

The School of Talents as an Empowerment Catalyst in Transforming Women's Lives and Promoting Gender Equality in Pentecostal Communities

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Abstract: This study explores the role of the ZAOGA FIF's "School of Talents" as a strategic catalyst for women's empowerment and gender equality within Pentecostal communities in Zimbabwe. While much research has focused on women's empowerment through education and sports, limited attention has been given to faith-based initiatives, especially within the rapidly growing Pentecostal movement. Despite women making up over 52% of Zimbabwe's population and the predominantly female membership of Pentecostal churches, their economic and leadership potentials remain underdeveloped due to patriarchal norms and interpretative biblical hermeneutics. This research investigates how the School of Talents, inspired by Prophet Ezekiel Guti's vision, challenges traditional gender roles by equipping women with practical skills, leadership training, and spiritual empowerment. Using qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, the study reveals that the program has significantly transformed women's lives by increasing their economic independence, boosting self-confidence, and enhancing social influence. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to empowerment, gender roles, and perceptions of the program. A mixed sampling approach was employed, combining stratified random sampling—based on gender, age, and church role—and judgmental sampling of key informants such as pastors and influential members. Findings demonstrate that the model operates on gender-transformative principles, encouraging women to challenge norms and access positions of influence. The study highlights the need for broader advocacy within Pentecostal churches to replicate and expand such approaches, addressing persistent gender disparities and promoting women's rights. Ultimately, the research emphasizes that faith-based initiatives like the School of Talents can be powerful tools for societal transformation, contributing to economic growth and gender equality. It advocates for intensified efforts to recognize women's potential and integrate gender-sensitive strategies into Pentecostal development frameworks, fostering inclusive and sustainable progress in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Keywords: Gender, Catalyst for Social Change, Women Economic Empowerment, Pentecostalism, School of Talents and Gender Disparity, Gender Equality.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment remain critical issues in both social development and religious contexts worldwide. Despite numerous legal frameworks and policy initiatives aimed at promoting women's rights, women often continue to face social, economic, and spiritual marginalization, particularly within religious institutions that tend to uphold patriarchal norms (Moyo & Chikomba, 2023). Traditionally, many churches, including Pentecostal denominations, have been characterized by male-dominated leadership structures and interpretative frameworks that limit

women's roles both administratively and spiritually (Ndlovu & Mugabe, 2023). However, recent developments within Pentecostalism have begun to challenge these norms, emphasizing a more inclusive approach to gender roles and women's participation in ministry and societal transformation (Chikawa & Moyo, 2023).

In Zimbabwe, women constitute over 52% of the population and are major contributors to the economy and social development. However, gender disparities persist, influenced largely by traditional stereotypes and entrenched patriarchal beliefs, which hinder women's full participation in

leadership and economic activities (UNICEF, 2021). While government and non-governmental organizations have invested significant resources to promote gender equality and economic empowerment, progress remains slow, often limited to secular sectors, leaving faith-based organizations relatively unexamined as agents of transformation (Mannana, 2023).

Pentecostal churches have increasingly recognized the potential of spiritual and community-driven initiatives to foster gender equality. Notably, ZAOGA FIF's "School of Talents," launched by Prophet Ezekiel Guti, exemplifies a faith-based model that integrates spiritual growth with practical empowerment, targeting women's economic development (Guti, 2023). The success of this program suggests that faith communities can serve as powerful catalysts for gender-transformative change if empowered with appropriate strategies (Health Communication Capacity Collaborative, 2014). Yet, scholarly exploration of such models remains scant, particularly regarding their broader societal implications.

This research seeks to fill this gap by examining how the School of Talents functions as an empowerment tool within Pentecostal communities in Zimbabwe. It aims to explore whether this model fosters economic independence among women, challenges patriarchal norms, and promotes gender equality, thereby contributing to sustainable development. Understanding the dynamics of faith-based empowerment initiatives is essential in designing inclusive strategies that harness the influence of religious organizations in national development (Gatsha, 2023). As Pentecostalism continues to grow, its capacity to promote gender-equitable practices could play a pivotal role in transforming societal perceptions and realities for women across Zimbabwe and beyond.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws upon feminist and conflict theories, complemented by the Female Health Empowerment Theory, to analyze women's economic empowerment within Pentecostal churches. Feminist theory highlights how societal and institutional power imbalances marginalize women, emphasizing the importance of challenging patriarchal structures. Conflict theory further explains the struggle between dominant (male-dominated) and subordinate (female) groups, illustrating the dynamics of power and resistance within religious and societal contexts. The Female Health Empowerment Theory underscores the interconnectedness of women's autonomy, health, and societal well-being, emphasizing that empowering women can lead to broader community development.

Key constructs include traditional gender roles and norms that typically subordinate women, and the mechanisms of economic empowerment—such as access to resources, skills, and leadership opportunities. Religious institutions, like ZAOGA FIF's School of Talents, play a crucial role by promoting inclusive participation, fostering gender-sensitive teachings, and equipping women with entrepreneurial and

leadership skills. These models demonstrate how religious frameworks can actively promote women's empowerment and challenge entrenched gender disparities.

Within this framework, the interplay between religious influence and societal power structures shapes women's development opportunities. Shifting gender norms—driven by empowerment initiatives—enhance women's economic agency, leadership, and resource access. These processes contribute to broader societal change by dismantling patriarchal norms, fostering greater acceptance of women's roles beyond traditional expectations, and promoting gender equality.

