

The Effects of Humanistic Teaching on the Performance Lag Address Program for Orphaned Adolescent and Vulnerable Learners in Secondary Schools in Chimanimani District in Manicaland Province

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ABSTRACT

One of the numerous unfavorable trends in emerging nations is the education gap, which appears to have been sparked by the rising number of parent deaths, which are primarily attributable to Cyclone Idai's devastation. In the Chimanimani District of Manicaland, Zimbabwe, the phenomenological research design examined the effect of humanistic education on the performance lag address program. The triangulated data were gathered at four secondary schools using focus group interviews, document analysis, and open-ended questionnaires. Eight adolescents and vulnerable learners, four school administrators, four guidance and counselling teachers, and four other volunteers were purposefully chosen, totalling 16 participants in the study. The results showed that many vulnerable children and adolescents who are falling behind in school continue to experience loneliness, inferiority complexes, stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, lack of concentration in class, and other negative emotions that interfere with their ability to effectively assimilate and accommodate learning materials within their learning environment. Adolescents and vulnerable children were affected by a particular set of conditions, which were made worse by poverty and parental duties. In light of the idea above, a number of learners voiced their profound heartbreak over a position from which escape is difficult, particularly in an unpleasant or trying one. A number of orphaned adolescents and vulnerable children were contemplating quitting school so they might escape the stigma and loss of respect they were experiencing from others. This thorough examination makes several important recommendations, including the distribution of educational materials to vulnerable children and orphaned adolescents, the implementation of interventions for orphans and vulnerable learners, and the development of non-threatening environments that take into account their needs.

Keywords: Humanism, Plap, Learning, Learner and Poverty

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The impact of humanistic instruction on a program to alleviate performance gaps in Zimbabwe's Manicaland region's Chimanimani district was the subject of a thorough critical analysis. It was a self-motivated, intentional project that required work to which we were drawn via observations and readings about the plight of disadvantaged children who were falling behind in their scholastic achievement and orphaned adolescents.

Due to the introduction of bearer cheques, Zimbabwe's educational system went through a period of over two years of learning regression. This led to a situation where inflation was extremely high. In 2008, teachers began to boycott their jobs during this time. Insufficient facilitators prevented several educational institutions from providing for learners. Schools were closed in some districts as a result of instructors' frantically racing up and down the street looking for food to feed their siblings. This situation persisted for almost three years. The aforementioned situation prevented learners from learning.

After noticing that some learners in primary and secondary schools were not meeting academic standards due to hyperinflation from 2006 to 2008, the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education established the Performance Lag Address Program (PLAP) in the Manicaland Province in October 2012 (Quinn, 2020b).

The crisis had a significant impact on a number of components of the educational system, particularly those that were related to funding, the teacher workforce, participation, equity, and learning results (Odoni, 2024). A study conducted in the Manicaland Province in five randomly chosen districts found a significant positive association between achievement lag and the number of years in school. With more years spent in school, the achievement disparity gets bigger. The typical achievement lag is four years. A year longer in school extended the achievement gap on average by one to two terms (Quinn, 2020b).

Program to Address Performance Lag is the outcome of deep-stick evaluation. The teacher learning programs were evaluated as part of the deep-stick evaluation. A guidebook for instructors was created expressly to address the issue of underachievement in order to close the gaps (Quinn, 2020b). The program's goal is to improve learners' performance from primary to secondary level. The program entails revisiting the curriculum and focusing on ideas that have consistently been hard for learners to understand. It is anticipated that learners would learn more quickly and the purpose is to educate from the last moment of success.

Within-class ability grouping is heavily stressed in the program. According to research, how often groups are formed affects learners' academic performance. The peer contexts, educational content, and pedagogy that learners experience when they switch groups are diverse. The model of curriculum differentiation emphasizes the use of pre-assessment to identify learners' strengths and interests, flexible grouping practices based on those pre-assessed areas, and the differentiation of existing curricula which suggests increasing the breadth and depth. Differentiating the curriculum takes into account the learners' varied learning rates, styles, interests, and abilities, as well as the need to deliver instruction that is appropriate for their skill levels (Sirait & Amnie, 2023).

