



**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

**NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
FACULTY OF COMMERCE, HUMAN SCIENCES AND EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGES**

THE PLIGHT OF A NEGLECTED AFRICAN BOY-CHILD: AN EXPLORATION OF IWEALA'S *BEASTS OF NO NATION* (2005), DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* (1988), AND ANDREAS' *THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU* (2001)

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of English
and Applied Linguistics**

BY

**Panduleni Kandalindishiwo Mpinge
211092355**

**Main Supervisor: Prof. Max Mhene
Co-Supervisor: Prof. Aletta Hautemo**

28 NOVEMBER 2025

Abstract

This study examined the plight of the neglected African boy-child through a critical literary analysis of Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). While dominant gender discourses in Africa have largely prioritised the challenges faced by the girl-child, an emerging body of scholarship highlights that the African boy-child also experiences profound socio-cultural, economic, and psychological neglect that remains insufficiently explored within academic research. Using Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory and Postcolonial Theory as the theoretical frameworks, this study interrogated how socially constructed masculinities and the lingering legacies of colonialism shape the identities, vulnerabilities, and developmental trajectories of African boys within the selected texts. Anchored in a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm and employing a thematic analysis of the novels, the study uncovered the multidimensional pressures that structure boyhood in diverse African contexts. The findings reveal that rigid patriarchal norms, socio-economic instability, and disrupted family structures compel boys to internalise expectations of emotional stoicism, authority, and premature adulthood, often at the expense of their psychological well-being. In *Beasts of No Nation*, the collapse of social order during civil conflict transforms the boy-child into a militarised subject whose autonomy, innocence, and emotional needs are violently erased. *Nervous Conditions* illustrates how patriarchal privilege, colonial education, and economic aspiration burden male children with identity fragmentation, emotional repression, and symbolic vulnerability despite their outward advantages. Similarly, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* exposes how rural patriarchal systems socialise boys into emotionally restrictive forms of masculinity, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of silence, dominance, and internalised trauma. Across the three texts, boyhood emerges as a paradoxical space in which boys are culturally elevated yet emotionally unsupported, rendering them simultaneously privileged and marginalised. The study concludes that the neglect of the African boy-child is profoundly psychological and socio-cultural, rooted in structural inequities and sustained by traditional ideals of masculinity that inhibit emotional expression and access to support. The study recommends a broadened gender discourse that

inclusively addresses the boy-child's needs, the development of culturally grounded interventions that promote positive and emotionally expressive masculinities, and further research into the lived experiences of African boys across varying socio-cultural contexts. By illuminating the hidden dimensions of male vulnerability within African literature, this study contributes to a more balanced and holistic understanding of gender and childhood in African societies.

DECLARATION

I, Panduleni Kandalindishiwo Mpinge, do hereby declare that the thesis, *The Plight of a Neglected African Boy-Child: An Exploration of Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), with the exception of the cited references, is a result of my own original research. It has not been submitted in whole or in part to any other university.*

Signature: ***Panduleni KM***

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The undersigned certifies that he has read and recommended to Namibia University of Science and Technology a thesis research project titled: 'THE PLIGHT OF A NEGLECTED AFRICAN BOY-CHILD: AN EXPLORATION OF IWEALA'S *BEASTS OF NO NATION* (2005), DANGAREMBGA'S *NERVOUS CONDITIONS* (1988), AND ANDREAS' *THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU* (2001)' in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in English and Applied Linguistics.

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.....
SUPERVISOR

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This thesis is a dedication to my mother, Meme Sarafia Ndeyapo Amutenya, who has sacrificed her all for my siblings and I. *Tangi tsheeri*, we are grateful for your life. To my dear cousin Anna Amutenya-Uugwanga, this success is for you too. You opened your home and the higher education door for me, and you have been holding my hand since then. Thank you.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
DECLARATION	iii
RETENTION AND USE OF THESIS	iii
APPROVAL FORM	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
DEDICATION	vi
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the study	1
1.3 Statement of the problem	2
1.4 Research objectives	2
1.5 Significance/Contribution of the study	3
1.6 The delimitation of the study	3
1.7 Limitations of the study	3
1.8 The definition of technical terms	4
1.9 Chapter Summary	5
1.10 Thesis outline	5
CHAPTER TWO	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.1 Defining neglect and the African boy-child	8
2.2 The African boy child in African literary works	10
2.3 Patriarchy and its role in the neglect of the African boy-child	13
2.3.1 Review of <i>Beasts of No Nation</i>	15
2.3.2 Review of <i>Nervous Conditions</i>	17
2.3.3 Review of <i>The Purple Violet of Oshaantu</i>	20
2.4 Theoretical framework	21
2.5 Research gaps	23
2.6 Chapter summary	24
CHAPTER THREE	26

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	26
3.1 Introduction.....	26
3.2 Research paradigm	26
3.3 Research approach	26
3.4 Research design.....	27
3.5 Text selection criteria.....	27
3.6 Data collection methods	28
3.7 Data analysis.....	28
3.8 Ethical considerations	29
3.9 Chapter summary	29
CHAPTER FOUR	30
FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS	30
4.1. Introduction.....	30
4.2 Socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood in the selected novels. (Objective one)	30
4.2.1. Socio-cultural dimensions of boyhood	30
4.2.2 Economic dimensions of boyhood.....	37
4.2.3. Psychological dimensions of boyhood	42
4.3 Socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of the boy child in African societies (Objective two).....	47
4.4 The intersection of masculinity and vulnerability in the selected novels (Objective Three)	50
4.5 Chapter summary	54
CHAPTER FIVE	56
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56
5.1 Introduction.....	56
5.3 Conclusion	60
5.4. Recommendations	62
5.5 Chapter summary	64
References	67

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Contemporary discourse on gender equality, both globally and within Africa, has predominantly centred on the challenges faced by the girl child, often overlooking the unique vulnerabilities of the boy child (Ratele, 2013). Kimmel (2017) argues that while global gender debates have rightly highlighted the marginalisation of women and girls, scholars increasingly note that boys and young men, too, encounter significant pressures, particularly concerning rigid expectations of masculinity and patriarchal norms. Across various African cultures, patriarchal structures have historically aggrandised men; this aggrandisement is often coupled with burdensome expectations. Ratele (2013) supports this assertion by stating that in the African society and on a global scale, boys are socialised to embody stoicism, strength, and economic provision, which limits their emotional expression and discourages help-seeking behaviours. These societal expectations, rooted in traditional and colonial legacies, create a paradox where boys are simultaneously privileged and vulnerable (Ngohengo, 2021). Khan and Khandaker (2017) argue that a growing body of evidence indicates that African boys face increasing mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and suicide, largely due to societal pressures to conform to narrow definitions of masculinity. Khan and Khandaker (2019) maintain that the stigma surrounding male vulnerability and mental health often prevents boys and men from accessing support, resulting in isolation and, in extreme cases, self-harm or substance abuse.

1.2 Background to the study

Ngohengo (2021) argues that patriarchal norms in Africa have historically emphasised the preference for male children, associating masculinity with authority and provision. However, these same norms can be detrimental, as they often deny boys the space to develop emotional intelligence or seek help. The erosion of traditional support systems, exacerbated by colonialism, urbanisation, and shifting gender roles, has left many boys without adequate guidance or positive male role models. Despite these realities, the experiences of African boy children remain marginalised in both academic literature and literary texts. While some authors have begun to

explore the complexities of boyhood through published African novels, a gap remains in the portrayal of boys' socio-cultural struggles, identity formation, and vulnerability. In light of this context, this study is crucial for addressing the critical gap in academic and literary representations of the African boy-child. By examining how selected African novels depict the struggles and vulnerabilities of boys and men through the male characters portrayed in the selected novels, the research aims to shed light on the intersection of masculinity, societal expectations, and neglect. This focus is vital for developing a more holistic understanding of gender and for fostering interventions that support both boys and girls in achieving their full potential. Addressing the needs of the boy child is not only a matter of equity but is essential for the overall progress of gender relations and social development in Africa.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Baum (2016) postulates that the neglect of the boy-child is rapidly becoming a concern for numerous societies worldwide. Unfortunately, the boy child endures the detrimental effects of neglect at the hands of parents, family members, guardians, and caregivers, whose primary responsibility should be to provide protection (Kimanthi, 2019). Despite its prevalence, the extent of this evident disregard for the boy child varies among different cultures and societies. Sahu (2022) contends that the emphasis on the life experiences of the girl child has jeopardised the experiences of the boy child; this is evident in the scarcity or, in many cases, the complete absence of literary criticism concerning the male gender. Through a literary perspective, this research aims to understand the plight of the neglected African boy-child by examining Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001).