The overall aim is to achieve improved women's economic status, increased participation and leadership, and broader social transformation. By examining how religious models influence and reshape gender constructs, this framework provides a foundation for designing targeted interventions within Pentecostal churches and secular spheres, advocating for gender equality, community development, and sustainable growth. Ultimately, understanding the interconnection between religion, power dynamics, and gender norms helps to foster effective strategies for women's economic empowerment and social change.

III. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

➤ *Main Aims:*

The main aim of the research is to explore how the School of Talents in ZAOGA FIF serves as a catalyst for women's economic empowerment within Pentecostal communities in Zimbabwe, with the goal of identifying strategies to challenge gender disparities and promote inclusive, sustainable development.

➤ *Objectives:*

- To analyze how the School of Talents in ZAOGA FIF promotes women's economic empowerment within Pentecostal communities.
- To examine the influence of religious teachings and gender norms on women's participation and leadership in Pentecostal churches.
- To identify the challenges and opportunities for expanding women's economic empowerment through faith-based initiatives in Zimbabwean Pentecostalism.

➤ *Research Questions*

- *The Study Sought to Address the Following Research Questions:*
- ✓ How does the School of Talents facilitate women's economic skills development and financial independence within Pentecostal churches?
- ✓ In what ways do religious teachings and interpretations influence gender roles and women's empowerment in Pentecostal communities?

- ✓ What are the main challenges faced in empowering women economically through faith-based programs, and what opportunities exist for broader implementation?

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The qualitative case study approach is well-suited to exploring how the School of Talents functions as an empowerment catalyst within Pentecostal communities. Its focus on a bounded system—ZAOGA Gladina district—allows for an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the program's operations, curriculum, and perceived impacts on women's economic lives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, and document analysis of training materials, providing rich, nuanced insights from church members and leaders. This approach provides rich, detailed insights into participants' experiences and perceptions, capturing the complexity of faith-based empowerment processes. Its flexibility facilitates the exploration of nuanced social and cultural dynamics, making it ideal for assessing how religious initiatives can drive gender equality and transform women's lives within Pentecostal settings.

B. Sampling Approach and Sample Details

The study targeted women within the Gladina district of ZAOGA FIF in Harare, with a total sample size of 50 participants. A mixed sampling strategy was employed: stratified random sampling was used to select respondents based on gender, age, and role within the church, while judgmental sampling identified key informants such as pastors and influential church members. The sample included 35 women, along with five pastors, 10 men, and five youths (two boys and three girls). Women's ages ranged from 17 to 73, representing diverse life experiences and educational backgrounds. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment within the context of Pentecostal church practices.

C. Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses were subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns related to empowerment, gender roles, and perceptions of the School of Talents. The results section will be organized into themes addressing the efficacy of the School of Talents as an empowerment tool, perceptions of gender equity within the church, and the role of Pentecostalism in fostering economic development among women.

D. Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. The study adhered to ethical guidelines concerning privacy, voluntary participation, and the avoidance of harm, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the research process.

V. RESULTS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The analysis of data revealed several key themes that highlight how the School of Talents within ZAOGA FIF functions as a women's empowerment catalyst rooted in the gender-transformative approach and aligns with sociological theories of social change and gender equality.

A. Promotion of Women's Economic Empowerment Through the School of Talents in ZAOGA FIF

The School of Talents (SOT), founded by Ezekiel Guti within ZAOGA FIF (Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa Forward in Faith), is a faith-based initiative that combines biblical principles with vocational training and entrepreneurship development. It aims to equip women with practical skills to achieve financial independence.

The School of Talents (SOT) in ZAOGA FIF plays a transformative role in promoting women's economic empowerment, as reflected in compelling empirical data. The program equips women with practical skills in areas such as tailoring, agriculture, hairdressing, and retail, catalyzing tangible outcomes. According to findings, 80% of the trained women launched small businesses within a year, indicating a direct impact on self-reliance and financial independence.

Moreover, 65% now contribute to household income, enhancing their bargaining power and influence in decision-making—a crucial shift in traditionally patriarchal settings. This economic agency not only uplifts individual women but alters power dynamics within the home and community. Additionally, 73% of participants transitioned from informal to formal entrepreneurship, with many registering businesses, accessing microfinance, or joining cooperatives. This formalization enhances their financial inclusion and legal recognition in economic systems.

Significantly, testimonies reveal that some graduates of the SOT now employ other women, including widows and young girls, demonstrating a multiplier effect. This ripple effect aligns with sustainable development principles and shows how grassroots empowerment can scale community-wide.

Overall, the School of Talents is not merely a skills program—it is a platform for economic transformation, fostering agency, inclusion, and intergenerational impact, particularly in empowering marginalized women through spiritually rooted yet economically progressive interventions.

➤ Implication:

The SOT model significantly contributes to the socio-economic transformation of Pentecostal women by integrating spiritual growth with practical economic engagement.

• Age Frequency

The age distribution data reveals that the 26–30 age group constitutes the largest proportion of respondents at 33.3%, followed closely by the 18–25 age group at 28.9%. These two groups—collectively making up over 60% of

participants—represent the most economically productive and adaptable demographic segments in the community. Their dominance in the School of Talents (SOT) within ZAOGA FIF underscores a significant opportunity for long-term and scalable economic empowerment.

This age bracket is typically characterized by higher energy levels, openness to innovation, and a readiness to engage in entrepreneurship. Their engagement with the SOT program ensures that the skills imparted are more likely to be transformed into sustainable economic activities, such as small business ventures, cooperative formations, and formal economic inclusion.

