching patrols and habitat rehabilitation (Respondent PA2).

Tourists' presence discourages illegal activities like poaching and logging (Interview Respondent PA3).

The community understands better the importance of protecting wildlife because of visitors (Respondent CM6).

Tourism income helps us plant trees and clean rivers (Respondent CM7).

According to the aforementioned, ecotourism in Mana Pools presents environmental risks that need to be properly managed even though it also provides significant environmental benefits like increased funding for conservation and increased community awareness. To guarantee that ecotourism fulfills its stated purpose of sustainable conservation, effective regulation, ongoing environmental monitoring, and public education are crucial.

The following sub-themes provide an in-depth analysis of the key environmental impacts reported by park authorities and community members, contextualized within relevant academic literature.

Disruption of Wildlife Behavior

Respondents consistently noted behavioral shifts among animals due to frequent human presence. PA3 stated,

Animals may become habituated to humans, which can increase risks from poaching or conflicts.

CM3 added,

We notice animals coming closer sometimes, but others run away faster.

Such changes reflect both attraction and aversion responses, suggesting inconsistent animal reactions to ecotourism pressures.

Habituation may compromise wildlife safety by lowering their wariness around poachers or vehicles (Neumann, 2021). Conversely, avoidance behaviors can disrupt feeding or breeding routines, especially in migratory or territorial species (Karp, 2015). Respondent PA4 highlighted this concern:

Some species avoid busy tourist spots, altering their natural feeding or breeding behaviors.

The responses as a whole point to a shared worry: that the increased human presence brought about by ecotourism is gradually but significantly changing the natural behaviors of animals. Some species become increasingly elusive, indicating stress or displacement, while others become too accustomed to humans, possibly putting themselves in danger. These alterations in behavior indicate an ecological imbalance in which wildlife is being compelled to adapt in ways that might be harmful to the ecosystem's long-term health as well as to their own survival. In the end, even though ecotourism seeks to live in harmony with the natural world, if it is not properly controlled, it may unintentionally disturb wildlife habits.

Habitat Degradation

Multiple participants identified direct physical impacts on the park's habitat. Respondent PA5 noted, "*Trampling of vegetation near trails is a concern and requires ongoing management,*" while Respondent CM4 observed that paths can get worn out, leading to soil erosion. In riverine zones, boat works can erode riverbanks if routes are not controlled.

This set of responses points to a shared concern: despite ecotourism's professed intention to promote sustainable interaction with nature, it is unintentionally destroying basic ecological features. These effects, particularly trail erosion and riverbank instability, demonstrate how unchecked visitor movement can directly affect terrestrial and aquatic systems. The respondents' emphasis on trail wear and erosion suggests that current usage patterns are surpassing the park's natural resilience thresholds.

Such deterioration is consistent with research by Mbaiwa (2017), who highlights how uncontrolled trail use and water-based tourism frequently hasten ecological deterioration in delicate systems. The combined effects of these activities endanger not only the health of the flora and fauna but also the long-term viability of the ecotourism infrastructure itself.

Declines in Biodiversity

Though some participants expressed optimism about biodiversity trends, many acknowledged risks linked to excessive or poorly regulated tourism. Respondent PA1 remarked that, "*Sensitive species may reduce in numbers if disturbed too frequently,*" These concerns align with studies by

Buckley (2020), which observed that ecotourism, when improperly managed, can lead to a decline in local biodiversity through species displacement, pollution, or invasive species introduction. While Respondent PA7 noted that *“biodiversity remains stable,”* this was accompanied by the caution that monitoring is essential to detect any declines early.

Positive Environmental Externalities

Despite the risks, participants also reported several environmentally beneficial outcomes of ecotourism. Respondent PA2 shared, *“Ecotourism has raised funding for anti-poaching patrols and habitat rehabilitation,”* and Respondent PA3 added, *“Tourists’ presence discourages illegal activities like poaching and logging.”* Community members echoed these sentiments, with Respondent CM6 noting, *“The community understands better the importance of protecting wildlife because of visitors.”*

The above voices confirm the findings of Stronza and Durham (2020), who observe that ecotourism can serve as a non-extractive use of biodiversity, financing conservation and fostering community stewardship. However, the realization of these benefits is contingent upon robust institutional support, equitable revenue distribution, and continuous environmental education.

STRATEGIES TO MINIMISE THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES IN ZIMBABWE'S NATIONAL PARKS.

This section explores existing management strategies and proposes additional measures for improving the sustainability of ecotourism in Mana Pools National Park. While ecotourism has brought notable benefits such as increased conservation funding, environmental awareness, and community engagement, interview responses revealed persistent environmental challenges that require more proactive and coordinated solutions.

Respondents acknowledged several strategies currently in place to address ecotourism’s negative environmental impacts. These included regulatory mechanisms, staff oversight, and community-based interventions. According to PA4, *“We conduct regular environmental impact assessments and have rangers monitoring visitor behavior.”* Highlighting ongoing efforts to mitigate on-site damage, PA5 elaborated that, *“Visitor numbers are limited through permits and there are strict rules enforced by park staff,”* emphasizing the role of controlled access.

Local communities also participate in the enforcement process. CM3 noted, *“Local guides educate tourists about staying on paths and respecting wildlife,”* while CM4 added, *“Communities report any signs of damage to authorities quickly.”* These grassroots efforts suggest a shared responsibility model between park authorities and community members.

However, the effectiveness of these measures varies. PA6 observed, *“They have helped reduce major disturbances but need constant review and community cooperation.”* CM5 echoed this sentiment: *“Most tourists follow rules now, but a few still cause damage.”* This indicates that while regulatory and educational strategies have had a measurable positive effect, compliance gaps and growing visitor numbers pose ongoing threats. PA7 noted, *“Some areas show recovery, but increased visitor numbers can strain resources,”* pointing to the limits of current capacity.

Despite the challenges, several respondents expressed optimism about the long-term sustainability of ecotourism when strategic coordination is maintained. PA1 argued, *“They are effective when well implemented but require ongoing funding and awareness programs.”* Similarly, CMI emphasized, *“If we all work together, the environment and people can benefit,”* underscoring the need for cooperative conservation models that integrate multiple stakeholders.

Recommendations focused on long-term sustainability and broader systemic change. Respondent PA5 mentioned, *“Building stronger partnerships with international conservation groups could improve resources,”* while Respondent PA6 stressed the need for integrated planning.

STRATEGIES FOR MINIMIZING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF ECOTOURISM

As ecotourism continues to grow in popularity, Mana Pools National Park faces the challenge of preserving ecological integrity while supporting sustainable tourism. The findings of this study reveal a mix of proactive conservation strategies and persistent challenges that require adaptive, community-centered solutions. Drawing from both participant perspectives and scholarly literature, this section explores existing and proposed strategies to mitigate the environmental footprint of ecotourism.

Role of Education and Guiding in Impact Reduction

PA2 argued that long-term success depends on collaboration between park authorities, communities, and tourists. Education becomes the pillar towards the fulfillment of this

collaboration. Through greater awareness among tourists and locals, education encourages a shared sense of responsibility and allows stakeholders to define their role in minimizing ecological footprints. Environmental education programs have the potential to bridge the gap between indigenous knowledge and modern conservation strategies, hence encouraging sustainable livelihoods consistent with ecotourism objectives for local communities. To visitors, interpretive and quality guiding services make a visit to a mere experience an active learning experience, instilling environmentally conscious behavior extending beyond the park ecosystem. Education and guiding, therefore, become not only the direct impact reduction measures but also long-term investments in the conservationist attitude development. Such a knowledge-attitude-practice synergy is critical to long-term and sustainability of ecotourism operations.

Gaps in Strategy and Need for Improvement

Participants expressed concerns over existing gaps in regulation and enforcement. PA3 recommended, *“Introduce stricter limits on visitor numbers during sensitive seasons like breeding.”* PA4 pointed at the need to enhance community involvement in decision-making and benefit-sharing, suggesting that current strategies may lack adequate inclusivity.

Respondent CM4 emphasized, *“Increase waste management and create more designated camping areas,”* highlighting infrastructural limitations that exacerbate ecological damage. According to Dlamini and Nkomo (2021), the success of ecotourism hinges on the provision of appropriate infrastructure and services, including waste disposal and zoning for human activities.

These recommendations suggest a need for adaptive management—a strategy that allows for flexible policy-making informed by real-time ecological feedback (Nyakunu & Gandiwa, 2020). Without periodic review and localized input, existing conservation strategies may fall short in addressing evolving ecological pressures.

Strategic Partnerships and Community Empowerment

Many of the participants called for a more comprehensive way to manage environmental matters. The report advised that closer bonds with external conservation organizations help gain access to resources and professional experience. The resolution added that tourism should always consider our culture and its connection to the environment. In addition, respondent PA6 underlined that more work is needed to understand the links between climate change effects and challenges arising

from tourism. Giving opportunities to local groups was always mentioned. Respondent CM5 noted: *“Communities often say they want to become more involved and enjoy better benefits.”* This result corresponds with the view of Chigonda and Mudzengi (2021), who emphasize that environmental governance should combine community knowledge, worldwide links, and greater inclusion of climate topics in tourism policies.