As a result of the teacher migration, zero percent pass rates were observed in numerous institutions. The Ministry of Education introduced Performance Lag Address Program addresses (PLAP) to this end. The Performance Lag Address Program addresses the learning gaps that were thought to have arisen from concepts missed at earlier stages. Pilot tests of this intervention technique were conducted in Zimbabwe's Manicaland Province. The accomplishment exam revealed math and English proficiency levels below grade four and below grade six, respectively. The goal of the Performance Lag Address Program is to identify the

performance learning gap and close it so that learners can continue to improve. When doing this, one should be in environments and situations that support their developmental needs. The Performance Lag Address Program (PLAP) was created to address and eliminate performance lag. Performance lag address program intervention was developed with the help of PLAN International and is primarily a humanistic teaching strategy (Muzawazi & Nkoma, 2011). With this in mind, the current study aims to examine the effects of humanistic teaching strategies already in use in schools in order to close the achievement gap among learners participating in Zimbabwe's landmark PLAP program.

Many nations used Skinner's operant conditioning methods of education prior to the advent of humanism. The foundation of the operant conditioning theory is the notion that learning occurs when overt behaviour changes. According to Newaz & Appolloni (2024), a person's behaviour evolves as a function of how they react to environmental circumstances. A reaction results in a result, such as deriving the meaning of a word, striking the ball, or figuring out a maths problem. The person is trained to respond when a specific stimulus-response pattern is reinforced (rewarded) (Turner & Balleine, 2024). Opportunistic conditioning differs from earlier kinds of behaviourism like connectionism and drive reduction in that it allows an organism to produce its own reactions rather than relying solely on external stimuli to activate them.

Opportunistic conditioning, however, does not account for the function of genetic and cognitive variables in learning, making it a partial explanation of the learning process in both humans and animals. Extrapolation is a concern that is brought up by the use of animal research in operant training studies. Psychologists like Pavlov, Watson and Skinner's studies on animals cannot be generalized to humans since they have distinct anatomy and physiology from humans and are incapable of thinking about their experiences or invoking reason, patience, memory, or self-comfort (Miller, 2020).