1.4 Research objectives

The overarching objective of this study is to illuminate the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological challenges faced by the African boy-child as depicted in selected literary works. The study sought to achieve the following objectives through a multidisciplinary analysis of the selected African literary works:

1. To analyse the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood in the selected novels.
2. To investigate the socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of the boy child in African societies as portrayed in the selected texts.
3. To examine the intersection of masculinity and vulnerability in the selected novels.

1.5 Significance/Contribution of the study

The researcher reckons that the study will contribute to the limited body of literature on the issue of the neglected African boy-child. It will help inform the subsequent studies on gender issues in literary works through a blend of two theories: Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory and Post-Colonial Theory. This could help to comprehend the complex interlinking of studies on gender issues and provide valuable information for scholars, researchers, policymakers, and academics, as well as those interested in the literary presentation of the African boy-child.

1.6 The delimitation of the study

The current study is exclusively an exploration of the plight of the neglected African boy-child as portrayed in the selected literary works. A qualitative approach was used in this study; text analysis was carried out on the selected novels. The analysis aimed at identifying and exploring the challenges faced by the male gender in the African society as portrayed in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001).

1.7 Limitations of the study

The major limitation of this research was the availability and accessibility of literary works centred on the neglect of the African boy child. Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) were the corpus of this descriptive qualitative study. This textual analysis aimed to explore and identify the challenges faced by the male gender in the African society as portrayed in these three selected works of literature. In other words, the scope of this qualitative study was

exclusively an exploration of the plight of the neglected African boy-child as portrayed in the selected literary works.

1.8 The definition of technical terms

The African boy-child refers to a male child under the age of eighteen within the African context, often framed in development and social discourse as a demographic whose needs and development have been neglected due to an intensified focus on the girl child in recent decades (Masiga, 2017). Academically, the term highlights a perceived crisis of identity and performance among young males in some African societies, where traditional expectations of stoicism, strength, and independence have intersected with modern socio-economic challenges, leading to issues like high school dropout rates, substance abuse, and identity crises (Masiga, 2017).

Patriarchy is a social system in which the primary positions of authority and power are predominantly held by men, enabling them to dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby, 1990). Derived from the Greek meaning "rule of the father," in its modern sociological and feminist usage, it describes an institutionalised system of social structures and practice, spanning political, economic, legal, religious, and cultural spheres: one that establishes and maintains male supremacy and female subordination (Johnson, 2014; Walby, 1990). Patriarchy operates by reinforcing gender inequality and often relies on an ideology that rationalises gender differences as inherent or natural.

Neglect: In the social sciences and fields related to caregiving, neglect is defined as an act of omission, or the failure of a person responsible for the care of a dependent individual (such as a child, elderly person, or patient) to provide the necessary supervision, nourishment, medical care, education, emotional support, and other basic needs for that person's well-being and development (Kondoltony et al., 2024). Neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment and can be categorised into types such as physical, emotional, educational, and medical neglect, often resulting in severe and long-lasting developmental, psychological, and physical harm.

Toxic masculinity is a term used in sociology and gender studies to describe a constellation of culturally specific, socially regressive male traits that are damaging to men themselves and to

society (Kupers, 2005). It is often understood as a subset of hegemonic masculinity - the dominant, idealised form of masculinity in a given society, characterised by an emphasis on extreme self-reliance, the suppression of emotions (other than anger), aggression, hyper-competitiveness, and the devaluation of women and all things perceived as feminine (Kupers, 2005; Terry, 2024). This adherence to rigid, narrow gender norms is considered "toxic" because it can lead to negative outcomes such as higher rates of violence, substance abuse, and poor mental health among men, and contributes to the oppression and abuse of others (Kupers, 2005).

1.9 Chapter Summary

Chapter One introduces the study by highlighting the marginalisation of the African boy-child within contemporary gender discourse, where prevailing narratives have emphasised the empowerment of girls while neglecting the distinct vulnerabilities encountered by boys. It shows that patriarchal and socio-cultural norms have historically favoured men, but they also create strict rules that make it hard for boys to express their feelings, seek help, and deal with psychological, socio-cultural, and economic problems. The chapter explains how colonial disruption, urbanisation, and the breakdown of traditional support systems have made these problems even worse, leaving many boys without enough guidance or good male role models. In light of the lack of literary scholarship on these topics, the study explores *Beasts of No Nation*, *Nervous Conditions*, and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* to analyse how boyhood, neglect, and the intersection of masculinity and vulnerability are shown. Utilising hegemonic masculinity and post-colonial theoretical frameworks, along with qualitative textual analysis, the chapter delineates the study's objectives, significance, delimitations, and limitations, while also defining essential conceptual terms that inform the study.

1.10 Thesis outline

The report is organised into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the study by presenting the background to the research, articulating the problem statement, outlining the research objectives, and highlighting the significance, delimitations, and limitations of the study. It also offers definitions of key terms relevant to the investigation. Chapter Two reviews the literature pertinent to the topic and discusses the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research.

Chapter Three details the research methodology, including the research design, paradigm, method, text selection criteria, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents and interprets the major findings of the study. Finally, Chapter Five provides the conclusions drawn from the research and offers recommendations based on these findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The African continent has long been a battleground for issues of gender inequality, with the plight of African women receiving significant attention in academic and social discourse. However, the challenges faced by the African male gender have often been overlooked or neglected (Baum, 2016). Azodo (2020) supports Baum (2016) by asserting that researchers, non-governmental organisations, international agencies, governments, and the media have largely overlooked the challenges faced by the boy child. Notably, the girl-child has long been considered the most neglected individual in African society at the expense of the boy-child. Chang'ach (2012) opines that the neglect of the male gender has resulted in various issues emerging in their home, school, and community environments, ultimately impacting their emotional and mental development.

Aggravating the situation for the African boy-child, there is an overwhelming emphasis on International Women's Day and the glorification of the girl-child as the shining beacon of hope. The African boy-child has been lamentably silenced, rendered voiceless, and victimised within society's confines. Baum (2016) postulates that the extent of neglect by researchers, particularly those with educational backgrounds in fields such as criminology, sociology, or social policy, is best exemplified through the depiction of a boy-child's experiences. Chitando (2011) opines that this encompasses instances such as parental separation, the unfortunate denial of educational opportunities that the boy child often faces, the prevalence of violence within the home environment, the harrowing issue of school bullying, and the distressing occurrences of rape and sodomy in society. By amplifying the voices of those whose stories have been overlooked thus far, this comprehensive analysis aims to foster a greater understanding, awareness, and empathy for the unique obstacles faced by the male gender in society.

2.1 Defining neglect and the African boy-child

According to Zhuwhara (2016), multiple studies have been conducted on gender issues in many literary works. Gender as a term includes both femininity and masculinity, but this study's focal point is on masculinity. Hence, the definition of the term is imperative. Gender is a multifaceted concept that cannot be pinned down to a single definition as it has been examined from diverse theoretical perspectives: biological, anthropological, psychological, and sociological (Toknubo, 2022). According to Bertens (2014), masculinity is a traditional gender role that is culturally constructed with connotations of strength, rationality, stoicism, and self-reliance. Each society has a different definition of manhood. It is from this pluralistic definition of masculinity that the writer interrogates the presentation of the male figures in the selected texts. The greater percentage of the conducted studies have explored how many instances of masculinity have manifested themselves in female characters; in other words, they focused on the power at play between male and female relations.