Mana Pools can move towards a more resilient and equitable conservation model by fostering cross-sector collaboration and embedding ecotourism within broader socio-ecological frameworks.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that while ecotourism in Zimbabwe’s national parks, particularly Mana Pools, generates revenue for conservation and promotes environmental awareness, it also threatens ecosystems through habitat disturbance and biodiversity stress. Although management measures such as visitor regulation and community participation are in place, they remain inadequate against growing tourism pressures. Ecotourism therefore requires more effective ecological monitoring, equitable benefit-sharing, and adaptive management that incorporates science and local expertise. Only by means of such holistic approaches can ecotourism fulfill its potential for supporting biodiversity conservation and the well-being of the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by the empirical findings, the following recommendations are advanced:

- i. **Policy Enforcement and Capacity Building:** There is a pressing need for national parks to implement and rigorously monitor visitor carrying capacity limits. Park authorities should also be capacitated with adequate funding, personnel, and training to enforce conservation policies effectively.
- ii. **Ecotourism Certification Systems:** Zimbabwe should develop a national ecotourism certification framework, modeled after successful programs like Costa Rica’s Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST). Certification would ensure that tour operators meet minimum environmental and ethical standards.

- iii. **Strengthening Community Participation:** Local communities must be treated as equal stakeholders in ecotourism governance. Mechanisms for inclusive planning, transparent benefit-sharing, and community-led monitoring should be institutionalized.
- iv. **Environmental Education Campaigns:** Tourists and local residents alike require continuous education on the ecological sensitivities of protected areas. Awareness campaigns should be culturally appropriate and leverage various media platforms.
- v. **Climate Resilience Planning:** Given the increasing pressures of climate change, conservation strategies must incorporate climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures. This includes monitoring changes in species distribution and habitat vulnerability due to shifting climate patterns.
- vi. **Infrastructure Development:** Investment in low-impact infrastructure, such as eco-lodges, solar-powered facilities, and sustainable transport systems, is necessary to align tourism development with conservation goals.
- vii. **Research-Driven Decision Making:** Environmental impact assessments should be conducted periodically, with findings used to inform policy revisions and on-ground interventions.

AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

While this study has provided critical insights into the environmental impacts of ecotourism in Zimbabwe's national parks, particularly Mana Pools, it has also illuminated several areas where further research is necessary to deepen our understanding and improve ecotourism sustainability. The complexity of ecotourism systems, their environmental interfaces, and the evolving socio-political landscape of conservation demand continued scholarly engagement. The following areas are recommended for future study: **Comparative Analysis Across National Parks.** s another area for further study is a comparative study between multiple national parks in Zimbabwe, such as Hwange, Gonarezhou, and Matobo—could highlight spatial differences in ecotourism management and environmental outcomes. This would help identify context-specific challenges and scalable best practices. Moreover, comparative research across Southern African countries (e.g., Kenya, Botswana, Namibia) could offer valuable regional benchmarks and collaborative policy opportunities.

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Querying the Colonial Factor in Zimbabwe's Prime Tourist Destination Toponym

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ABSTRACT

The naming of Zimbabwe's prime tourist destinations has remained underexplored in tourism research, despite its centrality to cultural identity and heritage representation. The majority of these destinations, such as Victoria Falls, Kariba Dam, and Hwange National Park, bear colonial or anglicised names that obscure indigenous meanings and histories. While a wave of toponymic reforms during post-independence Zimbabwe (1980s–1990s) swept through schools, roads, and government buildings, tourist destinations were largely exempted, signalling the persistence of an "imperial hook" designed to attract traditional international markets. This study was motivated by the need to interrogate how colonial toponyms destabilise the cultural and traditional rubric of Zimbabwe's tourism landscape and to question the silences in renaming policies. Using a qualitative approach, the research examined the cultural, historical, and political implications of naming practices in major tourist sites. Findings reveal that colonial naming practices continue to distort heritage meanings and weaken local ownership of tourism resources. The study promotes a decolonial approach that prefers the use of endonyms to exonyms, thereby consolidating community identity and fostering socio-economic development. In addressing the colonial legacy of tourism toponyms, the research contributes to ongoing debates on decolonisation, heritage preservation, and sustainable tourism development in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: destination, toponyms, endonyms, exonyms, onomastics, toponomastics

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is about cultural exchange(s) achieved through visiting places, physically and more recently, virtually. These places, termed 'destinations' are an amalgam of attractions that need to be identified before, during and after the fact. Recognition of these attractions is done by among other means, names. Storey (2011) asserts that place names have become routine in our everyday lives and as a result they are largely taken for granted. We never think about them or the processes underlying place-naming that divulge information on the social, economic, political forces and power relations that surround them (Caiazzo, Coates & Azaryahu, 2020).

The study of names is termed 'onomastics' and one of its principal branches is 'toponymy' which is the study of place names (Smith, 2016). Tourism is about places with names, hence the two are inter-related. According to onomasticians, names come in different forms and languages, but generally play the same roles, the main ones being identification, memorialization and historicization. Tourism is predominantly about the memorialization of travel experiences. Names of places also go through cycles, changing continuously as society, language, culture and politics evolve or devolve. Ainiala, Saarelma and Sjöblomnames (2016) put this down to the openness of the naming system. Some places have maintained their original names or their 'associative' or 'habitation' names, as indigenous people often gave appellations that related to certain events or manifestations of natural phenomena. Some toponyms have changed progressively in order to appeal to the targeted audience and others are corrupted versions of the original. Others have changed because of altered political circumstances and fortunes, while some are a result of the embracing of indigenous communities' rights, e.g., in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

Zimbabwe is an African country with several ethnicities and each has its naming conventions as regards places. Ideally the names of places should have cultural undertones and be in one of the several languages spoken in the country. The country was under British colonial rule for almost ninety years (12 September 1890-17 March 1980). After her independence in 1980, the tourism industry was primarily run by multinational companies like Southern Sun Hotels of Rhodesia and white Rhodesian families who owned smaller properties. As the country's legacy dictated from 1980 till the late 1990s, the traditional tourist source markets were dominated by visitors from Europe, particularly those from France, Germany and the United Kingdom. This market favoured certain places with specific attractions and these became the mainstay of Zimbabwean tourism. The history of these attractions was reflected by the anglicised and imposed toponyms, for example, the Victoria Falls. A classic case of colonial naming was a silencing act done through dispossession and laying claim to land already occupied by people who peddled the lie of a terra nullius.

From 1982 through to the 1990's there was a toponymic revolution as the new majority Government began to look into changing the names of places into local ones. Some suggestions were for new names while others were of the idea of going back to the original toponyms that existed in 1890 and subsequent years as the colonisers renamed spaces after dispossessing the Black majority. Schools, roads and buildings were the targets of this exercise; however, tourist attractions were not discussed. This can be alluded to the desire of mainly tour operators to

maintain an ‘imperial hook’, in an attempt to sustain the traditional tourist markets. This probably explains why the area of *toponomastics* has largely been ignored by tourism researchers in Zimbabwe. Resultantly, the toponymic characterizations of some of Zimbabwe’s tourist attractions will be discussed in this paper. Whilst there are several tourist destinations, this paper focuses on the following: Victoria Falls, Kariba, Hwange and the Eastern Highlands.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although they are of considerable cultural and brand importance, the Zimbabwean names of the country's top tourist destinations Victoria Falls, Kariba Dam and National Park, and Hwange National Park have garnered scant attention from scholars. Discussions surrounding tourism have largely revolved around economic indicators at the expense of the politically and culturally sensitive ground of naming places (Basik, 2020; Nash, 2016). This is despite names in essence conditioning visitors’ understandings and destination narratives to define meanings tourists bring to places (Caiazza et al., 2020).

This deficit is particularly stark in Zimbabwe, where certain toponyms encapsulate colonial legacies, linguistic bias, and historical erasure. Nevertheless, place names are highly effective as identity, ownership, and heritage markers, concerns upon which Decolonial aims and community-based tourism (Storey, 2011; Nash, 2016) revolve. A recent Victoria Falls study illustrates how colonial pasts continue to structure tourism value chains, perpetuating participation asymmetries and benefit appropriation (Geoforum, 2024). There is thus the pressing necessity for qualitative analysis of Zimbabwean toponymy of tourism, particularly from postcolonial and critical toponymy approaches (Pfukwa, 2007; Raharjo et al., 2024), to establish how naming discourses constitute local identity as well as attract tourists globally.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

The study sought to critically examine the toponymy of Zimbabwe’s tourist attractions, with particular focus on the cultural, historical, and political dynamics that inform their naming.

METHODOLOGY

Firth's (1957) hypothesis that words are best understood by the company they keep was applied in this research, proposing distributional approaches to meaning. Collocation analysis, as

suggested by Wideman and Masuda (2018), was employed to examine the names of tourist destinations since co-occurring place names could reveal discourses of identity, ideology, and power. These views are shared by Arrous and Bigon (2022), Düzgün (2021), and Mapara and Nyota (2016), who argue that naming patterns offer insights into social practices and historical events.

Plural toponymies generated by colonial manipulations of indigenous naming conventions in Zimbabwe remain employed in defining tourism identity and stakeholder perceptions (Rose-Redwood et al., 2018). The research applied content analysis of maps, gazetteers, archives, and reports to examine this. Analysis continued in the discourse-historical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak, 2015), placing names in broader socio-cultural and historical contexts. The speech act theory (Austin, 1960; Searle, 1975) was also used, and naming as performative acts of authority and ownership (Mapara & Mapara, 2018).

UNDERLYING PROCESSES OF PLACE-NAMING

Gumbo, Ndana and Chebanne (2020) revealed that altering names for tourism destinations has the potential to obliterate the history and culture of a certain locality, depriving posterity of the heritage associated with the place. Hence, giving a new name for the place might neglect the story completely, and most people would disregard it as they will not be familiar with the account. However, those people who have roots in it, and know the story, altering the name abolishes something about the place' (Gumbo et al. 2020). Names are used to appropriate and mark out space. Research has shown that they can also be used to include or exclude certain categories of people. For example, naming a site can indicate to operators for whom were the tourist sites meant. If they were meant for Black domestic tourists, the naming, infrastructure and superstructure would give a clue.