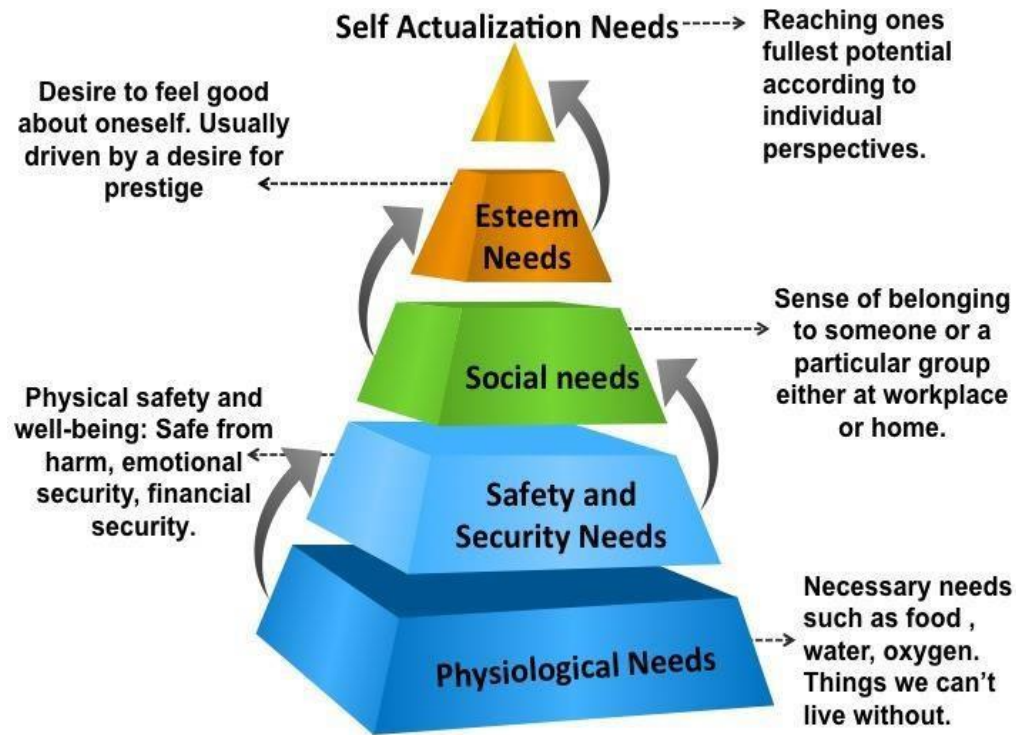
Humanism surpassed behaviourism in popularity once numerous inconsistencies in its findings were discovered. The humanistic approach prioritizes the examination of the whole person and the notion that an individual's behaviour is connected to their inner sentiments and sense of identity (Dewi & Yusmaridi, 2021). The fundamental tenet of the humanistic approach is that Learners have free will and an inbuilt drive to better themselves and the world (Bhikharie, 2024). Humanism also disapproves of the scientific method utilized in other psychological research techniques and emphasizes how human beings are essentially unique from other animals because they possess the capacity for thought, reason, and language (Dewi & Yusmaridi, 2021). The rigorous scientific method to psychology was rejected by humanistic researchers because they believed it to be demeaning and incapable of capturing the significance of conscious experience. The humanistic approach, in contrast, uses qualitative research techniques including diary entries, open-ended surveys, unstructured interviews, and individual level observations to learn about how Learners think and feel (Dewi & Yusmaridi, 2021). The humanistic perspective sees personal development and fulfillment as a fundamental human purpose and contends that subjective understanding and perception are more significant than objective facts (Ya Min Aung, 2020). It broadened the range of approaches to studying human behaviour and provided fresh perspectives on how to comprehend human nature and situation. As a result, humanism introduced a wider selection of efficient therapeutic techniques (Tolstova & Levasheva, 2019). Every learner goes through several growth stages, which take different amounts of time for every person. This is because every student has a different environment and learning style. The impact of humanistic education on the performance lag address program in secondary school learners was the researcher's main area of interest.

Research Question

1. What humanistic teaching tenets can help the performance lag address program in secondary schools succeed?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Maslow (1943) hierarchy of needs hypothesis, learners are born with a set of requirements that must be satisfied in order for them to live fully and eventually achieve self-actualization. Physiological requirements, safety needs, belonging and love needs, self-esteem needs, and self-actualization needs are all categorized into a hierarchy of five levels by Jung et al (2023) as shown in Figure 1 below.



Extracts taken from <https://managementisajourney.com/motivation-applying-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-theory/>

Figure 1: Hierarchy of Needs – Abraham Maslow; 1943 (Content Theory)

Physical Requirements

The hierarchy of requirements places physiological needs at the bottom. They are requirements to meet physical needs including sex, warmth, food, drink, and shelter. Prior to meeting any other demands, these essential needs should be met (ten Cate et al, 2024). Unmet physiological needs are fatal (Jung et al, 2023). For orphaned learners, these basic needs are frequently insufficient. Lack of food may cause malnutrition and growth retardation in these learners, while a lack of shelter may result in issues with learners who are abused in their relatives' homes and are sometimes referred to as "victims." Their inability to focus in class has an impact on their academic achievement, and they may decide to leave out.

Needs for Safety

When physiological demands are satisfied, safety needs become more important (ten Cate et al, 2024). Safety demands include the need to feel secure in a setting and they want to believe that everything is orderly and predictable (Stokes & Brunzell, 2024). At home, at school, and elsewhere, safety requirements are typically related to the surroundings. A learner will struggle to concentrate on learning if they come from a dysfunctional household, as in this example, absent parents as a result of a death. The student might

feel uneasy in such a home because they fear possible abuse, like sexual abuse. Due to safety being the main priority, the student will also struggle to complete their assignments.

A Craving for Love and Belonging

Friendships and family are among these needs (Anderson & Fowers, 2020). Due to their absence of parents and tenuous ties to their extended families as a result of having to stand up for themselves, vulnerable learners are destined to lack that sense of love and belonging. In quest of love and belonging, these children frequently drop out of school and get married young.