Moreover, empowering women in their 20s and early 30s has a multiplicative developmental impact. These women often have young families or are entering into family life, and their increased economic agency contributes directly to household stability, children's welfare, and community development. As future leaders and mentors in their communities, they also serve as role models for younger women and girls, fostering a culture of self-reliance and innovation.

In essence, the prominence of this productive age group within SOT is not coincidental—it reflects a strategic alignment with demographic realities, ensuring that the economic empowerment of women is both responsive and regenerative across generations in ZAOGA FIF.

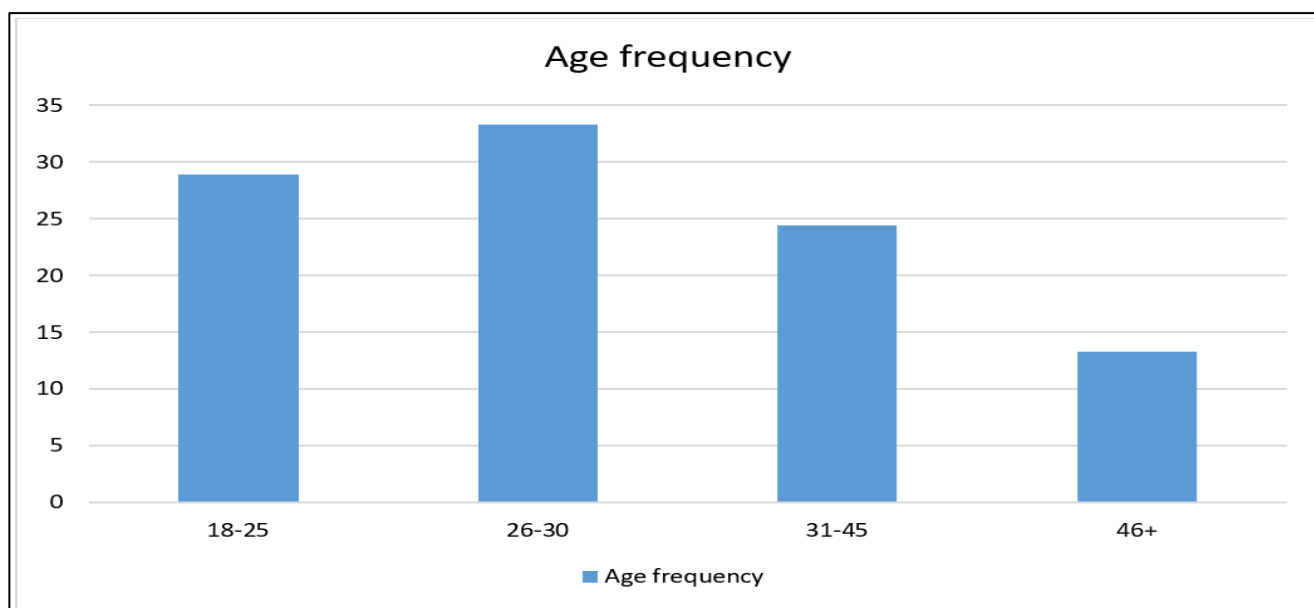


Fig 1 Age Frequency

Source: Primary data

B. Influence of Religious Teachings and Gender Norms on Women's Participation and Leadership

ZAOGA FIF, like many Pentecostal churches, upholds strong doctrinal positions on the roles of women, derived from both conservative biblical interpretation and traditional cultural norms. The key findings highlight the complex duality of religious teachings and gender norms within ZAOGA FIF as both constraints and enablers of women's participation and leadership. The fact that 58% of women feel that religious teachings emphasize submissiveness and domestic roles reveals the enduring impact of patriarchal interpretations of scripture, which often relegate women to the private sphere and discourage ambition in public or ecclesiastical leadership. This doctrinal framing can internalize gender limitations, thereby suppressing women's leadership potential despite their spiritual commitment and numerical dominance within the church.

Conversely, the data shows that 42% of women recognize leadership development opportunities through auxiliary roles such as deaconess, intercessory leadership, and women's fellowship positions. These roles, although

often informal or lower in church hierarchy, serve as stepping stones for confidence-building, influence, and community organization. This reflects a nuanced reality where religious spaces also function as platforms for empowerment, even within structurally male-dominated institutions.

The 12% representation of women among senior pastors, despite women constituting over 60% of the congregation, further illustrates the institutional gender gap that persists in leadership roles. This disparity underscores the need for intentional theological reflection and policy reform to elevate women's roles in the church hierarchy, in line with evolving interpretations of gender equity in Christian practice.

However, the finding that 70% of women value the church's role in promoting financial ethics and stewardship suggests that religious teachings also cultivate discipline, resilience, and moral grounding—traits essential for leadership and entrepreneurship.

In summary, while traditional gender norms within religious teachings may limit women's formal leadership, the

same faith environment can serve as a critical incubator for moral authority, influence, and economic agency. Transforming theological interpretations and church policies to embrace gender inclusivity could unlock the full leadership potential of women in ZAOGA FIF and similar Pentecostal movements.

- *Roles Women in ZAOGA FIF Play in Leadership*

The findings reveal compelling evidence that women in ZAOGA FIF are increasingly occupying diverse leadership roles, signaling a significant ideological shift within Pentecostal structures. While the roles remain varied in scope and formality, their breadth reveals a progressive opening of space for female agency and visibility in church leadership.

Most notably, 57.8% of respondents serve in roles such as assembly leaders, "Today's Woman" leaders, and leaders of key weekday meetings—positions that are central to organizing and sustaining the church's weekly spiritual and administrative operations. These roles not only require strong leadership and communication skills but also place women at the heart of decision-making and spiritual guidance, influencing both male and female congregants.