Toponymic enquiry remains an undersubscribed phenomenon, with research on the colonial factor in the naming of tourism destinations still missing in the toponym discourse (Arrous & Bigon, 2022; Woodman, 2015). So, many scholars around the discourse have presented varied views with others seemingly agreeing that names merely label objects they denote and have less bearing on people's views of an area. Taking this perspective would blindly mean that tourism destinations, in this context do not have an influence on host communities' attachment to tourism or tourists' decision-making processes when it comes to destination choices or revulsion due to colonial genocidal acts reflected in names like Massacre Bay (Jalata, 2013;

Markus and Marcus, 2001). However, various scholars have so far challenged this argument (Arrous & Bigon, 2022; Mashiri, Chabata & Mamvura, 2017; Giraut & Houssay-Holzschuch, 2016; Makoni, Makoni, & Mashiri, 2007; Burnard, 2001). Those who problematise such a view highlight the symbolic functions of naming. Arrous and Bigon (2022) argued that toponyms reveal geopolitics and power relations involved in the usage and management of such places, which is also the focus of this study, which seeks to assess the extent to which the tourism destinations in Zimbabwe were really meant for the local, Zimbabwean tourists through names that were apportioned by the colonisers. Authors such as Caiazzo et al. (2020) contend that names attached to these tourism destinations can imply reflective identities, act as rudiments of detachment and/ attachment and dependence, and reflect collective values and social customs. Giraut and Houssay-Holzschuch (2016) emphasise that place names act as powerful elements of inclusion and exclusion. They can also be celebrations of bigotry and arrogance (Jalata, 2013). Research so far signals prevailing discourses that echo diverse representations, which calls for research on toponyms as it affects each sector than merely a generic exercise

Recent researches seem to focus on place naming as an authoritative act (Ndlovu, 2021; Basik, 2020). This entails that naming is a social practice embedded in social and political struggles. Thus, it is worthwhile for anyone who would want to study and understand the tourism trends and development models in Zimbabwe's major tourism destinations to be fully aware of the history and politics of their current names. One can also be forgiven for concluding that a place name has an impact on a place's development model hence, if there is a need to alter a development model, possibly towards a more inclusive one, in the context of tourism, then policy makers really have to rethink these tourism destination names. Such a critical turn of scholarly research has birthed an imperative new interest in the politics of naming by which essentialist views to affixing stable identities to particular spaces that were implicit in the traditional scholarship on place names are exposed and interrogated. Emerging now is a broadened view of research, which positions research on toponymy within the context of broader debates in critical human geography (Mangena, 2023; Ndlovu, 2021). According to Arrous and Bigon (2022), places are reinterpreted as palimpsests which can be re- and over-inscribed, demonstrating that any place-naming regimes are inherently unbalanced and historically contingent. Toponymic engravings prompt and accompany ideological struggles and power shifts. Thus, this paper on the colonial naming factor, with a specific focus on the tourism destinations in Zimbabwe seeks to interrogate local and international ideological struggles, as well as the power shifts and their impacts on Zimbabwe's tourism performance.

CRITICAL TOPONYMIC THEORY

This study was informed by the critical toponymic theory. According to Wideman and Masuda (2018) and Tent (2015), the critical toponymic theory examines toponyms in the context of power struggles and political situations over places and place naming. In prior studies, Perko et al. (2017) purported that, individually or severally, people never have the same privileges to name places, thus the use of critical toponymic theory in examining the naming systems for major tourism destinations in Zimbabwe is justifiable. As such, one would expect that mainly the interests and ideologies of only a few privileged to bequeath names tend to inform the selection of place and consequently the ideologies of those unprivileged to bestow names are suppressed. As reiterated by Home (2021), Basik and Rahautsou (2019) and Nhongo and Masuku (2012), toponyms may be replete with questioned histories, a state of affairs that does not accord impartiality and diverse interpretations and sentiments, which therefore makes onomastics a contested arena in any discipline. The authors of this article have brought together an assortment of conceptually insightful and thought-provoking case studies that deal with the hegemonic and queried practices of naming. This conceptual paper builds on the work of scholars like Düzgün (2021) and Basik and Rahautsou (2019), who scrutinize the colonial clampdown on indigenous values. It does this by exploring how nationalist ideologies are consecrated through the rechristening of cities and the mapping of topographic features, contributing to the creation of commodified neoliberal urbanscapes. In addition, the paper explores the ongoing contestation over identity and place, as well as the emergence of fluid postcolonial identities. In this case, however, the authors opted to utilise the critical toponymic theory to expose the ways in which place names could have been used to claim territories and remove linguistic traces of native groups in Zimbabwe's major tourism destinations which for long has remained an orphan on the research radar.

PLACE-NAMING UNDER IMPERIAL RULE

Places were named in honour of the colonial metropolis (Boehmer, 2005; Room, 1989), which in this case was London and other places in the U.K. in general. Some were named after colonies or as celebrations of places in other colonies like Auckland and Sydney (Mapara and Nyota, 2016). For instance, Salisbury (Harare) was named after Lord Salisbury who was British Prime Minister when Rhodes was granted the Royal Charter to occupy what is today, Zimbabwe. It was then dubbed the Sunshine and Jacaranda City celebrating a foreign person to Africans and trees that were also foreign to Africa. But then the target markets were never

Africans but Whites who preferred to call themselves Europeans. Names like Troutbeck which are a combination of two nouns *trout* and *beck* are a product of a celebration of North American trout fish and the term for a fresh water stream, a beck hence Troutbeck. Why would one name a place Montclair? Who would benefit by associating with that place. Fellow Whites, mainly those that understand French would know that it means a clear mountain, but the question is which mountain? Is it Nyangani? But Nyangani is not always clear because of thick mists that most times cover the crest of the jewel. Interestingly, this is also as a place name that has a namesake in North America, specifically the United States.

ZIMBABWE TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Zimbabwe as a country is a prime tourist destination with an array of attractions, both natural and human-made. In the 1980s and early 1990s it was in the top ten destinations to visit in Africa. Some of the major attractions popular with the traditional source markets which have stood the test of time are as follows: Kariba, Victoria Falls, Eastern Highlands and Hwange to name a few.

The traditional source markets

This sector consisted of the above-mentioned European countries namely: Germany, France and the United Kingdom (UK). By default, this includes countries like Australia, the United States of America (USA) and Canada that are inextricably linked to the UK through colonialism. These countries accounted for 80% of tourist arrivals from 1980-1999 (*Zimbabwe Tourism Authority Report, 2001*). The other market was and continues to be South Africa. Below is a discussion of some names of top Zimbabwean destinations. They are not in any way discussed according to levels of prominence.

Kariba

Kariba is a town to the north of Zimbabwe. It is situated on the south bank of the Zambezi River and built on the twin hills of Botererkwa overlooking Kariba Gorge and Lake Kariba (one of the world's largest man-made lakes). The town was established in 1957 by the then Federal Power Board to accommodate Kariba Dam's construction staff as well as settlers (Mashingaidze, & Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation and Tugwi Mukosi Multidisciplinary Research Institute, 2021). The name Kariba is said to mean where the waters have been trapped *kariva* in the local Tonga language (Hang'ombe, 2015). During the five-year construction period of the dam, the BaTonga people living in the areas to be flooded were

relocated, as were animals marooned by the formation of the lake. Kariba became one of Zimbabwe's major tourist resorts largely because of its location on the lake and proximity to several national parks, including Mana Pools National Park, which was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1984. The town itself is also a National Park and some of its residents say in this area, animals have more rights than humans. It in some way therefore, becomes a place where people are as much as the trapped water in the dam are also trapped in this huge wildlife sanctuary.

Language appropriation and distortion in the naming of Kariba

Inasmuch as the bulk of literature points, the name Kariba appears to be a mere distortion by the mispronunciation of the indigenous noun term *Kariva* which literally translates to the 'the trap'. This would make sense to many as water was trapped between two mountains to form Lake Kariba, thus '*the trap*', would mean where water was trapped. However, looking at the literacy levels of the so-called distorters, Pfukwa (2003) argued that these foreigners could bring in some names that have a symbolic meaning of their own in the name of distortion. For instance, in Arabic the term Kariba exists as a noun, which means nearer to God (Allah in the Arabic translation). Kariba's beauty and serenity are so stunning that one might feel nearer to God. Furthermore, the destination's association with the Zambezi River God '*Nyaminyami*' may also have been influential, as Nyaminyami played a significant role in the livelihoods of the BaTonga, making such a meaning arguably undeniable.

Scholarly reviews show that the term *Kariva* is a distortion in itself. Insights from Dewey (1991) inform that some of the Korekore people were also connected to the Zambezi River, in the area now called Kariba, before the Tonga settlers displaced them. Back then, the greater part of the place on which the water was trapped to form Kariba Dam was originally named *Karuva* (literally translating to '*a flower*'), named after a chief's daughter. Therefore, the shift from *Karuva* to *Kariva* could have been intentional and meant to shift the matriarchal power reflected in the original name towards a more neutral one. While doing so, such a shift could reflect power imbalances between males and females in developing countries, where the elevation of women to positions of authority remains a challenge. This is something that is arguably the result of colonial patriarchy. Now that *Karuva* had a hive of activities, which included power generation and tourism and recreation, it may have been seen as unbecoming for the Lake and the town to carry a feminine name.

Victoria Falls



Source: Moore and Cotterill (2014, p. 145).