According to Cumber et al. (2015), neglect of the African boy child is both a social and cultural phenomenon that encompasses physical, emotional, and educational dimensions. Scholars argue that while the empowerment of the girl child has been necessary, it has often coincided with a lack of focus on boys, particularly in postcolonial African societies. Neglect occurs not only when boys are denied education or care but also when they are socialised into restrictive norms that suppress emotion, empathy, and vulnerability (Pike, 2020). The social construct[ion] of masculinity in many African contexts valorises stoicism and dominance, leading to the moral and psychological impoverishment of boys. Neglect, thus, becomes both structural, through inadequate policies, and cultural, through gendered socialisation that discourages nurturing male identities.

The African boy-child is a socio-cultural figure often situated within patriarchal traditions that deify male heirs as future family and community leaders. However, recent scholarship problematises the boy-child's social position, emphasising their vulnerability and neglect despite male privilege (Butau, 2020; Ngcobo, 2025). African boys frequently face societal expectations

that demand toughness, emotional restraint, and adherence to rigid masculine norms, often at the expense of their emotional and developmental needs. The neglected African boy-child, therefore, experiences neglect not only in material terms but also in emotional and psychological dimensions, partly because the cultural yardsticks do not encourage expressions of vulnerability or address boys' needs for nurturing and guidance (Ngcobo, 2025). Studies from Kenya and other African contexts highlight risks such as educational disengagement, streetism, and exposure to hazards linked to this neglect. The boy-child's neglect is thus both a failure of individual families and broader societal structures that prioritise male dominance yet neglect boys' wellbeing (Butau, 2020). Neglect in the African context involves complex socio-economic and cultural factors that impact children unevenly. The African boy-child, while socially privileged about gender hierarchies, exists paradoxically in a neglectful environment that undermines his holistic development. This neglect is both physical and emotional, exacerbated by cultural norms around masculinity and systemic poverty, creating a unique plight that literature such as the selected novels can illuminate effectively.

Moraa (2018) reiterates that the African boy-child's neglect emerges from various socio-cultural factors including absent paternal figures, economic hardship, and colonial legacies that disrupt family structures, neglect for the African boy-child involves not only physical deprivation but critical emotional and psychological abandonment shaped by gender norms that presume boys can fend for themselves, emphasising stoicism and self-reliance, ultimately further contributing to their marginalisation and societal invisibility.

Put together, neglect and the male gender intersect in African literature as a critique of social systems that fail to nurture humanity holistically. The African boy-child, as represented in Iweala's, Dangarembga's, and Andreas's works, embodies this dual marginalisation: neglected by systems meant to protect him and constrained by gender roles that deny emotional expression. These portrayals call for a redefinition of masculinity, one that embraces care, vulnerability, and moral consciousness as integral to human development.

2.2 The African boy child in African literary works

Despite the dominance of discourses in Africa that centre on redefining women's identities and amplifying their voices, it is equally important to interrogate how male characters are represented in African literary criticism, particularly in relation to the marginalisation of the boy child as a neglected and often unheard presence. Chitando (2011) observes that African critical scholarship has provided limited space for articulating the concerns of the boy child.

Stratton (2020) argues that feminist literary criticism frequently foregrounds female protagonists who embody strength, autonomy, assertiveness, and education, reflecting efforts to challenge and subvert patriarchal structures. Numerous feminist writers, activists, and organisations have worked to empower the girl child and dismantle gender-based barriers; however, in doing so, the needs and experiences of the boy child have often been overlooked or forgotten. While the boy child continues to struggle for recognition and equitable treatment, the girl child is increasingly portrayed as benefiting from social empowerment.

Fonchingog (2006) notes that girls often receive greater affection, support, and societal investment than boys. He further asserts that literary narratives tend to frame girls as the weaker sex, prompting society to adjust expectations to accommodate them, while boys are assumed to possess inherent strength and the capacity to manage their own struggles. Kiritu et.al (2025) re-emphasised that genuine female empowerment requires cultural transformation, and that prioritising the girl child on the assumption that boys are naturally resilient reinforces a silencing of the boy-child's voice that extends beyond simple exclusion. Muponde (2011) similarly argues that feminist movements, although responding to legitimate concerns about gender bias, sometimes produce sweeping epistemological claims that assume male privilege while overlooking the erasure of male narratives. This results in attempts not only to dismantle patriarchal masculinities but also to marginalise the representation of boys in literary discourse.

Woolf and Bagvilio (2017) maintain that women have historically required both literal and symbolic liberation from patriarchal constraints and have often sought, particularly from the nineteenth century onward, discursive spaces free from male dominance. Consequently,

depictions of the boy child are often diminished in literary criticism, with masculine identities frequently framed in negative or reductive ways. Historically, African women were silenced by rigid cultural structures that suppressed their voices and limited their participation in matters relating to their own lives.

Gender equality was virtually absent in earlier eras due to fear, patriarchal control, and a lack of institutional support (Musanga & Mutekwa, 2013). However, shifts in the early twentieth century, particularly through the influence of Western education and cultural exposure, enabled the African girl child to attain greater visibility. Furusa (2006) asserts that many African women writers portray gender relations in harsh terms, though often without acknowledging the influence of Western feminist thought on these portrayals. Harrington (2021) challenges patriarchal expectations that confine women to dependency, illustrating instead that women are equally capable of leadership. Although Harrington critiques patriarchal norms through satire and bold language, his work provides limited pathways for male–female collaboration toward gender equity.

The rise of human-rights activism further accelerated calls for women’s empowerment, with African societies gradually recognising the value of educated women (Chitando, 2011). Consequently, women increasingly entered formerly male-dominated fields such as politics, law, engineering, and medicine, accompanied by a rise in female enrolment across educational institutions (Ashcroft et al., 2011). Over time, society began to view women as equally capable - sometimes more capable than men. Musanga and Mutekwa (2013) observe that although men initially supported women’s empowerment, the momentum eventually shifted in ways that now prioritise the girl child at the expense of the boy child. Boys are widely believed to be naturally strong and capable of navigating life’s hardships independently (Waweru, 2023), leading to assumptions that they are less vulnerable to exploitation, violence, or neglect.

African feminist criticism has also been influenced by Western ideological frameworks, complicating women’s efforts toward self-definition. Alobeytha (2018) argues that Eurocentric feminist models have overshadowed indigenous struggles, impeding African women’s capacity

to create sustainable change rooted in their own cultural contexts. Colonialism, by destabilising African cultural systems, altered gender roles and forced African women into premature adoption of Western feminist identities, leaving them navigating dual and often conflicting cultural expectations. Alobeytha (2018) suggests that African women can only achieve meaningful emancipation through selective integration of feminist consciousness while maintaining collaborative, culturally grounded relationships with African men. Likewise, Mnthali's poem *Letter to a Feminist Friend* (as cited in Ashcroft et al., 2011) underscores the necessity for African men and women to unite against the enduring effects of cultural imperialism before turning their critique toward one another.

Although global movements have significantly advanced the empowerment of girls, these efforts have inadvertently marginalised the boy child, leaving him increasingly exposed to social vulnerabilities and developmental challenges. Masiga (2012) argues that societal gender norms shape how the boy child is perceived and portrayed, often to his detriment. Historically, patriarchy granted boys elevated social status, yet this elevation was rarely accompanied by the emotional or psychological support necessary to prepare them for such roles (Muponde, 2011). The resulting gender imbalance—where the girl child receives disproportionate scholarly and social attention—creates what Furusa (2006) identifies as a problematic dichotomy in which one gender is uplifted at the expense of the other. Furusa (2006) emphasises that gender equity cannot be achieved by empowering girls while neglecting boys, as both require equal developmental support.

