

**The relationship between education quality policies and lived experiences of  
orphaned learners**

**by**

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***“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” Philippians 4:13.***

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African orphaned learners in relation to their educational experiences with the view of establishing whether the type of education received and the inferred quality of that education correlate with official conceptions of quality education as articulated in government policies. The study interrogates policy intentions geared to improving the quality of education in South African schools and juxtaposes the intended policy with the lived experiences of orphaned learners.

This is a qualitative case study focusing specifically on four African primary school learners. Data were collected from interviews, observations and written stories of orphaned learners, as well as interviews with the orphaned learners' teachers and caretakers.

The claim I make in this study is that all learners living in impoverished communities and subjected to the kind of disadvantages in operation in their home environment are at risk of education of an inferior quality. However, being an orphan can aggravate this in that orphaned learners bring to school peculiar attributes which would produce outcomes that differ from those envisaged in policy documents. The findings of the study indicate that:

- (a) the behaviour displayed by orphaned learners, the emotional changes resulting from changing family circumstances, grieving the loss of parents and fear of losing the caregiver may impact negatively on the intended quality of education
- (b) the socioeconomic and cultural contexts of orphaned learners have an influence on the received quality of education
- (c) orphaned learners raised in sibling-headed households, where the primary educators (e.g. parents or surrogate parents) are non-existent, have impoverished educational experiences
- (d) the support provided by the extended family can contribute positively to the educational experiences of orphaned learners
- (e) the community can serve as a critical resource in enhancing the educational experiences of orphaned learners.

Finally, the study indicates that, by studying the lived experiences of African orphans, a better understanding of the quality of education received is made possible and this in turn could influence the conceptualisation of quality education and support structures required to achieve this ideal at higher levels of the education system.



## Key Words

- Orphan
- Lived experiences
- Policy
- Quality education
- Socio-cultural theory
- Learners
- Sibling-headed household
- Extended family
- Educational experiences
- Caretakers

## Acronyms

DoE:	Department of Education
EFA:	Education For All
NNSF:	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RNCS:	Revised National Curriculum Statement
WSE:	Whole School Evaluation
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

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