The Victoria Falls are Zimbabwe's premier tourist destination, attracting an average of eight hundred thousand visitors per year (African World Heritage Fund Tourism Report 2, 2015; Nature based Tourism Africa Report, 2022). They are positioned almost halfway along the mighty Zambezi River's 2700 km journey from the source in north western Zambia to the mouth on the Indian Ocean. Here, the river plunges headlong into a 100m vertical chasm spanning the full one-and-a-half-kilometre width of the river, creating the biggest curtain of falling water in the world and also one of the seven natural wonders of the world (Burrett & Mateke, 2018). The power of the falls is awesome with the highest ever flow recorded in 1958. This constant pounding by the currents of the mighty Zambezi has, over the millennium, cut through the rock faults and fissures and carved out eight successive precipices (and now the ninth has begun). The first inhabitants of the surrounding areas about some 1.5 million years ago, could have seen a different Victoria Falls to the one seen today. Being one of the greatest physical spectacles in Africa and beyond, it stands to reason that its naming has attracted so much interest from us humans over time and therefore, the toponym for the area could be steeped in history and mystery.

Language appropriation and distortion in the naming of Victoria Falls

The breath-taking landscape was appropriated and turned into a playground for Whites, which celebrated colonial adventure, science and modernity while commemorating a past generation of explorers and 'discoverers'. Several ethnic groups claim ownership of the Victoria Falls and hence have put forth various names to the space. The Lozi/ Kololo (Zimbabwean side) name

for the Falls is Mosi-Oa-Tunya meaning, '*the smoke that thunders.*' Contesting ownership from the Zambian side are the Leya people, who actually claim that their naming for the same Falls has a descriptive backing. The Tonga-Leya name for the Falls is *Shungu Namutitima* which literally translates to '*Water that boils/Boiling Water that smokes*' which seemingly suggest a much closer connection to the falls as a geological feature that is associated with water or rain thus Shungu meaning boiling water as opposed to the Lozi toponym which associates the falls with fire as reiterated in the name, '*the smoke that thunders.*' Minor contestants to the place name are the Nambya who call the falls Chinotimba, translating to '*the thundering place*' which Hang'ombe et al. (2019) thought was because of the tribe's detachment from the falls, where they could only hear the roars and see the mist from a distance. The Ndebele name for the giant waterfall is aManz' aThunqayo '*steaming or boiling water.*'

Even though there are claims of detachment of other ethnic groups from the falls as revealed in their names for the falls, the naming practices could have been influenced by each group's use of the falls. For the Leya, the most reminiscent aspect of the waterfall is also known as '*Syungwe mufu*' literally translates to 'mist of the dead', because it was associated with the memory of their ancestors. The *Syungwe mufu* included three places, which are first, the foot of the Falls, now known as the 'Boiling pot'. Here, offerings were hurled into the boiling pot over the lip of the falls from one of the islands hanging on the edge, but people also crawled down to the pit itself. History has it that this boiling pot was a focal point for most tribes around the falls, which could have informed their naming of the place, associating it with smoke, thundering, and steam (Mangena, 2023). Myths also suggest that there is an invisible monster that resided in the boiling pot, regarded as a River God by nineteenth European century 'explorers' (the same Nyaminyami of Kariba). However, all the surrounding ethnic groups associated the boiling pot with commanding ancestral spirits that needed pacification, and was a place where God could be approached (McGregor, 2003).

According to McGregor (2003), another significant ritual spot was at the topmost part of the waterfall and was known as '*Sambadwazi*' or 'cleanse disease'. The place lies on the upper lip of the Falls by the eastern cataract where the water swings round and over the edge of the gorge, but in doing so it creates a pool where the water does not move swiftly, which made it possible for people to dip themselves. The diseased and plagued jumped into this pool in a cleansing ritual in which they had to allow the garments which they immersed themselves in to be washed away over the waterfall, carrying infection and ill-health with it. The third site with special

meaning was '*Chipusya*', where water for rain requesting and other rituals was drawn. This place was only known to elders and individuals with spiritual powers to draw the water and would do so at dawn when they were unobserved. Of all these names, the one which was popularised is the Mosi-Oa-Tunya. To the Western world, especially the British, it was popularised by David Livingstone who gleaned it from his Kololo guides and companions when they took him to the falls in a canoe. However, instead of leaving the battle for place ownership and naming for the Falls to African ethnic groups, around the place, David Livingstone, in what is typical of most colonialists who include missionaries, named the falls after his potentate (of the then Great Britain during the time extending from 1837-1901) Queen Victoria, thus the modern-day Victoria Falls.

A closer analysis of this 19th century European explorer's naming of the falls, shows that the act could actually be equated to spitting in the faces of the African ancestors. He actually replaced African female royalty associated with the falls with British royalty, an act which would not be permissible in any European territory. One will never find any African royalty being celebrated on European soils. The pain of this affront is further heightened when it is realized that Livingstone was taken to the place by the Kololo who already knew it, like most local inhabitants. Tragically, and in typical European and colonial conceit, her historians harp on the untruth that Livingstone discovered the Victoria Falls.

As part of the bid to turn Mosi-Oa-Tunya into a European playground, they replaced the African feminine authority to the falls vested in '*Bedyango*' which in the local Lozi language means 'Gateway to the chief', a title that was always held by a woman. The above title implied royal power to the land, fertility and rain. *Bedyango*'s royalty meant that she would lead the plagued to the waterfalls for cleansing during an epidemic (Phiri-Chitungu, 2022), take charge and oversee collection of water for rain requesting from the sacred secret site, handed the new incumbent the symbolic soil as well as handing over the chiefly paraphernalia during chiefs' installations. Further to that, the woman with the title was the only one in whom power was vested to dispose a wicked chief through poisoning. Discarding the symbolism of Mosi-Oa-Tunya meant devaluation of the African female authority and agency. Thus, through the naming processes, local cultural values were overridden and the scenery of the falls was acclimatized. Part of this process included the eviction of inhabitants as earlier explorers (clothed as missionaries) popularised racial imperial and colonist identities in which original ethnic groups featured as a generic exotic or subservient other. This reflects just a small part of

the relations, which is also dependant on fusions and interactions between the coloniser and colonised, and on interactions within and between different local ethnic groups (which was altered under the hegemonic influence of colonial rule).

New symbolic appropriations of the Mosi-Oa-Tunya Falls and the Zambezi (also formerly known as *Kasambabezi* in Tonga, meaning ‘*only those who know dare bathe*’) as a whole from the early twentieth century depended on colonial administrators and royalty. Their blatant disregard for the Afrocentric royalty connected to the falls leads the authors to give a perception that, as an independent country and continent, decoloniality should also be revealed in the naming and popularisation of local names such as the Mosi-Oa-Tunya. One thought may be, the Western tourist should acknowledge and celebrate indigenous Zimbabwean royalty not British or any form of their royalty on the Black’s land. Could it be that, it is high time the toponymic ownership of the falls be returned to the rightful owners, who are predominantly Zimbabwe and Zambia, through the renaming of the landscape? Maybe the names such as Livingstone town in Zambia, or David Livingstone statue on the Zimbabwean side should be re-evaluated as the falls were already in use before his “discovering” them. Colonial touristic toponymy has endorsed the placing of unique value on the Western perspective subjugating local own connections to the falls. There may be a critical need for Lozi, Nambya and Leya sculptures and toponymic appropriation around the falls. Places such as the ‘Rainforest, David Livingstone’s cataract view point, Livingstone Island and the devils pool’, all should be replaced with names that celebrate Africanness and decolonisation of tourism sites.

Eastern Highlands

Situated along the Mozambican border is a different region of Zimbabwe which contrasts to the dry savannah in other parts of the country. In the eastern province of Manicaland there are three ranges of hills and mountains, namely; Nyanga (home to Mount Nyangani, the highest mountain in Zimbabwe standing at 2595m), Chimanimani and Bvumba ranges (Clark *et al*, 2017). These are characterised by rolling countryside, green forests, rugged granite peaks, misty valleys, deep gorges, cascading waterfalls, and sparkling rivers and lakes. It is an area of spectacular natural beauty with a cool damp climate making it one of Zimbabwe’s top tourist destinations. This area reminded the first European settlers of Scotland, so they named it the ‘Eastern Highlands’. The Great Dividing Range in Australia comprising of the main watershed of eastern Australia, a series of plateaus and low mountain ranges roughly paralleling the coasts of Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria for 3,700 km is also called, ‘Eastern

Highlands', or 'Eastern Cordillera' (Ranger, 1987). This duplication of names is testimony to the British arrogance, play on power and celebrations of places in other colonies.

The Eastern Highlands is a place of note as it houses the holiday homes of several settlers. Noteworthy is that of Cecil John Rhodes, the leader of the Pioneer Column (the first White settlers in the country), after whom the country Zimbabwe was previously named (Rhodesia). Much of the area under the now 'Nyanga' National Park was the private estate of Rhodes. To this day the hotel at the site is named the 'Rhodes Hotel'. It is a travesty to still venerate his name as Rhodes was responsible for place colonial dispossession and several imperialistic atrocities that still plague the country. One of Rhodes' worst plays was his dying wish to be buried at Matobo (distorted by colonialists to Matopos) an ancestral shrine in Matabeleland, serving as the ultimate slap on the face to all the inhabitants' values and traditional beliefs. Several hotel properties that were established during the colonial period, such as the Leopard Rock in Vumba and the Rhodes Nyanga Hotel, further perpetuate imperialism in the marketing of certain rooms decorated in colonial fashion inviting tourists to come and sleep in the bed that Rhodes or other British royalty slept in. This shows these hotels were named to attract Western tourists and not domestic ones, because who would want to sleep in the bed where their mother was raped? (Mapara, 2017). Figuratively, that is what inviting a local to pay through the nose to experience the colonial master's bed means.