Cumber and Tsoka-Gwegweni (2015) argue that the contradictory expectations placed on boys and men must be critically examined, and that society must begin to recognise boys as human beings with emotional needs and vulnerabilities. He calls for interventions that normalise help-seeking behaviours among boys. Similarly, Butau (2020) contends that the boy child is as vulnerable, if not more vulnerable, than the girl child, despite receiving significantly less societal attention. As a result of this neglect, boys often suffer in silence and may turn to destructive coping mechanisms such as substance abuse, crime, or violence when overwhelmed by societal

pressures. The assumption that boys are inherently strong and self-sufficient leaves them exposed to various forms of exploitation, abuse, and emotional distress.

2.3 Patriarchy and its role in the neglect of the African boy-child

Patriarchy, a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control over resources (Connell, 2002), has profound implications for gender roles and expectations within African societies. While patriarchal structures often endorse male dominance, they can paradoxically contribute to the marginalisation and neglect of the African boy-child, who is often expected to embody strength and resilience yet simultaneously receives inadequate emotional and social support (Benneh et al., 2016).

In many African contexts, patriarchy reinforces rigid gender stereotypes that define the boy-child primarily as a future breadwinner and protector, often neglecting his emotional, educational, and psychological needs. Idriss (2022) highlights how the expectation for men to have absolute control over their households and to provide a substantial "bride price" can be an overwhelming burden, leading to stress and limiting their choices, such as marrying for love. These pressures can lead to a narrow definition of success and self-worth, where failure to meet these expectations can result in feelings of shame and inadequacy.

These societal expectations pressure boys to conform to traditional notions of masculinity, which can limit their access to nurturing relationships and psychosocial development. Consequently, the neglect of the boy-child manifests in disparities in education, mental health, and social support systems, with patriarchal norms discouraging open discussions around vulnerability and emotional needs, which can have long-term detrimental effects (Mukasa, 2021). Furthermore, the societal pressures rooted in patriarchy impede progress towards gender equality and neglect the specific needs of boys who face adversities such as poverty, domestic violence, or neglectful parenting. These boys often lack adequate support structures, as patriarchal cultures over-emphasise male independence and discourage reliance on community or institutional aid (Idriss, 2022). This leads to a cycle of neglect where many boys grow into adulthood with unresolved

emotional and psychosocial issues, fuelling intergenerational patterns of neglect, intergenerational trauma, and gendered violence.

Related studies indicate that patriarchal norms also limit boys' participation in open discussions about mental health, further compounding their vulnerability. For example, in Namibia, traditional views equate masculinity with self-reliance, discouraging boys from seeking social or psychological support. Consequently, many boys experience feelings of loneliness and emotional repression, yet societal stigma prevents them from addressing these issues. This pattern contributes to increased incidences of maladaptive behaviour such as aggression, substance abuse, and delinquency, often seen as outlets for unresolved emotional stress

Moreover, patriarchal values influence educational priorities and resource allocation, often neglecting the holistic development needs of the boy-child. Studies have shown that boys are more likely to drop out of school early due to economic hardship, cultural expectations, or lack of targeted support (Baum, 2016). Educational neglect is compounded by societal perceptions that prioritise female education in some contexts, portraying boys as less deserving of academic investment, thus exacerbating the neglect. Furthermore, Chitando (2011) posits that the societal pressures rooted in patriarchy impede progress towards gender equality and neglect the specific needs of boys who face adversities such as poverty, domestic violence, or neglectful parenting. These boys often lack adequate support structures, as patriarchal cultures emphasise male independence and discourage reliance on community or institutional aid.

Patriarchal norms often discourage boys from expressing emotions other than anger or stoicism, leading to a suppression of feelings like sadness, fear, or vulnerability. This can have detrimental effects on their mental health and their ability to form healthy relationships. The societal conditioning that teaches boys to be "strong" and "unemotional" can prevent them from seeking help for psychological distress, contributing to higher rates of unaddressed mental health issues. Chitando (2011) emphasises the importance of raising sons with empathy and kindness, suggesting a conscious effort to break away from traditional patriarchal conditioning.

While patriarchy often positions men as perpetrators of violence, it also exposes boys to cycles of violence, both as witnesses and victims. The normalisation of aggression as a masculine trait can lead to boys being socialised into environments where physical and emotional violence are prevalent. This can manifest in various forms, from corporal punishment in homes and schools to involvement in conflict, as seen in the context of the civil war in some African countries, where men's actions led to widespread displacement and suffering. The expectation to be "tough" can also lead to risky behaviour and a disregard for personal safety.

The intersection of patriarchy with other socio-economic factors, such as poverty and conflict, further exacerbates the neglect of African boys. Suliman (2019) claims that in impoverished communities, patriarchal norms can lead to a prioritisation of resources for girls' education and health, often under the guise of empowering women, while boys' needs are overlooked or assumed to be self-sufficient. This is not to diminish the importance of supporting girls, but rather to highlight the unintended consequences for boys within a patriarchal framework that assigns different values and expectations to each gender. During times of conflict, boys are often targeted for recruitment into armed groups, a phenomenon deeply rooted in patriarchal ideals of male aggression and military prowess. This forced recruitment deprives them of their childhood, exposes them to extreme violence, and often leaves them with severe trauma and limited reintegration prospects.

2.3.1 Review of *Beasts of No Nation*

Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* is a compact but powerful literary intervention about the neglected African boy-child. It presents the extreme form of boy-child neglect through its depiction of Agu, a nine-year-old boy, forcibly recruited as a child soldier. Agu's narrative, told in first-person point of view, immerses readers into the psychological and emotional toll of war on child soldiers, highlighting the themes of identity loss, trauma, and the erosion of childhood innocence (Iweala, 2005).

Iweala employs a distinctive narrative style in *Beasts of No Nation*, utilising a fragmented and colloquial first-person voice that mirrors Agu's disoriented and traumatised state. Scholars have

noted that this narrative approach effectively immerses readers in Agu's experiences, conveying the confusion and horror of war from a child's perspective (Yeboah, 2022). The novel's form challenges readers to confront the brutal realities of child soldiering without the mediation of adult interpretation, thereby fostering a direct emotional engagement with Agu's plight.

Scholars such as Pant and Gajurel (2024) and Eriksson (2023) emphasise that the novel's strength lies in its portrayal of moral corruption and identity loss under war's coercive systems. The Commandant becomes a perverse father figure who exploits Agu's dependence and need for belonging (Alobeytha, 2018). This relationship symbolises the failure of family, community, and state to protect the boy child from manipulation and violence. In Agu's transformation from a curious schoolboy into a killer, Iweala dramatises the collapse of nurturing social structures. Critics interpret this as a commentary on postcolonial governance and social fragmentation, where children become casualties of adult conflicts (Eriksson, 2023).

The psychological impact of war on child soldiers is a central theme in Iweala's work. Pant and Gajurel (2024) discuss how Agu's forced participation in violence leads to a profound identity crisis, as he transitions from a victim of war to a perpetrator. This transformation underscores the novel's exploration of the loss of childhood and the complexities of moral agency in extreme circumstances. The narrative illustrates how systemic neglect and violence can distort a child's sense of self and morality, rendering them vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.

Scholars have debated the ethical implications of representing child soldier narratives in literature. Devine (2011) argues that while such narratives can raise awareness about humanitarian issues, they risk sensationalising suffering and reinforcing stereotypes about Africa. However, Iweala's subtle portrayal of Agu's inner turmoil and moral ambiguity complicates simplistic readings, prompting readers to consider the broader socio-political factors that contribute to the phenomenon of child soldiering. This ethical complexity challenges audiences to move beyond curious consumption and engage with the structural injustices that perpetuate such atrocities.