Personal Pride

Self-esteem is a combination of accomplishment, respect for others, and the desire to stand out from the crowd (El Idrissi Amiri & Ghourdou, 2024). Learners will feel inferior, powerless, and weak if these requirements are not addressed. Learners from child-headed households are frequently excluded from society and treated with contempt, vulnerable learners lack respect and acknowledgment. As a result, because of the circumstances surrounding their parents' deaths such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV and AIDS), vulnerable children are stigmatized and occasionally branded.

Achieving Oneself

This is the desire to fulfill one's potential and become everything that one is capable of. Khan et al (2024) emphasized the worth and significance of self-actualization a man is capable of. This urge is driven by a desire for personal development rather than a sense of lack. Maslow (1954) asserted that while self-actualization is the ultimate objective of the human psyche, it cannot be properly attained without the satisfaction of other drives and needs. It is very difficult for orphaned learners to self-actualize since they are unable to fully commit to and follow their life goals due to a variety of obstacles arising from their experiences. Due to the fact that education is the primary means of achieving self-actualization, such learners have little chance of finishing or performing well in school, which prevents them from achieving self-actualization.

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of the interpretative research paradigm, a qualitative research methodology, and a phenomenological research design. Focus group interviews, document analysis, and open-ended questionnaires were all used to collect data. Data collected was structured to address the main questions of the study. The data was analysed using thematic content analysis, which involves identifying common themes that emerged from the data. According to Velykoivanenko et al (2024), a questionnaire is a paper with pertinent elements that the researcher wishes to present the respondents. Therefore, it is acceptable to say that a questionnaire is a collection of items that the researcher has created in a scientific and meticulous manner to elicit replies from participants in the empirical study (Parmaxi, 2023). The intended respondents, who happened to be secondary school learners, were literate and were not anticipated to have any difficulties understanding and responding to the questionnaire items, the researchers thought it was suitable to employ questionnaires. Twenty 4th year learners from families in the Manicaland Province without parents were selected using the purposive sample method.

CONSIDERATIONS OF ETHICS

The protection of the liberty and welfare interests of specific participants is guided by ethical concerns,

which are generally accepted ethical standards (WHO, 2019). In qualitative investigations, where researchers frequently breached respondents' privacy, ethics are more important. The researchers requested authorization from the appropriate party to obtain permission for the study before the research project got started. The researchers coordinated a meeting with research participants to discuss problems of informed consent, anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality of the study with school administrators after permission was obtained. The researchers gave consent letters to a sample group and requested them to read and fill them out. In addition to giving authority to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason, participants were informed in the consent letter that participation was entirely voluntary. The researchers told the participants that neither their true names nor the names of their schools were utilized for collecting the data. The researchers represented the schools and the names of the participants with letters and pseudonyms to guarantee anonymity. The researchers maintained the information they had collected from the research participants in a secure location. The researchers gave participants a word that, the data researchers collected would be kept private and utilized only for the investigation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the key topic that emerged from the study's findings, it was presented, examined, and discussed:

1. Importance of PLAP
2. Factors that could limit the success of PLAP
3. Strategies that necessitate PLAP

Theme 1: Importance of PLAP

According to the report, many learners from low-income households, particularly orphans, in the Chimanimani District lack the funds necessary for school supplies like uniforms and books. The extended relatives were unable to generate money for school supplies, fees, food, and other necessities, the researchers stated that many orphans were unable to perform at their highest level or continue with their studies. To substantiate this, one of the orphans stated the following:

"All the necessary school supplies, including uniforms, were formerly bought by my mum. I first started having issues when I moved in with my stepmother. Asking my stepmother to buy school uniforms for me bothers her since she feels that she is not my mother and should not be bothered. Because I lack a uniform and other necessary school supplies like books, pens, and rulers, my performance at school has declined significantly."

A very identical orphan gave the following account of her feelings:

"I enjoy going to school every day, but the reality is that it is difficult for me to do so without putting on shoes, jerseys, and tracksuits because the season we are in is extremely chilly."