Vumba

Vumba is a favourite destination for more relaxed tourists looking for beauty and quietness among its deep, rich green forests, loping mountains, and valleys (Unwin, 2003). According to Chitombe, Mhlanga, and Ndlovu (2023), Vumba is a distorted version of Bvumba (which means mist in the local dialect). The location is high in the mountains, where mists can collect at any time of day, shrouding the picturesque scenery, hence the name. The Zimbabwean place name "Vumba" exemplifies how colonization may subtly, and sometimes blatantly, modify indigenous place names, resulting in the loss or transformation of original meaning and cultural value. The anglicised spelling "Vumba" eliminates the characteristic "bv" sound in Shona, a common occurrence in colonial toponymy. This phonetic simplification typically made names easier for English people to pronounce while removing some of their original linguistic character. While "Vumba" continues to widely allude to the "misty" nature, the modest spelling change can be interpreted as a minor but ongoing erasure of the original linguistic integrity. The fact that, the name Vumba prefers the coloniser's phonology to the indigenous one,

automatically results in the loss of deeper cultural nuances. While "mist" is the major meaning, pre-colonial Shona names frequently contained many meanings, such as historical events, spiritual importance, or unique landscape elements (Jenjekwa, 2021; Makondo, 2009). These colonial name distortion tactics convert complicated indigenous names to a single, often superficial, descriptive phrase. This can result in a loss of the rich cultural background embedded in the original name.

In this case, the emphasis on "mist" for Vumba, while accurate, may obscure other, possibly more significant, memories the indigenous communities had with the mountains before colonial intrusion. It reduces the narrative surrounding the location to a single, easily digestible attribute for outsiders. Carter (2024) argued that this newness in place-name phonetics is still used to express colonial power, establish a sense of ownership, and remember colonial personalities or events, frequently at the expense of pre-existing indigenous identities. Even the simplest example of colonial renaming demonstrates how indigenous names were viewed as disposable or irrelevant, establishing a narrative of conquest and supremacy (Nash, 1999). The preservation of "Vumba" is not a relative exception to this pattern.

In the same line, Goitia (2024) suggested that when minor adjustments and distortions are made to place names, it is critical not to overlook the possibilities of exacerbating the concept of othering and exoticism. In most cases, colonial transliterations or descriptions of indigenous names may accidentally "other" the place or endow it with an exoticised, romanticised image that does not reflect its functional or cultural relevance to locals. While "Mountains of the Mist" sounds poetic, colonial narratives might have utilised such phrases to stress the "wild" or "untamed" aspect of African landscapes, fitting into a broader colonial vision that frequently objectified the land and its inhabitants/ owners. This might result in a mismatch between how outsiders view a place (as formed by colonial descriptions) and how indigenous Zimbabwean people understand and experience it. To change these colonial narratives, as a nation, we must return to the ancient place names. The original place names define us as a people; they are infused with rich cultural meanings, deeper links to community values, and an attachment to the local heritage.

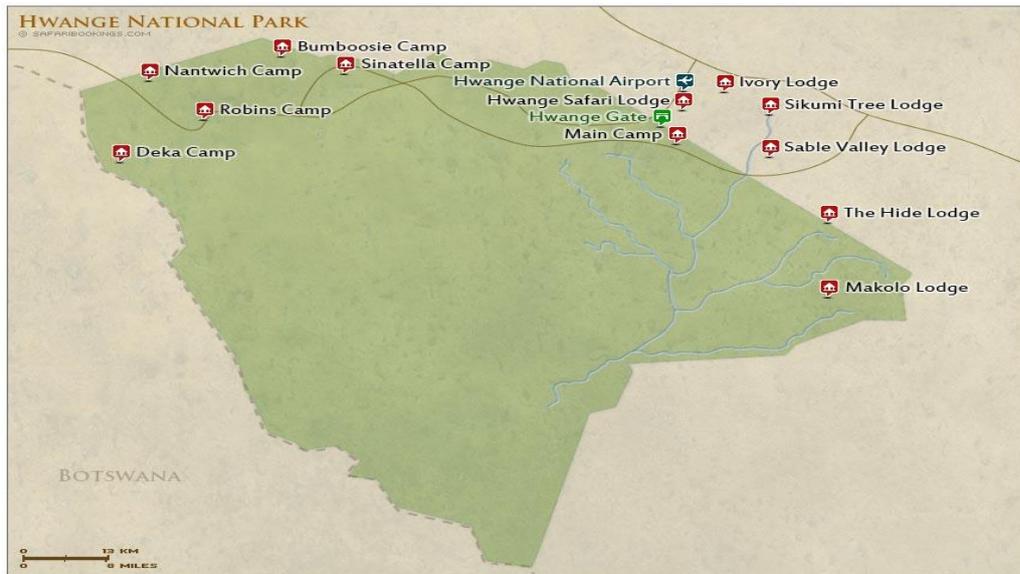
Prince of Wales

Other tourist areas in Manicaland were not exempted from the colonial naming. Prince of Wales View is located on a cliff that overlooks Forbes border post which is Zimbabwe's

gateway to Mozambique and the port city of Beira. The border post is named after Major Patrick William Forbes who was a soldier and administrator of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) through the first decade of its mandate as a Chartered Company. Despite being said to have been a person of great courage and good leadership skills during the march on Bulawayo, his stature crumpled through his failure to capture Lobengula during the Pupu-Shangani battle. This was coupled with the loss of nearly 40 lives during the so-called Shangani Patrol (McCarthy, 2008). What is also interesting in the two names, one related to royalty, and the other one of a person in service of the empire, is the Prince of Wales view, one overlooking a space that marked the border between what was then Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique) and the Rhodesian possession. The fact that both places have not yet been renamed is a sign that, through such omissions, the Rhodesians continue to celebrate their conquests.

Hwange National Park

Originally, Robins Game Sanctuary belonged to a cattle rancher by the name Robins. Robins turned the ranch into a wildlife preserve because his herds were constantly attacked by lions and leopards. He later gave the sanctuary to the Zimbabwean government in exchange for a water supply and a new house (Haynes, 2014). The park was named after a local Nhanzwa (Nambya) chief. It also turned out to be the royal hunting grounds for King Mzilikazi in the early 19th century, and the Rozvi Changamire before that. The park is located approximately an hour's drive, south of the Mighty Mosi-Oa-Tunya (Victoria Falls). Being the biggest National Park in Zimbabwe, it vaunts of a tremendous collection of wildlife. On an approximate area of 14650 square kilometres, the park gives home to an approximate four hundred bird species and more than a hundred varieties of mammals. Hwange's elephants are world famous and the park has one of the largest elephant populations in the world. Hwange National Park is the largest in Zimbabwe. Hwange, is the only park offering the big five in Zimbabwe. The Park has three distinctive camps and administrative offices namely; Main Camp (which happens to be the largest), Robins and Sinamatella. Below is the map for Hwange National Park.



<https://www.safaribookings.com/hwange/map>

Language appropriation and name contestations in Hwange National Park

Quite a number of place names in Hwange have a colonial background attached. Such names include key places such as Robins Camp, Panda-ma-tenka Road, Nyorka Camp, Nantwich Camp, and Kennedy Vlei pans and Rail Siding, among others. Robins Camp was named after Herbert Robins, a European who bequeathed his land to the government upon his death in 1939. Nyorka Camp is a mere distortion of the Shona name *nyoka*, which means (a) snake(s). Nantwich camp was named after a town in England, while the Kennedy Vlei pans and Rail Siding were named after a white farmer who resided nearby in 1917. The name was popularised at the expense of the original African one. The worst of all distortions is Panda-ma-tenka Road for Pandamatenga Road. The road-naming itself was rooted on activities during the precolonial and colonial era, when there was so much trade in ivory. The picture below shows an elephant ivory trading post set up close to a 'raintree' in a small village in 1871. Pandamatenga literally translates to *'The place where trade is done.'*

Skins, tusks, and horns at the Pandamatenga trading post

His handwritten pocket notebook records New Year's Day 1875 thus: "cloudy morning, hot-heavy shower in aftn – fine eveg. after



Source: Haynes (2014, p. 27).

Inasmuch as trade was good for the civilisation and general development of Zimbabwe and other African countries alike, it is what was traded at the trade post that is of concern. Trade in Ivory meant that there was a lot of disrespect for animal rights, where both Blacks and Whites would hunt these big animals uncontrollably for their ivory. Keeping such a name to date, seem to promote trade in animal products and poaching during an era where conservation and preservation issues are taking centre stage and some of the animals whose tusks were traded are now classified as endangered species. Trade in ivory at the Pandamatenga trade post was massive to the extent that elephant ivory would pass through here in wagonloads.

Further to that, not only did the trade post act as a trade route for ivory, instead, Pandamatenga Road brought ill-fated missionaries northward into the far interior of the country. Ambitious Jesuit missionaries in black robes, who included Henry Depelchin under the Tati guide Theodore Nigg all set up a temporary camp at Pandamatenga in 1880 before getting permission to cross the Zambezi. This is a clear indication that the place played a critical role in the colonisation of Zambia and Zimbabwe, thus of concern should not only be the spelling distortion on the name currently but rather a total change of place name to something that does not exacerbate memories on how Zambia and Zimbabwe were colonised and how the countries suffered some key losses in materials of value as a result of tourism.