Beasts of No Nation serves as a powerful literary intervention that brings attention to the plight of the neglected African boy-child. Through its innovative narrative form and unflinching examination of psychological trauma, the novel provides a compelling critique of the conditions that lead to the exploitation of children in armed conflicts. By foregrounding Agu's personal journey, Iweala invites readers to reflect on the broader implications of war and the urgent need for systemic change to protect vulnerable populations.

2.3.2 Review of *Nervous Conditions*

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) presents a compelling exploration of gender, identity, and socio-cultural dynamics within postcolonial Zimbabwean society, foregrounding the complexities surrounding the African boy-child's plight amidst patriarchal structures. While the novel primarily centres on the female protagonist, Tambu, and her liberation struggle, it simultaneously highlights how male children, particularly Tambu's brother, Nhamo, experience neglect and marginalisation within these socio-economic and cultural contexts.

The African boy-child, often assumed to be socially and culturally privileged due to patriarchal structures, has historically received limited scholarly attention compared to the girl-child. Yet, in many African societies, boys experience forms of neglect and marginalisation that are subtle, structural, and psychologically damaging (Chabaya & Gudhlanga, 2013). Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) foregrounds these issues through male characters such as Nhamo and Jeremiah, whose experiences reflect the complex interplay of colonial education, patriarchal expectations, and familial pressures.

Dangarembga situates male characters within a patriarchal system that both privileges and oppresses. Babamukuru, the educated male authority figure, embodies societal expectations of masculinity and success, yet these very expectations create psychological and emotional burdens for younger male characters. Nhamo's early death represents the ultimate cost of neglect, while Jeremiah's ongoing struggles highlight the pressures placed on boys to conform to an idealised form of manhood. Scholars argue that Dangarembga's portrayal demonstrates how patriarchy, while ostensibly benefiting males, can simultaneously render them vulnerable and marginalised

within family and society. *Nervous Conditions* highlights the themes of marginalisation, emotional neglect, and identity formation.

The African boy-child occupies a dual position within social and literary discourse. While patriarchal norms often position him as privileged, this assumption overlooks the emotional and psychological vulnerabilities imposed by rigid gender expectations. Dangarembga's novel critiques this dynamic by illustrating how male children, like Nhamo, are constrained by societal and familial expectations that demand academic achievement and adherence to masculine ideals, yet fail to support their holistic development (Megbowon, 2024). Scholars note that neglect in this context is both emotional and symbolic, reflecting broader socio-cultural forces that marginalise male childhood.

Colonial education, a key theme in *Nervous Conditions*, significantly affects boys' development. Missionary and colonial schooling promises social mobility, yet often imposes alien cultural values that alienate boys from their communities and emotional realities (Hawkins, 2007). Nhamo, as a male student, fails to navigate these pressures, culminating in his untimely death. Scholars highlight this as evidence that colonial educational structures, while privileging male access to knowledge, neglect the emotional, cultural, and psychological needs of African boys. A critical aspect of the boy-child's plight in Dangarembga's novel is emotional neglect. Boys are socialised to suppress vulnerability, which compounds their psychological stress. Jeremiah, for instance, faces familial and societal pressures without adequate emotional support, reflecting a recurring theme of male invisibility in discussions of childhood and gendered oppression. Scholars argue that Dangarembga's work exposes the silencing of boys' emotional experiences, challenging assumptions that male privilege precludes neglect.

Despite these challenges, *Nervous Conditions* also illustrates moments of male resilience. Babamukuru's pursuit of education and social mobility exemplifies an active negotiation of societal expectations, though it comes with personal and emotional costs. Scholars note that Dangarembga portrays the boy-child's agency as restricted, suggesting that survival and identity formation require navigating both oppressive structures and cultural expectations.

Studies on *Nervous Conditions* underscore that the African boy-child is neither fully privileged nor immune to systemic oppression. Patriarchy, colonial education, and familial expectations intersect to produce a form of marginalisation that is emotional, psychological, and symbolic. Scholars converge on the view that Dangarembga's novel expands the discourse on gendered childhood to include the vulnerabilities of boys, highlighting the need for multifaceted approaches to understanding African childhood. *Nervous Conditions* provides a critical lens on the neglected African boy-child, illustrating how societal and familial pressures, compounded by colonial education, create vulnerabilities that are often overlooked. Through characters such as Nhamo and Jeremiah, Dangarembga emphasises that male privilege in patriarchal systems is neither absolute nor protective; rather, it often entails psychological burdens and emotional neglect. The novel, therefore, contributes to a broader understanding of gendered oppression, calling for greater scholarly attention to boys' experiences in African societies. Hence, the current study serves as a building block.

The narrative reveals that African boy-children are often caught between traditional patriarchal expectations and changing socio-political realities, which profoundly impact their emotional and psychological development. Nhamo's character embodies this tension; despite being the favoured son embodying traditional masculinity, he contends with limited opportunities and pressures that lead to his premature demise. Such a portrayal underscores how the boy-child, though privileged in patriarchal terms, can nonetheless become neglected in terms of personal growth and well-being due to socio-economic hardships and cultural rigidity.

Furthermore, *Nervous Conditions* critiques the systemic neglect that arises from economic disenfranchisement and colonial legacies, which hinder both male and female but manifest uniquely in the boy-child through expectations of maintaining familial honour and authority without adequate support. This neglect extends to educational disparities and emotional repression enforced by societal norms, contributing to the boy-child's marginalisation despite superficial privileges. Critically, scholars observe that Dangarembga's work invites a re-examination of masculinity in African contexts, challenging dominant stereotypes by exposing the vulnerabilities and neglected needs of boys in postcolonial Africa (Norris, 2013). This detailed

understanding aligns with feminist and masculinities theories that advocate for recognising boy-children as complex subjects influenced by intersecting pressures of gender, culture, and postcolonial realities.

Nervous Conditions offers a valuable literary lens through which the neglected status of the African boy-child can be examined, revealing the intricate interplay of culture, gender, and socio-economic factors shaping their experiences. By articulating these challenges, Dangarembga's novel broadens the dialogue on childhood, masculinity, and neglect in African postcolonial studies.

2.3.3 Review of *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*

Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) is a poignant literary exploration of traditional Namibian society that primarily foregrounds the marginalisation of women within a patriarchal system. While the novel's dominant focus is on the struggles and resilience of women, notably Kauna and her friend, Ali, it also implicitly reveals the sidelined experiences of African boys within this social structure, thus contributing to the discourse on the neglected African boy-child (Butau, 2020).

Set in the rural village of Oshaantu, Andreas's narrative exposes the entrenched patriarchy manifest in marriage, property rights, and domestic violence. The story follows Kauna, a young mother subjected to spousal abuse and accused of poisoning her husband upon his sudden death, symbolising the vulnerability of those deemed powerless in the community. Through the portrayal of the male characters, particularly Shange, Kauna's husband, the novel indirectly highlights the boy-child's precarious position caught between traditional expectations and social neglect. Andreas situates the African boy-child in a context where male privilege coexists with inadequate attention to their emotional and social development, a point often overlooked in African literary studies (Butau, 2020).

The novel's feminist lens critiques how patriarchal norms harm both women and children, yet it subtly signals the African boy-child's plight as a neglected figure who neither receives nor the

protection afforded nor the empathy often extended to girls in postcolonial discourses. This nuanced treatment challenges reductive binaries of oppression by showing the intersecting vulnerabilities borne by boys, who are socialised into destructive masculine roles but remain deprived of nurturing care. The communal solidarity among women in the village, a key narrative element, contrasts with the absence of a comparable support structure for the boys, underscoring their marginalisation.

By articulating the experiences of Kauna's sons within the broader, diverse picture of gender oppression, Andreas's novel contributes to the emerging scholarship that calls for greater attention to the African boy-child's sociocultural challenges in contexts cracked open by colonial legacies and indigenous traditions (Butau, 2020). The novel thus expands feminist literary critique to accommodate the neglected voices of boys, urging more inclusive dialogues about gender, power, and care in African societies.