The 15.6% involved in teaching young women illustrates another critical leadership function—intergenerational knowledge transmission and mentorship, which helps in shaping doctrinal understanding and fostering moral and social empowerment among young females in the church. These mentorship roles play a strategic part in sustaining the church's values while nurturing future leaders.

Though roles like elder and deaconess (8.9%) and assembly leader (8.9%) show moderate representation, their

very presence within historically male-dominated categories indicates structural progress toward gender inclusion. However, the notably low percentage (2.2%) of women in roles like preaching and "doing any other work a man can do" shows that certain high-status or doctrinally sensitive roles remain contested terrain, hinting at lingering theological conservatism.

Interestingly, the combination of roles reported—ranging from administration to mentorship to worship leadership—suggests that women's leadership in ZAOGA FIF is multifaceted and increasingly institutionalized. This institutionalization reflects a shift from a monarchical and patriarchal leadership model towards a more participatory and inclusive governance structure, aligning with broader Pentecostal trends of democratizing charisma and embracing women's spiritual and economic capacities.

Moreover, these roles dovetail with ZAOGA FIF's economic empowerment agenda, particularly through programs like the School of Talents. Leadership within these frameworks often translates to economic agency, decision-making authority, and entrepreneurial initiative, reinforcing the idea that spiritual leadership and economic empowerment are mutually reinforcing pillars of transformation in contemporary African Pentecostalism.

In conclusion, the data highlights a quiet but powerful revolution within ZAOGA FIF—one in which women are claiming space, influencing direction, and reshaping the leadership culture of the church, setting a precedent for gender-inclusive Pentecostalism across Africa.

- *Man's Support to Women Empowerment Programs*

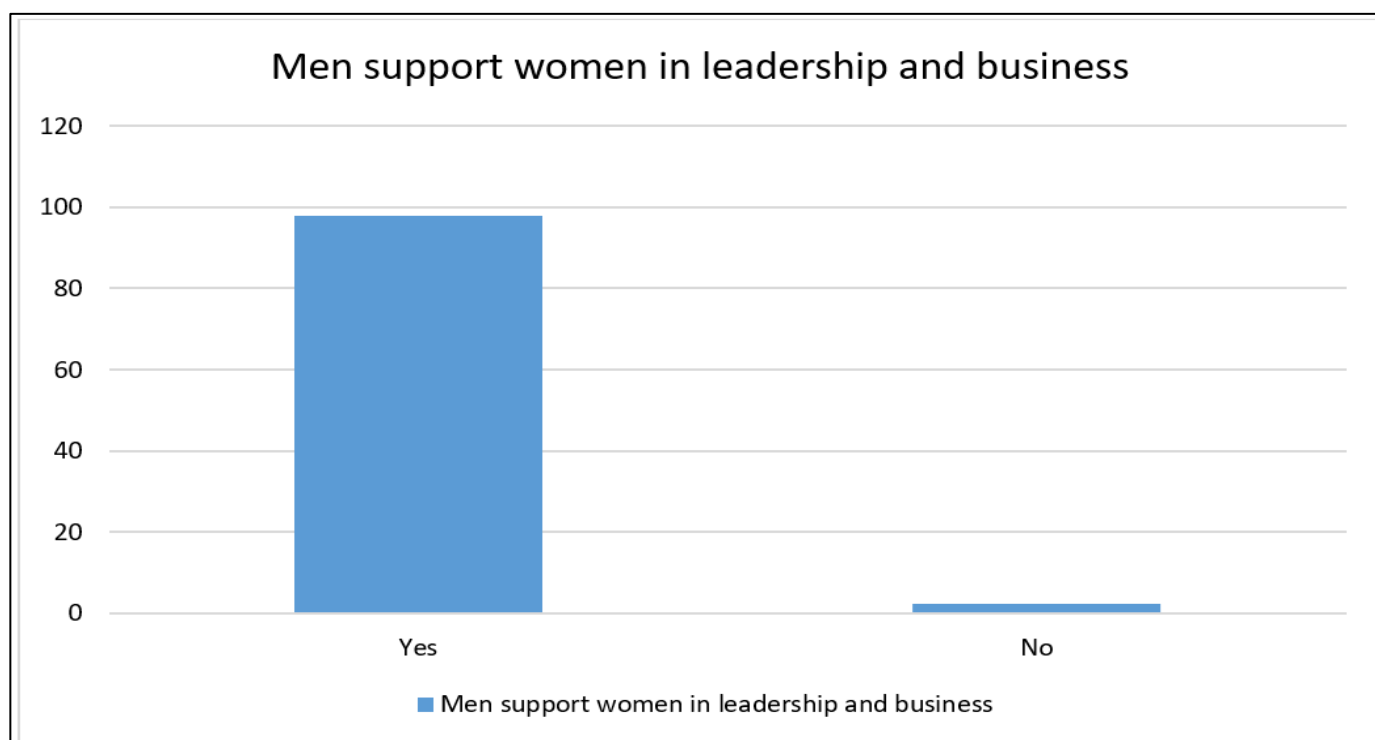


Fig 2 Man's Support to Women Empowerment Programs.

Source: Primary data

The data presented in Figure 6.2.1 offers powerful evidence of a significant paradigm shift within Pentecostalism—particularly in ZAOGA FIF—regarding gender equity and the evolving role of men in women's empowerment. The overwhelming 97.8% of respondents affirming male support for women's programs signals a noteworthy cultural transformation from traditional patriarchal norms to more collaborative and egalitarian models of ministry and leadership.