One of the orphans felt that this was insufficient, and he spoke as such:

"I don't like or appreciate falling behind in my academic community. The cause of this is that, because of financial difficulties, my stepmother did not provide me enough time to complete my schoolwork, food, uniform, and other academic supplies. I used to eat three times a day before my mother passed away, but once she did, I only eat once, and once more, I was not provided food to bring to school for breakfast and lunch. These were a few of the issues that made it difficult for me to keep up with my educational goals."

Financial difficulties were identified as a significant barrier keeping orphans from meeting educational goals during interviews with guidance and counselling teachers and school administrators. According to a teacher

of guidance and counselling:

“School expenses are the main obstacle faced by orphans. The orphans’ school expenses were typically covered by Beam and their stationery by UNICEF in earlier years, but these days it’s hard to find the supplies.”

Similar to this, it was proved by records examined, in particular school registers, and that many orphans skipped school due to financial difficulties. The study’s findings support those of Fauk et al (2017), who found that orphans in Tanzania’s Mbeya Rural District withdrew and skipped class as a result of financial difficulties. Reduced education requirements were seen by extended families in the Mbeya Rural District as a crucial approach that would free up funds for other necessities. According to a study by Nchimbi (2013), who agreed with this point of view, orphans face challenges in meeting their fundamental needs and educational requirements, such as paying for school and buying supplies, to name a few, because of financial limitations. Shahidul & Zehadul (2015); Fleming (2015) all provided similar findings. In this sense, learners who are orphaned owing to financial difficulties are more likely to miss out on opportunities to attend school and fulfill their educational aspirations.

Theme 2: Factors that could limit the success of PLAP

According to the study, children who live as orphans are primarily subjected to stunted development of their emotional intelligence and life skills, including communication, decision-making, and many others. It was also shown that orphans lack the fundamental components of self-worth, competence, and belonging that are lost when a parent dies. One of the guidance and counselling teachers stated the following in an interview:

“Orphans suffered greatly from a sense of loss, abandonment, and guilt as a result of the trauma of their parents’ protracted illness and subsequent death. As a result, they have an increased need for security and love. Without further emotional and psychological care, orphans are more prone to experience depression, academic difficulties, and anti-social or delinquent behaviour that forces them to skip school.”

Accordingly, one of the orphans provided a vivid depiction of the brutal treatment she endured at the hands of her stepfather along these lines:

“I’m not exactly sure why my stepfather despises me. I always lose to him. Yesterday, after I had lost a little sum of money, I was assaulted. I have trouble understanding him at times. My mother was given to me by my father when he passed away, but my mother is treated horribly by my father’s younger sibling. Being beaten up makes me sick and fatigued.”

Another orphan who felt the same way said:

“I have no one to tell my troubles, in a similar vein. My aunt and uncle don’t have time to hear me out. I was sick the entire previous week, and when I informed them about it, they didn’t even seem to care.”

The need for emotional support and a sense of belonging among learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly orphans, was affirmed by school administrators during interviews. The study showed that orphaned learners’ psycho-social requirements frequently go unmet, which causes them to skip class, fall behind in their academic performance, or even drop out. The research by Mwoma & Jace (2015), which found that psycho-social influences can cause young school dropouts in children, is supported by this finding. Similar to this, Nchimbi (2013) said that it is important to note that losing one or both parents deprives a child of the right to parental care, including emotional and psychological support for his or her well-being. In support of the aforementioned assertion, Tadesse et al (2014) noted that when children lose one or both of their parents for any reason, they encounter a variety of psychosocial issues, including grief,

hopelessness, anxiety, stigmatization, physical and mental abuse, labor abuse, a lack of parental love and support from the community, withdrawal from society as a whole, feelings of guilt, depression, and aggression. They also experience eating, sleeping, and learning disturbances. Given the aforementioned information, it is imperative to recognize that the psychosocial effects of poverty can damage a learner from a background family that is experiencing poverty's potential to achieve academic success.