In conclusion, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* offers a rich, multi-layered narrative that, while centrally concerned with women's oppression, illuminates the plight of the African boy-child as a neglected subject of inquiry. Andreas's text invites scholars and readers alike to reconsider traditional notions of masculinity and neglect within African contexts, marking the novel as a critical contribution to postcolonial feminist and gender studies.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The current study is anchored on the tenets of two theoretical frameworks, Connell's Masculinity theory and the Post-Colonial Theory. The choice of the selected theoretical frameworks is premised on the assumption that the two theories are a perfect blend necessary to critically examine the plight of the neglected African boy-child in the twenty-first-century patriarchal society through a literary lens.

Raewyn Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory posits that masculinities are multiple, socially constructed, and exist within hierarchical power relations rather than being fixed or innate traits. The theory emphasises that masculinity is fluid and shaped by social, cultural, and historical

contexts, rejecting the notion of a single, universal masculinity. Connell identifies different types of masculinities, including hegemonic masculinity, the culturally dominant form associated with traits like aggression and control, alongside marginalised and subordinated masculinities that reflect varied experiences of power and oppression based on factors such as ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Demetriou, 2001). Central to the theory is the role of power, with hegemonic masculinity legitimising male dominance over women and other masculinities. Connell's work challenges traditional gender norms and advocates for analysing masculinities within specific cultural and historical contexts to understand the complexities of male identity and gender relations. Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory explores the social constructs, behaviours, and cultural expectations of being male. According to Connell (2015), over time, various theories have emerged to explain how masculinity is perceived, enacted, and evolves in response to societal changes. Hegemonic Masculinity Theory is employed in this study to elucidate the selected literary texts, particularly to demonstrate the characters portrayed in the selected texts and to explore the themes. Masculinities are dynamic; hence, employing Connell's Masculinity theory can aid in analysing other various surfacing themes in the selected texts.

Postcolonialism involves the study of the experiences in terms of slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, race, gender, culture, and education of ex-colonial societies all over the world (Hiddleston, 2014). To raise attention and understanding of these factors, colonised people authored literary works that remain as documentary proof of imperialism. The Post-Colonial Theory, advanced by scholars like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, critically examines the enduring impacts of colonialism on societies, identities, and power structures. It advocates for deconstructing colonial narratives, reclaiming indigenous cultures, challenging power dynamics, amplifying marginalised voices, and promoting social justice and cultural hybridity. Postcolonial Theory provides a critical framework for analysing the lingering effects of colonialism on African identities, family structures, and gender relations. Scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1994) and Frantz Fanon (1963) argue that colonial domination not only exploited material resources but also disrupted indigenous value systems and self-perceptions. The result is a fractured post-colonial identity, characterised by alienation, mimicry, and internalised

inferiority. Post-Colonial Theory offers a framework to analyse how the legacies of colonialism continue to shape social, cultural, and political realities in African societies, including childhood experiences. In the context of the selected novels, postcolonial theory helps unpack how colonial and neo-colonial power dynamics exacerbate neglect by marginalising children, especially boys, through poverty, social instability, and fractured identities. Applying the postcolonial theory to the selected postcolonial literary texts enables a complex exploration of the neglected African boy-child's plight. The Post-Colonial Theory will provide an understanding of how colonial legacies disrupt traditional masculinities, impose harmful new expectations, and contribute to the psychological trauma and marginalisation of the African boy-child.

Together, these two theories, Hegemonic Masculinity Theory and Postcolonial Theory, expose how colonial histories and dominant masculinity ideologies intersect to perpetuate the neglect of African boys in literature and reality. They foreground the socio-political conditions and gendered power relations that shape boy-child childhoods, identities, and experiences of marginalisation across varied African contexts portrayed in the texts.

2.5 Research gaps

A major research gap in the plight of the neglected African boy-child lies in the under-theorisation of contemporary African masculinities and their intersection with socioeconomic change. Traditional scholarly focus on male issues often centres on adult men's roles as patriarchs or breadwinners, failing to adequately explore the developmental trajectory and psychological impact of changing gender norms on the adolescent African boy-child. The rapid decline of traditional male socialisation structures, coupled with limited economic opportunities, creates an identity crisis, which Frantz Fanon terms "alienation from self". However, research rarely employs qualitative, ethnographic methods to understand how these boys internalise and respond to the conflicting societal expectations of being a 'man' in a modern society, often impoverished, and rapidly feminising educational and employment landscape. Studies are urgently needed to investigate the psychological well-being, emotional literacy, and expression of vulnerability among African boys, challenging the pervasive, culturally ingrained stereotype

that 'boys don't cry' and don't require targeted psychosocial support, which is a major barrier to seeking and providing help.

Finally, there is a noticeable gap in evidence-based intervention research and the assessment of policy effectiveness. A significant portion of gender-focused policies in Africa has, justifiably, been directed towards female empowerment, leading to an imbalance in program design and evaluation that neglects the male-specific context. When programmes for boys exist, they are often small-scale, locally initiated, or focused on singular issues like mentorship or sports, lacking the rigorous, peer-reviewed evaluation required to inform large-scale national or regional policy. The academic community must move beyond merely lamenting the 'neglect' and prioritise action research that pilot tests, rigorously evaluates, and documents scalable interventions targeting the complex, intersectional vulnerabilities of the African boy-child. This includes assessing the impact of male-targeted scholarships, mental health programs specifically tailored to young African men, and interventions that promote positive male role models and alternative, non-hegemonic versions of masculinity in both school and community settings.

2.6 Chapter summary

The literature reveals that while considerable focus has been directed toward addressing the challenges faced by African girls, the plight of the African boy-child has largely been overlooked. This neglect manifests in multiple dimensions, including physical deprivation, emotional repression, and educational disadvantages exacerbated by cultural norms and patriarchal expectations that idealize toughness and emotional stoicism in boys. African boys often face societal pressures to embody hegemonic masculinity marked by strength and control while simultaneously being deprived of nurturing and emotional support, resulting in psychological distress, marginalisation, and increased vulnerability to risks such as school dropout, violence, and substance abuse. Literary texts such as Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* highlight these themes, portraying how traditional gender roles combined with socio-economic challenges create a paradoxical environment where boys are both privileged and neglected in their holistic development.

The study is framed within Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity theory and Postcolonial theory to critically analyse how socio-cultural norms and colonial legacies intersect to perpetuate the neglect of the African boy-child. Patriarchal systems reinforce rigid gender roles that limit boys' emotional expression and psychosocial growth, contributing to their invisibility and marginalization despite their expected roles as future community leaders and providers. Furthermore, research gaps exist in understanding contemporary African masculinities, emotional literacy, and effective intervention programs tailored to boys' unique challenges. There is a call for more qualitative, ethnographic studies to explore boys' internalisation of masculinity norms and for rigorous evaluations of male-focused interventions to promote positive masculinity, mental health support, and empowerment in African contexts. This comprehensive perspective emphasises the need to move beyond recognising neglect towards actionable, culturally sensitive policies and programmes to support the African boy-child's holistic well-being.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methodologies and procedures employed in the study. It addresses the following areas: research design, research paradigm, data analysis, and ethical considerations. The study employs several elements to extract information from the selected texts, namely, Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Neshani's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*.

3.2 Research paradigm

According to Creswell (2017), the interpretivism paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from the subjective experiences of individuals. The current study, therefore, uses the interpretive research paradigm to explore the selected texts. The interpretivism paradigm is suitable for this study because it enables a textured exploration of the African boy-child's neglect by centring subjective narratives, cultural specificity, and interdisciplinary critique. It empowers researchers to amplify the novels' calls for redefining masculinity and addressing systemic inequities in African societies.