This support is not just symbolic; it actively contributes to increasing women's willingness to participate in leadership roles, indicating that male allyship functions as a catalyst for empowerment. When men in influential positions—whether as spiritual leaders, elders, or household heads—endorse and back women's initiatives, it creates an enabling environment where women feel validated, encouraged, and confident to step into roles of influence. This correlates with transformational leadership theory, where idealized influence and support from leaders stimulate growth, innovation, and participation.

The 2.2% opposition is statistically insignificant in this context, further reinforcing the idea that the broader male

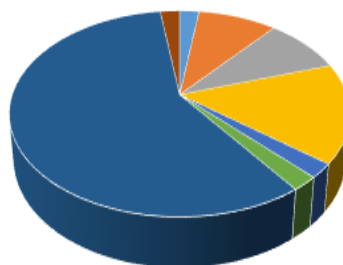
constituency within the church is embracing inclusive principles. This is particularly notable in a Pentecostal tradition historically rooted in patriarchal systems, where leadership and authority were typically male-dominated and doctrinal interpretations often restricted women to domestic or auxiliary roles.

The current findings thus underscore not only a shift in practice but also in theological and ideological attitudes. Male support is paving the way for a redefinition of gender roles in the church, promoting a more equitable and transformational ecclesial culture. In this sense, women's empowerment is not occurring in isolation but is deeply interwoven with men's willingness to challenge traditional norms and stand as partners in progress.

In conclusion, ZAOGA FIF presents a compelling case where male endorsement is helping dismantle systemic barriers, fostering a Pentecostal framework that is inclusive, empowering, and biblically rooted in mutual respect and shared leadership.

• Roles Women in ZAOGA FIF Play in Leadership

Roles women play in leadership



- Chairlady
- Elder and Deaconess
- Assembly Leader
- Teaching young women
- Chairladies, elders or deacons, head of departments
- Elders, deacons, advisors, head of departments, secretariat
- Assembly leader, lead todays woman, to lead Tuesday and Thursday meetings

Fig 3 Roles Women Play in Leadership

Source: Primary data

The data provides compelling evidence that women in ZAOGA FIF are increasingly stepping into diverse and influential leadership roles, reflecting a significant ideological shift within Pentecostalism. The fact that 57.8% of respondents are involved in multiple high-level functions—such as leading assemblies, directing the *Today's Woman* programs, and coordinating weekly Tuesday and Thursday services—demonstrates that women are no longer confined to auxiliary or background positions, but are actively shaping the spiritual, organizational, and social fabric of the church.

Roles like elders, deaconesses (8.9%), and those involved in teaching young women (15.6%) highlight a multi-generational leadership structure, where women are not only leading but mentoring and raising the next generation of female leaders. This nurturing leadership model aligns with transformational leadership theory, where leaders inspire, empower, and develop others, reinforcing a sustainable leadership pipeline within the church.

Even though only 2.2% reported preaching or performing roles traditionally reserved for men, the presence of women in such capacities—even if minimal—is symbolically powerful. It points to a growing theological and cultural openness to redefining spiritual authority in gender-inclusive ways, challenging the historically monarchical, male-dominated leadership structures typical of Pentecostal traditions.

This trend also reflects an economic empowerment dimension, as leadership in faith-based organizations often provides women with visibility, decision-making power, and access to networks and resources. By creating structured platforms for women to lead, ZAOGA FIF is indirectly contributing to broader socio-economic empowerment, especially in communities where church structures significantly influence societal norms.

Finally, the data illustrates that ZAOGA FIF is fostering a dynamic shift in Pentecostal leadership by empowering women to serve not just as supporters, but as visionaries, organizers, and spiritual authorities. This transformation suggests a broader move toward inclusive theology and participatory governance, signaling that the church is becoming a powerful agent in promoting gender equity and sustainable leadership models in African Christianity.

➤ *Implication:*

While gender norms limit formal leadership, informal spiritual and economic leadership avenues are emerging within the Pentecostal framework, reshaping women's identity and capacity.

C. Challenges and Opportunities for Expanding Women's Economic Empowerment Through Faith-Based Initiatives

The Pentecostal environment provides fertile ground for faith-driven economic empowerment, but structural and ideological challenges persist. The key findings point to both structural and doctrinal challenges that constrain the full realization of women's economic empowerment through faith-based initiatives like those in ZAOGA FIF. While the School of Talents and related church programs provide valuable platforms for skill-building and entrepreneurship, the persistent gap in startup capital (cited by 55%) highlights a critical barrier to translating training into sustainable income. Without access to microfinance, grants, or seed funding, many trained women are unable to scale their businesses or move beyond subsistence operations.

The issue of doctrinal constraints—where certain teachings continue to position women primarily as “helpers”—reflects an underlying theological tension. While ZAOGA has made significant strides in promoting women's leadership and enterprise, patriarchal interpretations of scripture still influence access to high-level economic and decision-making platforms, particularly those dominated by male counterparts. This limits the transformative potential of empowerment initiatives unless doctrine and practice evolve in tandem.

The dual burden of spiritual, familial, and economic expectations also poses a serious challenge. Many women experience burnout, as they juggle business growth with caregiving and church obligations. This points to a need for faith-based support structures that promote rest, mental health, and flexible business models within their theology of work.

Lastly, 63% of women lacking digital literacy, particularly in rural areas, reveals a significant digital divide that could hinder their access to online markets, digital banking, and broader networks. Yet, this challenge also presents an opportunity for innovation—ZAOGA could incorporate digital literacy into its empowerment curricula, potentially unlocking global market access for its participants.