CONCLUSION

Coloniality in tourism toponym destabilises the cultural and traditional rubric in Zimbabwe's tourism destinations. Most of the names given to tourism destinations and major sites, and attractions in Zimbabwe were bestowed before independence. This study therefore recommends that, if decoloniality is to be advocated for in the tourism sector of Zimbabwe, claim of ownership and contest should be propagated in two ways. Over and above advocating for restoring locals' attachment to their cultural and heritage sites now used for tourism, there is a clear need to propagate tourism through the use of endonyms as opposed to exonyms on all touristic sites. The discussions posed in this paper have revealed that most of the exonyms either 1) promulgate the celebration of white European legacy on black soil, 2) completely distort the meaning engraved in local names that unified communities or 3) celebrate the bad deeds by Europeans which is a clear sign of colonisation under post-colonial rule. Thus, tourism marketing should see a complete turn of events in the branding of these tourism sites, thus advocating for the renaming of most of the places of interest within the tourism context.

When tourism destination names are distorted and misappropriated, they lose their historical, linguistic, geographical and cartographical meanings amongst other significances and functions. The call for decolonising Zimbabwe's tourism toponymy as championed in this study is in tandem with the spirit African renaissance currently suffusing the whole African continent. The benefits of indigenous tourism toponymy are quite legion. Place names serve to stamp a people's peculiar identity and ensuring socio-economic development. Over four decades into Zimbabwe's independence, the defaced toponyms still reign as symbols of imperial imposition. This study is only the tip of the iceberg as several tourist destinations, properties, organisations and activities have also misappropriated or distorted indigenous names. It is therefore high time to right the wrong by reverting to the original place-names in tourism destinations where possible or altering some native names where they resonate with some bad memories of events that transpired on a particular place.

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NAVIGATING CONSTRAINTS AND UNLEASHING POTENTIAL: AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS IN INFORMAL TRADING IN CHINHOYI, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The study's goal was to document the difficulties that young unregistered traders in Zimbabwe's Chinhoyi town confront. The lack of focus on the difficulties encountered by young informal merchants by local and national regulatory bodies served as the impetus for the study. Since this study draws on the everyday experiences of young informal traders and their navigation of the complex issues they face, we feel it broadens our knowledge of the challenges these individuals face. The study, which used a qualitative research approach and focus groups, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis as data generation tools, discovered that young informal traders face a number of difficulties, including a lack of funding, harassment from local authorities, a lack of mentorship, and competition from more established traders. Thus, the study found and came to the conclusion that young entrepreneurs use a variety of survival techniques in this challenging environment, including borrowing money from friends and family and depending on a wide range of mentorship and coaching programs from diverse sources. The report suggests that the public and private sectors shoulder the burden of fostering these budding entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Informal traders, entrepreneurs, municipality, challenges, Chinhoyi

1. INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this paper is to reveal the reality and everyday life of youth informal traders in the town of Chinhoyi in Zimbabwe. The research discusses coping mechanisms that these young traders use in reaching opportunities and constraints. Kabonga, Zvokuomba, and Nyagadza (2021) researched in Bindura and found that the youth engaged in informal trade have to cope with risks and rise above various challenges to continue their businesses. Like most Zimbabwean towns, Chinhoyi is based on agriculture and mining. Formal business industries have since the start of the long-standing macroeconomic uncertainty in the early 2000s worsened, paving way for the emergence of small-scale informal businesses (Mupambirei & Matiza, 2021). Economic crisis from 2023 onwards hastened the phenomenon: poor global prices for commodities triggered lay-offs among agricultural and mining workers,

The central focus of this article is to accord readers a practical insight into the everyday challenges of young informal traders. The introductory section presents the background of the informal economy in Zimbabwe in general. This is followed by a step-by-step process of how the data were collected, analyzed, and presented for the findings of the study on thematic lines.

Informality of the Informal Sector: Context

Since liberation for Zimbabwe, the informal sector has coexisted with the formal economy (Njaya, 2015). The sector was shunned by policymakers in the early period as being ephemeral, believing that it would shrink as formal employment increased (Nuru & Devi, 2016). Structural adjustment, however, during the 1990s sparked huge retrenchments, resulting in a shift towards informal trade (Chirisa, 2009; LEDRIZ, 2015; Mupedziswa & Gumbo, 2001). Njaya (2015, p.98) remarks that liberalization in the economy led to redundancies in the public and private sectors, which caused a rise in flea markets and cross-border trading centers, mostly by women (Chibisa, 2008).

From 2000, Zimbabwe fell into severe economic hardship, characterized by hyperinflation, shortages of foreign currency, and deteriorating formal employment (Kabonga, 2020). Initiatives such as Fast Track Land Reform further destabilized agriculture, raising unemployment (Kabonga, 2020). Throughout the period of crisis in Zimbabwe, informalization increased as foreign currency and basic commodities were transmitted via parallel markets (LEDRIZ, 2015; Tamukamoyo, 2009).

Chinhoyi's agricultural and mining closures mirrored national trends, thrusting many into informal ventures. In response, stakeholders—including NGOs and government bodies—launched support initiatives, such as the Zimbabwe Informal Sector Association (Mid-1990s) and the Informal Industry Resources Network, which offered training and finance to informal entrepreneurs (Mupedziswa & Gumbo, 2001). Expansion of informal activity was further propelled by empowerment and indigenization policies tied to widespread layoffs (Njaya, 2015). According to the 2023 Economic Census (ZimStat, 2025), around 76% of Zimbabwe's 204,798 registered business establishments operate informally, with the wholesale and retail sector accounting for over 73% (ZimStat, 2025). Informality plays a pivotal role in the broader economy, especially amid persistently high youth unemployment and rising NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rates (ZimStat; Musarurwa, 2025).

The literature underscores a scarcity of in-depth inquiry into the everyday experiences of young informal traders, creating a gap for policymakers. This study aims to contribute to that understanding by illuminating the specific challenges and resilience strategies of young entrepreneurs navigating Zimbabwe's informal economy.

Literature Review

Literature identifies several problems faced by young unregistered businesspeople that either discourage the establishment of their business or limit expansion. One of the primary challenges is perception, particularly among older clients who are more likely to doubt the ability of young traders to deliver quality commodities (Maphosa, 2022). This negative perception reduces consumer confidence and leads to declining sales. Recent studies in Zimbabwe and other sub-Saharan nations suggest that young informal traders have a tendency to operate in environments where they are undervalued or stigmatised (Chitongo, 2023).

The local authorities' attitude aggravates the problem. In Kenya, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, vending spaces continue to be stigmatized as unsafe or illegal spaces (Mupambirei & Matiza, 2021). In Zimbabwe, this is historically corroborated in the government's Operation Murambatsvina, which razed informal trading facilities and pushed thousands of vendors, particularly women and youths, onto the streets (Tibaijuka, 2005; Chikanda, 2020). These operations have a direct effect of incurring financial losses, disempowering livelihoods, and entrenching adverse attitudes against the informal sector.

Another constraint is a lack of entrepreneurial leadership and management capacity among young traders. Empirical evidence is that it is hard for informal enterprises to expand without adequate business, marketing, and finance capabilities (Matunhu & Moyo, 2021; Sibanda, 2022). Evidence in Chinhoyi illustrates that young vendors use trial-and-error approaches in business operations since they lack exposure to training in entrepreneurship.

The cost and regulatory barriers are also significant. High payment fees, bureaucratic time delays, and regulatory procedures discourage youths from registering their enterprises (Makwara & Tavuyanago, 2022). It has been shown that formalizing a business in the majority of African countries is disproportionately expensive in relation to income levels, a replay of earlier findings by Gatewood and Boko (2009) and Gombarume and Mavhundutse (2014). This regulatory "mountain" factio shuts out the lion's share of potential entrepreneurs from the formal economy.

Conceptualising Informal Trading

In a general sense, informal trade is the sale and purchase of goods for insignificant margins of profit, often done outside official regulatory frameworks (Mupedziswa & Gumbo, 2001; Mhlanga, 2021). It may include consumables and non-consumables peddled on streets, walkways, open spaces, road junctions, or door-to-door levels (Chirisa, 2013; Dube, 2020). Informal traders in Zimbabwe market a range of goods from fresh fruits and vegetables and second-hand clothing to household appliances and domestic goods (Chitongo, 2023).

Some of the definitions, such as "hawkers," "peddlers," and "street vendors," are used extensively in policy literature and academic work (Matenga, 2018; Maphosa, 2022). In Chinhoyi, informal business exists in designated and undesignated areas, typically without payment of tax, and therefore a significant percentage of transactions is not reported (Chazireni & Chigonda, 2018). The informal sector includes roadside vendors, domestic businesses, cooperative vendors, and cross-border vendors (Mhlanga, 2021).

Since it is informal, the sector tends to operate in contradiction with domestic law and by-laws, with restrictions imposed on trading zones, product ranges, and operating hours (Mupambirei & Matiza, 2021). Characteristics such as small initial capital, irregular earnings, and limited access to credit still remain the norm (Sibanda, 2022). In Zimbabwe, these structural and economic constraints are compounded by long-term high unemployment and macroeconomic instability, which drive more youths into informal trade as a survival strategy (Makumbe, 2023).

THE RESEARCH SITE AND METHODOLOGICAL DELINEATIONS

Study Context

The research was carried out in Chinhoyi, Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe, an area that is dominated by gold and nickel mining, which drives the local economy and sets the platform for youth informal trade (Muzvidziwa, 2022). Informal markets—in the guise of community-based stalls and night bazaars—are vital in addressing residents' needs in this context (AP News, 2024).

Youth Informal Sector in Zimbabwe

National data attests to the prevalence of the informal sector: 76.1% of business undertakings are conducted informally, and retail and wholesale top with over a 73% of the economic contribution (ZimStat, 2025). Out of employment, as of Q3 2024, informal non-agricultural employment made up 43.6% of total employment, and informal jobs maintained the livelihoods of more than 80% of the Zimbabwean population (Sunday Mail, 2025; ILO–UNESCO, 2024).

