



What 'next' for adolescent girls on an alternative education pathway in Zimbabwe?

Faculty of Wellbeing Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2024

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Project description

School

Education, Childhood, Youth & Sport

Members

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Aim

The PhD will explore the longer-term impacts of development interventions in girls' education.

Background

For the past five years, WELS colleagues have been working on an alternative education programme in Zimbabwe for adolescent girls who cannot attend formal school. The key message to the education community from the girls in the research strands of the programme is: *'stop trying to change our lives to fit your education system... change the education system to fit our lives'*. This is precisely what the alternative education programme attempted to do, and we

have a large body of [evidence around its immediate impact](#). But what 'next' for these girls' lives?

We are exploring their post-transitional pathways through a small amount of follow-on funding (which enables a small-scale piece of research, to be completed by early 2026). A PhD project starting in 2024 would complement, extend and strengthen this work as well as enabling more detailed and creative analysis of the quantitative data.

Methodology

This would be a mixed methods PhD that would:

- facilitate new and broader insights from the existing longitudinal quantitative data set on girls' aspirations and opportunities (generated through the five years of the project) and new data generated through the programme extension. This part of the research would draw support from the quantitative analysis expertise from Dr Keetie Roelen (supervision team).
- build on these insights to develop a qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of girls (now young women) who have graduated from the programme. This part of the research would draw on the creative, qualitative expertise of Dr Alison Buckler and Professor Liz Chamberlain (supervision team) and from across the Centre for the Study of Global Development (CSGD).

We would be open to an original conceptual framework that draws on the interests and expertise of the student, or a continued alignment with /

expansion of the socio-cultural and capability approach focused frames that have driven the girls' aspirations study so far.

Contribution

Motivated by accountability agendas, a need to secure trust between organisations, donors and the public, and a desire to increase effectiveness of and learning from projects, monitoring and evaluation forms a central pillar of development interventions. However, a core challenge is that (most often) when the project ends, the learning ends. This PhD would contribute to a rare opportunity to extend the exploration of the impact of an intervention in a crucial area of development interest: alternative provision for girls' education.

It will contribute to the Faculty's established and expanding expertise in alternative education in lower-income countries, and contribute to the evidence base for alternative pathways as a positive and genuine alternative to formal schooling for some of the most marginalised children. It will support and enrich the research agenda focused on developing new ways of thinking about the hoped-for and possible futures for adolescent girls' who have missed a significant amount of formal school, and the kinds of learning opportunities that are valued in pursuit of these futures.

It would also align with the CSGD's commitment to researching across boundaries by combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, as well as expertise from across the CSGD's 'learners and learning', 'poverty and social protection' and 'youth and transitions' research hubs.

PhD project

This PhD project enables a rare opportunity for a student to explore the 'what next' of a development intervention, underpinned and supported by a rich analysis of existing and new data about the intervention. The student would be ideally supported by Dr Alison Buckler and Professor Liz Chamberlain who have generated a body of qualitative data and outputs from the girls' education programme over five years, as well as supporting quantitative data outputs through the project's monitoring and evaluation programme. The PhD, and introduction of Dr Keetie Roelen to the team, will complement this existing work by enabling a richer intellectual analysis of the quantitative data. Ultimately it will enable an extension of insights into girls' lives several years beyond graduation from the programme.

The student will benefit from connections to and engagement with the collaborating NGO partner, facilitating access to participants and local expertise about the programme.