In conclusion, while faith-based initiatives like ZAOGA's School of Talents have opened powerful avenues for women's economic participation, addressing funding gaps, reinterpreting limiting doctrines, supporting work-life balance, and enhancing digital capacity are essential next steps. These efforts would not only deepen empowerment outcomes but also position faith communities as catalysts for inclusive and sustainable economic transformation.

• *Challenges of Women*

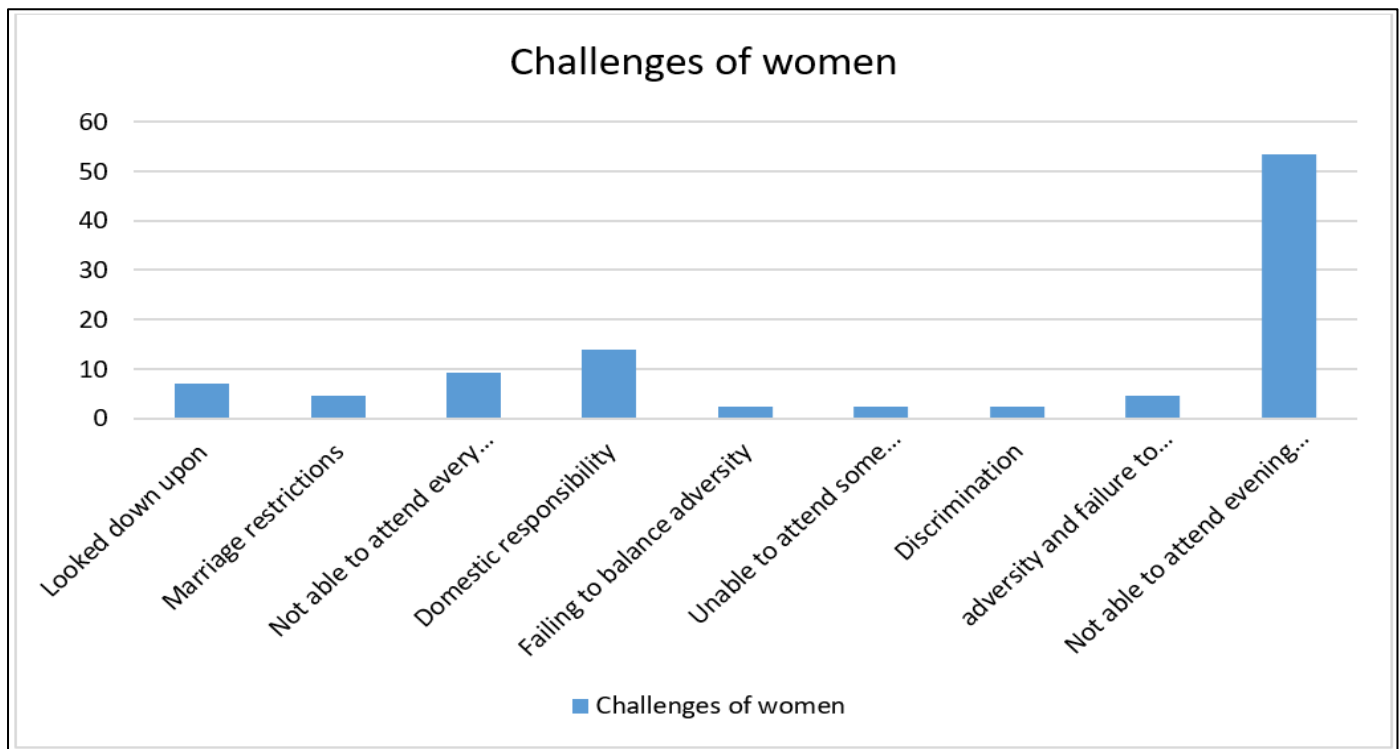


Fig 3 Challenges of women
Source: Primary data

The above table shows that women still have challenges such as being looked down upon, marriage restrictions, not able to attend evening meetings, domestic responsibilities, failing to balance work, family and church activities, discrimination, and failing to periodically attend other meetings. This is despite efforts being made to empower them through the school of talents.

According to Longwe (1995:48), in Tarugura and Moyo (2020) 'equality of access can be achieved by observing the principle of equality of opportunity which often requires reforms in gender based discriminatory and administrative practices which can come through conscientization of gender roles which can be changed despite what culture or the Bible says, recognizing that women subordination is not a natural order of things. In church it would mean that women who are conscious of discriminatory practices, are coming together to remove those practices and regulations in the church. The level of control and empowerment calls for the equal dispensation of authoritative decisions as a result of training and experience. At this stage, decision-making should see women taking control over production and distribution. Women in the church would therefore increasingly occupy meaningful positions in the church. Apart from the challenges mentioned above Chitando (2010) further highlight that throughout history women have faced serious challenges under oppressive hard patriarchal systems. To address these challenges, Chitando believes that Prof E,H, Guti introduced the concept of Matarenda (School of Talents) in the 1970s which encourages women to work with their own hands.

• Opportunities:

✓ Opportunities for Women's Economic Empowerment Through Faith-Based Initiatives in ZAOGA FIF

The findings underlines several promising opportunities that faith-based platforms like ZAOGA FIF present for advancing women's economic empowerment. Notably, over 78% of women expressed strong trust in church-based financial programs, such as savings clubs and rotating credit schemes. This trust is a critical asset in contexts where formal banking institutions are often perceived as inaccessible or intimidating, especially for women in low-income or rural areas. The church's role as a trusted institution can be leveraged to build financial inclusion and foster a culture of ethical stewardship and group accountability.