3.3 Research approach

A qualitative inquiry, also known as a fundamental interpretative investigation, provides thorough narratives aimed at comprehending a phenomenon, a process, or a specific point of view from the perspectives of those involved (Creswell, 2017). Similarly, this study will use a qualitative approach because it will attempt to explore a social phenomenon - in this case, the plight of a neglected African boy-child in the selected African novels. A qualitative approach focuses on thorough narratives and comprehending a phenomenon. According to Jensen (2013) the core of qualitative research lies in understanding complex phenomena through rich, detailed narratives. The plight of the neglected African boy-child is not a simple, quantifiable variable; it's a multifaceted social issue with deep roots in cultural, familial, and societal contexts. A qualitative

approach, through the analysis of literary narratives, allows for an in-depth exploration of this neglect, the experiences of the boys, and the societal factors contributing to their situation, as portrayed in the novels.

3.4 Research design

According to Creswell (2017), research design is an overall plan for addressing a research question, including specifications for enhancing the study's integrity. The study is a descriptive desktop study; therefore, it is befitting to employ the exploratory research design for the proposed study. This design will allow the researcher to explore the plight of the neglected African boy-child. In essence, the exploratory research design is the most fitting because the study seeks to uncover, interpret, and understand a complex social phenomenon as depicted in a specific body of literature, rather than to test a pre-existing theory or measure a known variable. It provides the necessary framework for an in-depth, qualitative inquiry that aims to shed light on a significant and potentially overlooked aspect of the African experience.

3.5 Text selection criteria

Purposive sampling was used to select the three novels to be used for this research. Etikan et al. (2016) define purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling technique in which researchers deliberately select participants, cases, or units based on specific characteristics or qualities that are relevant to the research objectives, rather than relying on random selection. The selected texts, Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) are suitable for the topic and context of the proposed study. These three selected texts exhibit the themes of the neglect of the male gender and can be explored from the masculinity and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The proposed study will provide, thorough comprehension of the effects of the neglect of the African boy-child through the analysis of the selected literary texts. The findings of this study could be broadly generalised to the African continent and other countries with similar socio-cultural structures that contribute to the neglect of the boy-child in African society.

3.6 Data collection methods

The study employed desktop research for the data analysis. The researcher has chosen the content analysis method to gather and analyse data. Content analysis concludes by objectively and methodically identifying certain themes (Bass & Semetko, 2021). Given that the study is based on a critical reading of literary works, data were gathered by reading the selected texts, scholarly articles, related journals, and books. The information acquired was organised into categories based on the objectives. Using the crafted conceptual framework, the study applied critical reading to the selected novels.

3.7 Data analysis

According to Creswell (2017), qualitative research predominantly employs inquiry methods that produce texts rather than numbers. Textual data could include transcripts of interviews or conversations, diary entries, case histories, etc. This study is a qualitative, content analysis research. There was no fieldwork conducted; the study has analysed the selected novels to determine the findings of the study. Other literary critics from journals, the internet, and other publications were also referenced to build the information that was used to interpret the study. Terry et. al (2017) define thematic analysis as a qualitative research method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data. Its primary goal is to uncover the underlying ideas, experiences, or perspectives that emerge from the data. The research question centres on the plight of the neglected African boy-child. This inherently calls for understanding the diverse aspects of this neglect. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to systematically identify, categorise, and interpret the various ways neglect is depicted in the novels. The study involves three different novels; therefore, thematic analysis is exceptionally well-suited for identifying common themes and variations across multiple texts. It allows the researcher to compare and contrast how the plight of the neglected African boy-child is portrayed in *Beasts of No Nation* (which focuses on a child soldier), *Nervous Conditions* (which, while primarily about female experiences, may implicitly or explicitly touch upon male neglect through characters like Nhamo), and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (which, although about

women's plight, reveals contexts of male neglect or the absence of positive male figures). This comparative aspect is crucial for a comprehensive exploration of the selected texts.

3.8 Ethical considerations

This research is based on publicly published novels, so no ethical issues are expected to arise from the study. Thus, a desktop research ethical clearance may not be necessary. However, the researcher will be cognisant of the observation of and adherence to ethical behaviour throughout the study. The researcher abided by the institutional statement of academic honesty and integrity. All NUST ethical considerations were followed. All sources cited in this study were acknowledged by using the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology and theoretical framework of the study, which investigated the neglect of the African boy-child in selected novels. It adopted an interpretivism paradigm, emphasising subjective narratives and cultural contexts. A qualitative approach was used to explore this complex social issue through detailed literary analysis. The study employed an exploratory descriptive design and purposive sampling to select three novels - *Beasts of No Nation*, *Nervous Conditions*, and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* - based on their relevance to themes of male neglect. Data collection involved desktop research and content analysis, focusing on a critical reading of texts and scholarly sources. Analysis was conducted through thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes across the novels. Ethical considerations were addressed, noting that the study uses publicly available texts and adheres to academic integrity standards.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Introduction

The overarching objective of this study was to illuminate the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological challenges faced by the African boy-child as depicted in selected literary works. The study sought to achieve the following objectives through a multidisciplinary analysis of the selected African literary works:

1. To analyse the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood in the selected novels.
2. To investigate the socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of the boy child in African societies as portrayed in the selected texts.
3. To examine the intersection of masculinity and vulnerability in the selected novels.

The findings from the three selected novels - Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) - illustrate that the African boy-child experiences a complex intersection of socio-cultural conditioning, economic deprivation, and psychological disintegration. Each text presents boyhood as a stage fraught with expectations, emotional neglect, and identity crises shaped by the weight of both traditional and postcolonial realities.

4.2 Socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood in the selected novels. (Objective one)

4.2.1. Socio-cultural dimensions of boyhood

The socio-cultural dimension explores how traditions, gender norms, and community expectations shape the experiences of boys. In African societies, the social construction of masculinity often emphasises authority, stoicism, and economic provision, leaving little to no

room for emotional vulnerability or liberty. Each of the selected novels for this study presents a detailed examination of how these norms operate, producing both opportunity and constraint for the male gender.

Boyhood in *Beasts of No Nation* is presented as a distorted and ruptured stage of human development. Agu, the protagonist, begins life in a culturally grounded African community with a stable family, Christian values, and aspirations for both traditional initiation and formal education. These socio-cultural structures symbolise moral order, communal belonging, and identity formation. However, when a civil war broke out in his country, the socio-cultural systems were disrupted. Agu is forcibly socialised into adulthood through violent and coercive means. The civil war disrupts traditional familial and communal structures, forcing Agu into the role of a child soldier. Cultural expectations of bravery and endurance are manipulated by armed groups, creating a distorted initiation into manhood that bypasses nurturing and guidance (Iweala, 2005, p. 14). The militia leader, Commandant, embodies the authoritarian figure through whom cultural and societal norms are violently reframed, illustrating how war reshapes socialisation processes and enforces compliance with a warped conception of masculinity (Iweala, 2005, p. 62). Agu's early exposure to violence, forced labour, and survival strategies demonstrates how socio-cultural context, here shaped by conflict, determines the trajectory of boyhood. The narrative vividly exposes how war transforms childhood into a site of suffering and moral corruption. Agu's conscription as a child soldier underscores how economic hardship and political instability create conditions where the boy-child becomes both a victim and an instrument of violence. The loss of his parents, home, and education symbolises the destruction of foundational social structures that sustain healthy boyhood.

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) addresses socio-cultural dimensions in a markedly different context. Set in colonial Rhodesia, the narrative highlights the gendered construction of opportunity and social mobility. Nhamo, Tambu's brother, is afforded educational privileges denied to his female peers, reflecting the intersection of patriarchy and colonial influence (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 23). This social conditioning instils in boys a sense of entitlement and authority, reinforcing gender hierarchies within the family and community. Nhamo's dominance

over female characters, especially his sister, Tambu, reveals how societal expectations of masculinity, strength, intelligence, and leadership are cultivated from a young age, while simultaneously marginalising the emotional and intellectual contributions of boys (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 47).