Among youth in particular, UNICEF reports that around 84% are in informal employment because of limited formal work opportunities (UNICEF, 2022). This is supported in qualitative literature: a British Council report discusses that nearly half of working young people do so informally, doing "hustling" since the formal economy doesn't have available support and opportunity (British Council, 2023).

Qualitative Framework and Narrative Inquiry

The study applies narrative inquiry to uncover how young people construct and interpret their lives in off-the-books trade. The power of this approach is to generate rich, story-telling understandings of the socio-economic lives of youth traders (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008). Most recent studies highlight the importance of an integration of multimodal storytelling, digital tools, and Dynamic Narrative Inquiry, focused on how narrative influence's identity and agency among marginalized youth (Anderson & Holloway, 2023; Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2024; Daiute, 2021). For enhanced validity and depth, the study utilized methodological triangulation, combining in-depth interviews, focus group discussions held in community marketplaces, and document analysis. This technique lies at the core of recognizing converging and diverging perspectives (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

Farquhar, Michels & Robson (2020) expand upon this by suggesting triangulation which facilitates convergence and divergence as a way of revealing underlying patterns. More recently, the Qualitative Triangulation Framework (QTF) likewise enables researchers to pinpoint tensions and reflexivity in interpretation (Kelly et al., 2022).

Sampling and Participant Engagement

Under the purposive sampling design (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016), the researchers selected 30 youth informal traders drawn from community activities across Chinhoyi because there were no formal records. These sampling designs have been established to be utilized in researches of hidden or undocumented communities across urban Zimbabwe (Mabasa, 2023; Maree, 2022).

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Challenges faced by young entrepreneurs in informal trading

Lack of capital. Among the many issues that young unregistered business owners in Chinhoyi Town face, capital was mentioned most frequently. Every time they spoke, research participants brought up this topic first. Young entrepreneurs lack capital, according to a consensus with other experts (Chimucheka, 2012; Edoho, 2015; Fatoki and Garwe, 2010; Nuru and Devi, 2016; Nyanga, 2013; Tinarwo, 2016). Two unofficial cell phone vendors on the streets of Chinhoyi town said the following:



I do not have enough money to grow my business. I aim to sell high end and top of the range smartphones but currently I do not have money to purchase those phones for resell. My desire is to increase the range of the products that I sell but the problem is that I do not have enough money to diversify the products that I sell.

This result supports the claim made by Chimucheka (2012) that young entrepreneurs have restricted access to finance. An additional investigation into this issue showed that, in the setting of scarce resources, the sources of finance for young informal merchants were their personal savings and, sporadically, presents and loans from friends. Since they need collateral security, which informal traders are unable to provide, banks and other financial institutions in

Zimbabwe are reluctant to lend to them. Additionally, Edoho (2015) found that banks need ludicrous collateral from young business owners before to offering investment loans.

Because young informal merchants typically do not fulfill the basic standards for borrowers and frequently lack independent property rights, banks are hesitant to lend to them because they do not have collateral. "At the bank, they asked me whether I have a house or car before they can extend a loan to me," stated a young, female merchant who saw this. Since I'm just eighteen, where would I obtain that?

We also found out the young entrepreneurs believe the banks are unable to assist them because they are sceptical that they will not efficiently utilise the loans extended and expend the loan on non-business matters such as lavish partying and fashion. As it is beyond of the scope of our study, we could not establish from banks why they rarely extend support to young informal traders.

Like with formal trade, sustained informal commerce also needs funding from commercial banks, credit bureaus, microfinance organizations, and other financial institutions. According to our interview, a lot of informal traders are afraid to approach financial institutions since they've had bad experiences with them in the past. The unnecessary paperwork that finally produces nothing is a part of the bad experience. Some of our respondents had low educational backgrounds, so they were scared by the paperwork, which is typically written in financial jargon that is hard even for the most educated people in the community to understand.

The bulk of the entrepreneurs, according to the interviewees, sold their goods in public areas and on the streets, and their main complaint was that they lacked a physical facility to operate their businesses from. Not only were the market booths that the town government had allocated insufficient, but they were also hard to get. To secure a market booth, one needed considerable political capital, which the young people did not have, as we discovered. One common observation regarding infrastructure that study participants provided to us was as follows:



I sell my tomatoes near that big supermarket, so on this day there were people queuing for mealie meal and an old man accidentally pushed a makeshift stall I had put and all my tomatoes were scattered and people ended up trampling on them and I incurred a huge loss. I am yet to fully recover from that loss.

It was discovered that teenage unregistered vendors lacked the social skills necessary to handle situations in which a bystander tramped on their goods. In other research, seasoned vendors conversed with bystanders and received payment. Young informal merchants lose money with no way to recover their losses if they lack these engagement abilities. Dealing with property owners who claim that the young unregistered vendors impinge upon their business in one way or another has led to confrontations when they trade close to existing business units and on store verandas. The young unofficial vendors were frequently threatened by the store owners, who also occasionally had them detained by the police. Interviews revealed that established companies would collude with security personnel to drive away the younger unregistered vendors. Secret money transactions between large corporations and security personnel have been documented, as the section that follows demonstrates. As a result, teenage informal dealers and security personnel had a "cat and mouse" relationship that was typified by running fights. Therefore, we contend that the microbusiness politics surrounding

the admission of young street vendors into town areas revealed the monopoly capital's manipulations against susceptible and emerging street-based enterprises. Thus, it continued to be a daily uphill struggle for young unregistered vendors to negotiate and navigate their admission into areas governed by well-established, formalized firms.

Young informal traders in Chinhoyi Town suffer a number of difficulties, one of which is their frequent cat and mouse escapades with the law enforcement agents, especially when the municipal police abuse them. The respondents stated that they frequently experienced a tense interaction with the local police, which included arrests, having their belongings detained, and having them auctioned off. Although established business units were not susceptible to these issues, all informal street vendors were. According to a research participant:



The municipal police always hail obscenities at us and threatening us with arrests for selling our wares in the streets. But we do not have an option, there are no jobs in the country thus we survive by selling our wares in the street.

The teenage unofficial vendors were said to have objected to the municipal police's alleged heavy-handedness in making arrests. Therefore, we contend in this essay that the actions of municipal police contribute to the state of anomie, which is defined as the absence of standards

governing human behavior, as identified by the classical sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917). According to Olsen (1965), the behavior of municipal police is indicative of a social order that is collapsing and is marked by conflict between social groups due to unachieved objectives. Thus, in Chinhoyi, a youthful businessperson stated:

Two weeks ago I was arrested by the police for selling second hand phones along Main Street, the experience was nasty and unforgettable. The municipal police grabbed me by my belt, dragged me for 10 meters and I was bungled into the municipal vehicle. This was very inhuman behaviour.

According to the Matenga (2018: 49) research conducted in Masvingo, "street vendors were rounded up by municipal police and subjected to similar harassment given to thieves, robbers, and sex workers," demonstrating the significant cooperation between the two law enforcement agencies. Fundi et al. (2015) expressed similar opinions when they hypothesized that municipal officials, who beat, harass, and seize items without notice, are a key cause of fear for informal traders. The overbearing tactics of the municipal police have led to ongoing conflicts between young unofficial vendors and the police. We saw that the ongoing conflicts disrupted business as usual.

It has come to light that certain male municipal police officers have been known to solicit payments from unlicensed vendors in return for young female entrepreneurs' non-arrest and sexual favours. A young woman said as much:

I pay US\$3 per week to a certain municipal police officer to get protection from arrest. Although I have not done it yet but I know of cases where my colleagues provide sexual services to municipal officers in exchange of protection. Our options are limited.

There is a dearth of literature on informal trade that discusses cases of transactional sex, but research indicates that it is common in areas of war and conflict when the military exploits women by exchanging food and safety for sex. We identified the presence of transactional sex as indicative of an anomic circumstance through a focus group discussion. Adjibolosoo (2013) reinterprets Emile Durkheim's concept of anomie and refers to it as a condition of severe human factor degradation, when society loses its moral leadership-providers, organizations, and individuals. We were able to interact with specific participants through FGDs, even if they were not the ideal method to provide evidence on such delicate topics and private information about claims of abuse of women by local authorities, some of whom even held political

positions in the governing party. Those who dared to speak up about this topic in spite of their worries did so with knowledge that added fresh perspectives and trends to the research. Therefore, we proved that governing party-affiliated municipal police personnel would mistreat women more than others, knowing full well that they would be "insulated" from punishment.

Literature has long shown the necessity of mentorship and assistance for young people's enterprises to succeed (Tinarwo, 2016). We found that research participants in Chinhoyi town not only lacked business mentorship, training, and assistance, but also lacked the desire for it. The young unregistered vendors listed a number of company functions, such as bookkeeping, customer service, advertising, and financial management, that they believed needed guidance and assistance. In this study, we found that most of the young unlicensed vendors in the research area had lower levels of education, with fewer holding postsecondary degrees. Most people with only a high school diploma or less found it difficult to adjust to the changing corporate climate that called for creativity and flexibility. During the interview process, one of them stated that "you need mentoring and support from individuals and institutions for any business to grow." In my own experience, I struggle with money management. Since my funds are out of order, I would like to increase my capability there.

The study reveals that young informal merchants maintain inadequate records. The young unregistered vendors failed to maintain enough documentation of their daily sales, purchases, and inventory. It was challenging to determine whether they were breaking even or turning a profit without this crucial information. The illegal nature of their operations discouraged corporate America, non-governmental organizations, and even the government from supporting them, in contrast to other industries where training and assistance are offered. However, depending on individual effort, some tertiary level might provide training services.