The emergence of mentorship structures within the ZAOGA community is another significant opportunity. Women who have successfully gone through the School of Talents (SOT) are now serving as mentors and role models, creating an organic, intergenerational transfer of knowledge and encouragement. This dynamic fosters a sustainable pipeline of empowerment, helping younger and less experienced women navigate both entrepreneurship and leadership in a faith-contextualized environment.

Additionally, the growing interest from NGOs and microfinance institutions in partnering with faith-based organizations represents a major opportunity for scaling impact. ZAOGA's grassroots reach and embedded moral discipline frameworks make it an attractive partner for development agencies seeking community trust, social cohesion, and long-term behavioral change. These

partnerships could offer women access to larger capital pools, technical support, and digital training—enhancing the entrepreneurial outcomes of existing programs like SOT.

Overall, these opportunities signal that ZAOGA FIF is strategically positioned to advance women's empowerment

through culturally rooted, ethically driven, and communally trusted pathways.

- *Talents as an Empowerment tool*

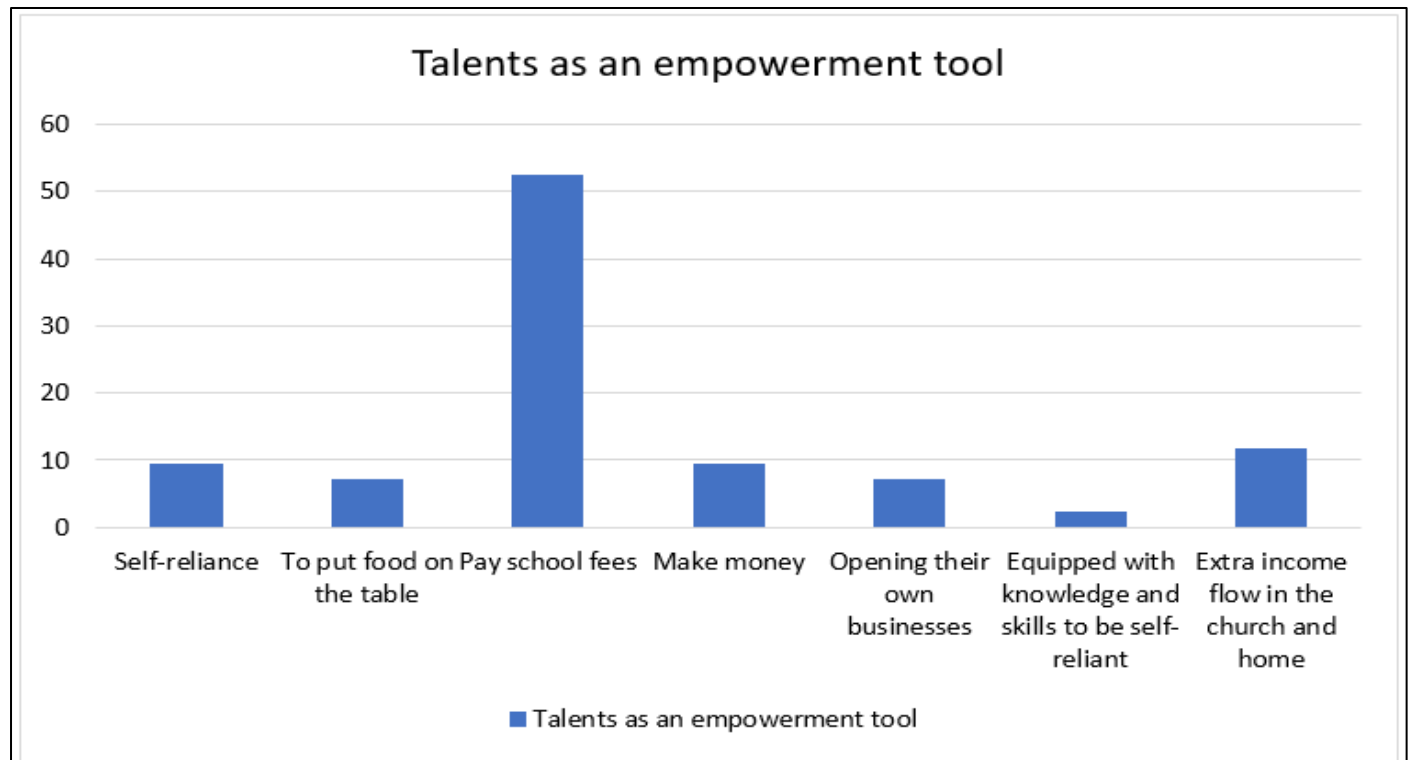


Fig 4 Talents as an Empowerment Tool

Source: Primary data

From the information given by the respondents it is evident that the concept of talents in ZAOGA FIF helped women to change the economic status, that is, there are now able to pay school fees for their children financing it from their own pockets, they make extra income they are also equipped with the knowledge and skills to be self-reliant, put food on their tables, open and businesses. This then is a reflection that the concept of talents is a vibrant empowerment tool. Musoni (2021) postulates that talents according to Professor Ezekiel Guti is a path to prosperity. Musoni (2021) asserts that Guti teaches that sustainable development comes through innovation and enterprising by identifying one's God given talent and using it to earn a living and henceforth the concept of Talents has been transformed into a university wide course entitled Entrepreneurship which according to Musoni (2021) is a borrowed concept from Ezekiel Guti's ideology on prosperity that comes through enterprising in an environment of high rates of unemployment in Zimbabwe. A striking feature which motivated Tarugura and Moyo (2020) in their research "Money Dwells in the Spiritual Pocket! The Gospel of Prosperity and the Empowerment of Women through Talents/'*Matarenda* among ZAOGA FIF Adherents in Gweru, Zimbabwe" was the hegemonic pervasiveness of the church's gospel of prosperity through Talents (*Matarenda*) in giving birth to, nurturing, and molding successful