Theme 3: Strategies that necessitate PLAP

The study found that in order for orphans to attend/remain in school, a special curriculum that is pertinent to the issues they encounter on a daily basis is required. Life skills and practical abilities for daily living should be emphasized in such a curriculum. One of the guidance and counselling teachers provided the following evidence to support their position:

“To address the needs of orphaned learners, teachers need to be well-versed in life orientation skills. Orphans’ attendance in school would be aided by this. If they continue their education, they will acquire the knowledge and certifications required to contribute positively to society.”

Similar to this, one of the school administrators proposed the following measures to protect orphaned learners from absenteeism and school dropout:

“Primary schools and Non-Governmental Organizations must work together to help orphans who struggled to attend school receive the qualifications they need. So that orphans can finish their basic education, schools should foster an environment that is more supportive of their needs.”

Orphaned learners that participated in focus groups agreed that providing necessary school supplies by non-governmental organizations and creating a positive learning environment at the school might stop absences and school dropout. Similar findings were made by Darling-Hammond, et al. (2024), in their study, which found that teachers’ life orientation training is essential for improving their attitudes toward working with orphans as well as their knowledge and skills. A special curriculum for orphans is required to address four areas of psycho-social support, including emotional, social, spiritual, and physical wellbeing. This research study’s findings, which established the need for such a curriculum to prevent orphaned learners from dropping out of school, were echoed by Nkhoma (2013). For a child to develop in a meaningful and advantageous way, they are necessary components. Previous researches, such as those by Kurebwa & Mabhandu (2015); Mupa & Chinooneka (2016) revealed insights on methods that may be implemented to prevent school dropout. From the discussion above, it is clear that providing educational necessities like school fees, uniforms, and stationery, developing a special curriculum relevant to orphans’ needs, and creating a welcoming environment that takes orphans’ needs into account can help to ensure that orphaned learners do not leave school without the knowledge and credentials they need to succeed in society.

CONCLUSION

The results of the case study demonstrated the existence of a diagnostic assessment in the secondary schools for locating learners who are falling behind in specific subject areas. The best practices, negative practices, and solutions implemented were all highlighted. The latter was brought on by a lack of knowledge, inefficient resource use, and antiquated equipment. The identified continuous assessment’s best practices were used to build the proposed assessment. This evaluation approach is used to determine whether learners in Zimbabwe’s secondary schools are proficient. The identification procedure should begin in the learner’s classroom and go on to the clinical setting, where instruments appropriate for the learner’s surroundings and at their level will be employed. Learners who are falling behind in a particular area will be the subject of identification. This needs to go on throughout diagnostic testing to confirm the two basic identification steps. As a result, the connection between identification and intervention is guaranteed. As part of the

ongoing identification process, the intervention is included. Although the evaluation methodology is not prescriptive, it does adhere to the humanistic teaching philosophy that learners who are falling behind can still be taught through the use of individualized lesson plans in inclusive classrooms. However, the Humanistic Teaching intervention was implemented for a short period, which may not have been sufficient to produce long-term effects. Moreso teacher bias, when implementing the humanistic teaching approach may have had biases that influenced the outcome.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the conclusions, the following suggestions are made:

1. All secondary schools should put the performance lag address program into practice. Schools will be able to focus on learners who are falling behind in their educational attainment as a result. Before implementing the program in other schools, a pilot program in a few schools should be started in the Chimanmani District of the Manicaland Province.
2. To include the best methods of humanistic teaching in the performance lag remedy program, staff development should be carried out for all secondary teachers.
3. For the purpose of leading the whole school assessment program, schools should establish identification committees made up of the head teacher, classroom teachers, and PLAP instructors. Through termly reports from school heads, the Provincial Education Director and District School Inspector should also be kept updated on the committee's progress.
4. Special needs education training, particularly in the area of evaluation, is required for all secondary school instructors. In-house training programs for PLAP implementers, tutors, and educational psychologists can be created with the assistance of regional institutions.
5. It is important to identify all learners in the classroom, as well as those who are falling behind academically, have general learning disabilities, and are creative, talented, or gifted.
6. A campaign to raise awareness in the community and schools should be run with the goal of changing learners' perspectives in order to create more child-friendly learning environments.

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