Like in other parts of Zimbabwe, Chinhoyi's young informal merchants operate within the larger structural economic issues that have a significant impact on the informal economy. Zimbabwe has been dealing with enormous economic difficulties since the year 2000. These difficulties include deindustrialization, poor rates of economic growth, unemployment, inflation, and poverty. The present government's strict budgetary policies, which are summed up in the phrase "Austerity for Prosperity," have made the underlying economic issues worse and led to an increase in the rate of poverty. The majority of people living in Chinhoyi have

little discretionary income as a result of the economic issues. Little business is generated for young informal traders by this. Given the broad economic issues facing the nation, it was not surprise that a sizable portion of the young informal merchants complained of having a difficult time with their businesses. Informal trading is vulnerable to macroeconomic trends. The following phrases were common during the in-depth interviews and FGD: '*zvinhu zvakaoma, vanhu havasisina mari, nyika yashata mukoma* (Things are difficult, generally people lack disposable income because the economy is compressed and in bad state my brother)'.

When one research participant explained how the situation of the Zimbabwean economy affected their company's day-to-day operations, the participant's response was, "People are affected by the poor state our economy." The shortage of disposable wealth among people eventually affects our company. If all settles down quickly, business will pick up. The macroeconomic structural problems faced by young entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe are consistent with the findings of Chimucheka's (2012) study. Evidence from Chinhoyi indicated that young informal merchants faced extremely challenging conditions, which was consistent with findings made by Mupedziswa and Gumbo (2001) that some finally gave up on informal trading because it was not profitable and was hampered by financial difficulties.

Though macroeconomic issues affect a wide range of traders, including young informal traders, our analysis revealed that the issue was the young informal traders' incapacity to handle the exceptional economic challenges confronting the nation. Some of them were inexperienced in business, so they had no idea how to handle the severe financial difficulties they were facing.

Strategies for survival: Dancing on the same spot

Among the key conclusions of the study was the common opinion that young entrepreneurs involved in unofficial trading encountered several difficulties, such as a dearth of guidance and assistance. The study's findings highlighted the fact that young entrepreneurs exercised agency in addressing a variety of obstacles. A significant finding indicated that peer-to-peer mentorship and self-sufficiency were essential components of "on the job training." We discovered that young informal merchants could maintain themselves since there was less dependence on more seasoned traders. One of the interviewees had this to say:



When business becomes tough I get assistance from other young informal traders, they are generally receptive to my problems than the established informal traders. The training and mentoring is an ongoing process every day as we share notes, support each other and compete at the same time.

According to the Chinhoyi research, young entrepreneurs used online resources to get advice on how to get beyond the many challenges they faced in informal commerce, in addition to getting advice and support from their peers. Every interviewee had a smartphone that they used to access the internet, even though they did not always have a connection. Those who were more organized did their business online, notably for items they wanted from other nations, even though less than 5% of those questioned used this service.

Informal savings to raise capital

As this post has already shown, one of the biggest obstacles to young informal merchants growing their businesses is a lack of finance. In order to combat this, young unofficial traders use a variety of strategies for conserving money and obtaining seed money for startup and recapitalization. Occasionally, the little earnings from unofficial trade were put into unofficial lending programs and savings clubs, including internal savings accounts, to increase the amount invested. One of the respondents speaking on capital raising said:



To raise money for my business, I am participating in an Internal Savings and Lending Scheme popularly known as 'mukando' and coordinated by a local finance house. The share out we got at the end of the saving cycle was significant for making our small business grow as we transacted in United States Dollars to beat the hyper-inflationary environment.

While we disagreed with some of the basics of Matenga's (2018) research, our results supported parts of his findings about the use of rotational savings to raise capital for company expansion. Given the challenges they had in obtaining financial backing from financial institutions, many young informal merchants used the "mukando" funding method, even if the study's findings suggested that not everyone was into these ventures. In addition to these channels, young unofficial vendors disclosed that they had borrowed small sums of money from friends, family, and coworkers for their ventures. The results refuted the findings of Nyanga's (2013) study, which found that capital from family was the primary source of funding for informal trade enterprises. According to our research, family members are not highly valued as a source of funding for unofficial businesses. Young business owners contended that receiving funding from family members could only benefit a select few who had close relatives living abroad. A study conducted in Ghana by Boateng et al. (2014) found that friends and family were reluctant to contribute to the risky start-up ventures of unofficial entrepreneurs.

Use of social capital

As previously mentioned, young unregistered vendors, particularly women, were subjected to mistreatment by city police, who would occasionally rob them of their hard-earned money and even assault them sexually. Some of the informal merchants responded to this by handling and combating some kinds of abuse by law enforcement officials through the use of social capital. The usage of social media by local police resulted in a decrease in abuse and manipulation. Participants in the research who were questioned emphasized that social networks had a significant role in informing young unofficial vendors in Chinhoyi town about impending police raids, prompting them to conceal their goods. Therefore, in order to engage in informal commerce in Chinhoyi, one had to establish and maintain social networks and contacts that facilitated their business. In other research, social capital was found to be crucial for the survival and expansion of all firms, but especially for unofficial enterprises. For instance, Mupedziswa and Gumbo (2001: 36) said that informal traders in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, were reliant on one another, particularly when it came to recommending clients to one another for goods and services. Consequently, we contend that the young informal merchants were increasingly intimate with one another as a result of their informal companies. The study findings also showed that young informal traders belonged to WhatsApp smart phone groups in which they not only shared business deals but social aspects too, for instance alerting each other of opportunities and dangers. Here there is leveraging on technology to deal with dangers of street trading in Chinhoyi town.

Prisoners of hope

The results of the study conducted in Chinhoyi town showed that young informal merchants experienced optimism in the face of an environment that appeared to be devoid of hope. Thus, we came to the conclusion that despite the many difficulties they encounter related to both the micro- and macroeconomics, young informal traders are "prisoners of hope" since this is what keeps them continuing. The majority of young entrepreneurs carry on with their unofficial ventures in the hopes that their financial situation would improve. The young informal traders all felt that things may become better in the future.

Despite the challenges I am facing, I am resolute to continue with my business and hopefully the economy will improve for the better. I am hopeful but choice less. What else can I do to eke a living in this environment?

We contend that the young people were hopeless and had their hopes fixed on the prospect of an improvement in the state of the economy. The idea that things will become better in the future was encapsulated in the phrase "prisoners of hope." Our results support the contention made by Chirisa (2013) that having a "positive mind" enabled entrepreneurs to overcome current obstacles. But our case goes beyond Chirisa (2013) in that this was not only optimistic but also expressed pessimism about the future, which is why we refer to them as "prisoners of hope." It's said that when individuals lose hope, they stop caring about the future and let it decide their fate.

Diversity of coping mechanisms

The Chinhoyi town study site's navigation reveals that young unregistered vendors used to dishonest methods in order to survive the challenging commercial climate. Corroborating information was obtained from key sources in the local municipality and central government offices, indicating that a portion of the youth informal merchants were involved in the sale of stolen products at a lower cost than those sold in the legal sector. Many people were drawn to this, particularly those looking to purchase inexpensive used smartphones. Through underworld ties and criminal networks, the stolen goods may even originate from outside of Chinhoyi town. Our study on this topic was dependent on key informants as the young unofficial dealers would not provide reliable information. Young unofficial vendors would entice prospective clients by offering wiggle space on rates in a market overflowing with identical products.

In addition, elder consumers lost faith in the entrepreneurial endeavors of young people since they were accused of creating or dealing in "substandard" items. Young people engaged in informal trading also hid their products in covert locations with drainage holes as coping methods for the harsh environment created by police raids. Compared to their elder fellow informal dealers, their youthful zeal made it easy for them to do this. An further coping strategy we saw was their modifying their business schedule. According to our observations, the younger informal vendors became more active in the marketplace after 5 p.m., when regular business hours ended. By now, it was getting close to nightfall, and local law enforcement would have finished for the day.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study's foundation was an examination of the difficulties encountered by young informal merchants in Zimbabwe's tiny town of Chinhoyi, as well as their coping mechanisms, using a qualitative methodology. According to the methodological and epistemological interactions, young traders in a small town faced several obstacles that hampered the profitability and expansion of their enterprises. Young informal traders used a variety of survival strategies, such as depending on informal sources of capital like saving groups, peer-to-peer mentoring, online coaching, and social capital to "beat" the systems and survive the harsh environment, in order to "survive" the lack of capital and other difficulties, such as harassment by municipal authorities. According to the report, this "prison of hope" mentality kept young informal traders alive in the face of crippling obstacles. As a result, the research makes many suggestions in light of the significance of informal trade to both the Chinhoyi economy and the national economy as a whole.

Formal financial support to young informal traders is of paramount importance. Currently, young informal traders are reliant on informal sources to raise capital. Financial institutions should develop financial products tailor-made for young people in informal trading. These financial products should do away with the borrowing requirements such as collateral security. It is evident that most of the young informal traders lack the collateral required by formal financial institutions. The government should also provide financial support to the young informal traders.

The local authority has an important role to play in sustaining and driving informal trading. There are many ways that the local authority can achieve this. For the available council infrastructure, the council or local authority can adopt a quota system in allocation of infrastructure particularly vending stalls or market stalls. This will enable the young informal traders to have access to proper trading infrastructure.

The young entrepreneurs should not be viewed as victims of abusive municipal police officials as if the young informal traders lack agency. The young informal traders are encouraged to use available mechanisms to report the corrupt municipal police officers that fleece them of their hard-earned cash as well as reporting sexual exploitation by some municipal police officials.

any non-state actors such as NGOs, civil society organisations, universities and colleges are encouraged to mentor and support the young informal traders as they contend with the difficulties that come with running a business.

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