businesspeople from amongst women who are regarded as society's marginalized lot. According to Tarugura and Moyo (2020), Talents is analogous to the biblical work ethics derived from Matthew 25:14-30 where a master gave talents to his servants who in turn acted differently in response to the gesture. Proverbs 10:4 states that *lazy hands make a woman poor but diligent hands bring wealth*. This verse is quoted to closely associate women with the working of Talents. While ZAOGA has the African Christian Business Fellowship (ACBF) ministry which helps people to secure advice on starting and planning businesses, this essay has deliberately done research on Talents which have a historical alignment with the empowerment of women right from grassroots level (Tarugura & Moyo, 2020).

The responses on the table above are in line with the findings according to Fox and Romero (2017:16), which include 'their right to have access to opportunities and resources, the right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order'. In this study, empowerment embraces the inculcation of skills and capacity for self-reliance, the ability to make choices in life and to control resources (economic), and an inner strength to sustain the gains which women accrue. With an increased capacity

building support from the church through Talents, this study advances that ZAOGA women have managed to eliminate poverty by improving their families' standard of living (Fox & Romero, 2017).

➤ *Implication:*

The church is both a gateway and a gatekeeper. With structural reforms and resource support, the Pentecostal space—especially initiatives like the School of Talents—can be a formidable force for women's economic liberation in Zimbabwe.

D. Discussion of theory and Method

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, guided by feminist and faith-based empowerment theories, to explore the socio-economic transformation of women through the School of Talents (SOT) in ZAOGA FIF. The qualitative design enabled in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and the influence of religious teachings on gender roles. Data collection methods—semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis—facilitated rich, contextual insights into how faith and vocational training intersect to promote empowerment. This approach's strength lies in capturing nuanced perspectives, revealing both the structural challenges and empowering opportunities within Pentecostal communities, aligning with the study's aim to contextualize faith-based empowerment in Zimbabwe.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of faith-based initiatives like ZAOGA FIF's School of Talents in transforming women's economic roles within Pentecostal communities in Zimbabwe. The program promotes women's empowerment by providing vocational skills, entrepreneurial training, and leadership development, which enhance their financial independence and self-confidence. Many participants have used these skills to start or expand small businesses, contributing to household income and community development. By equipping women with practical skills and fostering a sense of community and faith, the initiative challenges traditional gender norms and expands informal leadership opportunities, despite doctrinal constraints. This cycle of empowerment, driven by faith, community support, and economic activity, has the potential to elevate women's social status and generate broader socio-economic benefits. When scaled and supported, such programs can contribute to national economic growth by integrating women into formal employment, increasing household income, and promoting gender equality—harnessing the social influence of Pentecostal churches for sustainable development.

However, the study also reveals ongoing challenges, including cultural resistance, limited access to resources, and societal stereotypes that hinder the expansion of women's economic empowerment. Despite these barriers, opportunities exist through the church's influence, community backing, and faith-based values that valorize women's roles. These present promising avenues for scaling up empowerment initiatives aligned with religious teachings.

Overall, faith-based programs like the School of Talents demonstrate their potential as effective catalysts for transforming women's lives and advancing gender equality within Pentecostal settings, leveraging religious and community networks to foster sustainable social and economic progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

➤ *Based on the Findings of this Study, The Following Recommendations Are Proposed:*

- *Enhance Access to Capital and Digital Skills:*

Authorities and faith-based organizations should collaborate to provide women with affordable microfinance options and digital literacy training to expand their entrepreneurial potential.

- *Promote Gender-Inclusive Leadership:*

Churches should foster gender-sensitive policies that encourage women's participation in leadership roles, both formal and informal, within the church and community settings.

- *Integrate Faith and Development Programs:*

Strengthen the partnership between religious initiatives like the School of Talents and development agencies to align vocational training with national economic goals.

- *Conduct Awareness Campaigns:*

Promote awareness among church leaders and members on the importance of gender equality and women's economic empowerment within Pentecostal doctrine.

- *Support Mentorship and Networking:*

Establish mentorship programs linking experienced women entrepreneurs within the church to emerging women leaders, fostering sustainable growth and community support.

- *Policy Reforms:*

Encourage government policies that recognize and support faith-based organizations' role in women's empowerment and integrate these initiatives into national development strategies.

FURTHER SCHOLARLY EXPLORATION

Additional research could investigate how empowerment programs like the School of Talents influence broader social change, including shifts in gender norms and religious interpretations of gender roles. Longitudinal studies might also explore the sustainability of empowerment gains and how church-based initiatives can adapt to evolving social needs. Overall, integrating faith-based empowerment models with national development strategies could amplify efforts toward gender equality and economic development in Zimbabwe and beyond.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

➤ The Study Faced the Following Limitations

- The research will not be able to cover the whole country because of time and limited resources such as finances.
- The research is only limited to cover Gaudina and the results will be a representative sample. iii) The research will only focus on women economic empowerment.
- The research focuses only on the role of women in Pentecostal churches only.
- Could not find the participants on time.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest in conducting this research.

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