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga (1988) explores the boy-child's socio-cultural struggle through the character of Nhamo, whose privileged access to colonial education masks a deeper sense of alienation. Nhamo's boyhood is constructed around patriarchal entitlement and the colonial notion of male superiority. His disdain for his rural home and his mother's poverty reflects how colonial education distorts African boys' identities, replacing communal values with individualistic ambition. Nhamo embodies the boy-child who benefits from gendered favouritism; he is educated while his sister, Tambu, is initially denied schooling. But this advantage becomes a psychological burden. His inability to reconcile his new identity with his roots leads to spiritual and emotional disconnection. Nhamo's death thus symbolises the collapse of a young boy caught between traditional expectations and colonial indoctrination. Dangarembga presents him as both a victim and product of a patriarchal system that equates masculinity with dominance, privilege, and emotional detachment (Dangarembga, 1988).

Dangarembga, through the short-lived character Nhamo, subtly reveals upbringing as one of the first insights into the formative pressures in the male world of *Nervous Conditions*. When Babamukuru leaves for England, and the school fees dry up, Nhamo's parents show their values. Ma'Shingayi sells vegetables to send Nhamo to school, but explains to Tambu that women must be the ones to make sacrifices (p.16). By doing this, the mother demonstrates that she submits to the male mentality of her husband, Jeremiah, who asks Tambu if she can '*cook books for her husband*' (p.15). Is there any surprise then, when Nhamo, even at a tender age, asserts his maleness over his sisters by making them carry his things home from the bus station (p.10). Not only are his father's words and actions manifestations of a limited view of women, but at this point in the narrative, his mother does not question that limited view and thereby validates Nhamo's assumption that his father's ways are correct. Nhamo has a condescending, harsh

attitude towards women, but it is an attitude he learns from his father and mother and the social environment that aggrandises men and boys.

The men and women of *Nervous Conditions* learned their gender roles as innocent children, like Nhamo, without any clear fault of their own, and under pressure to uphold those roles. The differences between Babamukuru and the other Shona men further demonstrate the effect of upbringing, not only on how eventual adults view the opposite gender, but on entire world-views. While preparing Tambu for her move to the mission, Babamukuru extols education as part of being a good woman (p. 88). While Jeremiah, who previously resisted Tambu's education, accepts Babamukuru's plans for his daughter, clearly motivated by submission to his god-like brother, not his own sensibilities about women and education. Babamukuru further sets himself apart by insisting that a wedding will restore the morality of the family, a white assessment of the issue. Jeremiah, again, submits to his brother's plan over his own Shona solution of calling in witchdoctors (pp. 146-7). Something is different about Babamukuru, but his present relationship with the whites is only a limited explanation for the difference. Though the family arch-patriarch must have grown up with some of the same influences as his ancestors, he was a child when he left home to be educated and raised by Western missionaries (p.5), and it is that upbringing that shapes his ideologies about boyhood and gender roles.

The long-running influence of the whites on Babamukuru, from his childhood and straight through adulthood, is the clearest and most plausible answer for why the choices he makes are so different of other men in his family. Cultural mixing (hybridity) is another force in the male world, revealed through Dangarembga's text. Even while Babamukuru is a carrier of white ideals, he is also a post-colonial Shona man, a patriarch who has lost sight of the traditional value of women, but retains high expectations. Babamukuru declares to his assertive daughter, Nyasha, perhaps to the whole family, that, "*We cannot have two men in the house*" (p.115). His assertion goes for his wife, Maiguru, as well, who is educated and productive, like him, but does not share in his authority or glory. Ironically, though Babamukuru insists both Nyasha and Maiguru get a good education, he stifles their attempts to think and achieve. This irony, possibly representative of an immature crossbreed between the white and Shona cultures, is an assertion of Homi

Bhabha's Hybridity. Hybridity, a fundamental concept in postcolonial theory, denotes the cultural, linguistic, and ideological blending that occurs through the interaction of colonised and colonising cultures, producing identities that are dynamic, negotiated, and situated within what Bhabha describes as the "third space." Primarily developed by Bhabha and further advanced by cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, hybridity questions static conceptions of identity by emphasising the ambivalence and transformative possibilities inherent in cross-cultural interactions.

This concept provides dimension to this literary character and insight into the real men Babamukuru represents. Additionally, Babamukuru, with all his contradictions and peculiarities, represents a diversity among Shona men, unlike the homogeneity among women in male-authored African literature. Babamukuru and other men, like Jeremiah and Takesure, have both commonalities and differences in their concepts of women and morality. For instance, the importance Babamukuru places on monogamy within marriage, as opposed to Takesure, who goes after Lucia anyway he can, and unlike Jeremiah, who hopes to take her as a second wife. But Jeremiah and Takesure follow Babamukuru despite their differences and opposing desires, demonstrating a sort of pressure system between the followers and their leader. Furthermore, this pressure system spans out into all aspects of life, as demonstrated when Babamukuru motivates Jeremiah to fix a roof that he was capable of fixing long ago, once again submitting to his "god-like" brother, thus depicting him as an apathetic follower, without the hope and vision of Babamukuru. Babamukuru exemplifies colonial mimicry by internalising Western authority, highlighting the intricacies of hybrid identities in postcolonial African society. The novel emphasises hybridity as a locus of empowerment and significant conflict. *Nervous Conditions*, therefore, clearly highlights how the social and cultural dimensions are at play in rearing the boy child in most African cultures.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Andreas (2001) shifts the focus to the domestic sphere, revealing how rural socio-cultural structures shape the boy-child's upbringing. Although the narrative foregrounds women's experiences, it simultaneously sheds light on how boys are socialised within patriarchal systems that deprive them of emotional nurturing. Boys grow up

observing fathers who dominate and mothers who submit, internalising gender hierarchies as natural. The absence of positive male role models results in emotional illiteracy, where boys learn to equate masculinity with authority and silence. Andreas exposes how economic hardship, rural marginalisation, and gendered labour divisions indirectly neglect the boy-child by denying him models of compassion and emotional balance. This creates a generational cycle where neglected boys mature into emotionally unavailable men who perpetuate the same patriarchal neglect they experienced as children (Andreas, 2001).

Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) presents the influence of rural Namibian social structures on boyhood. The narrative portrays young boys growing up within tight-knit village communities where social roles are rigidly defined. Male authority is socially reinforced through practices that encourage control over family members and public behaviour. Boys observe and internalise adult male conduct, including gender based violence, dominance over women and younger siblings, as normative. The novel demonstrates that cultural rites, communal expectations, and the intergenerational transmission of gendered behaviour shape male identities, often limiting emotional expression and reinforcing cycles of patriarchal authority.

Shange and other male figures in the novel embody the traditional, patriarchal construction of masculinity that deeply influences the socio-cultural framing of boyhood. Boys are socialised into roles emphasising control, dominance, and emotional stoicism, mirroring the rigid gender norms prevalent in the Namibian village setting. Shange exemplifies toxic masculinity with his violent, abusive behaviour toward his wife Kauna, reflecting how patriarchal expectations can stifle sensitivity and promote aggression as markers of manhood. Meme Ali narrates Shange's brutal assault: "*Kauna was lying on the ground covered in a blanket of sand... the heavy mine shoes sounded as if they were breaking every bone*" (Andreas, 2001, p. 58). This illustrates how male power is enforced violently within domestic spaces, shaping the emotional landscape children, including boys, grow up in.

The novel further critiques how society confines boys within narrow identities that suppress their full humanity. As Zhuwarara (2016) notes, masculinity is socially constructed as "tough, objective,

rational, independent, achievement-oriented, aggressive, virile and emotionally inexpressive" (p. 9), a framework reflected in significant male characters who embody these traits to the detriment of themselves and those around them. Moreover, Shange's neglect toward nurturing and emotional support signals the socio-cultural neglect of the boy child's psychological needs, as the boy child is raised under these constraining ideals of hegemonic masculinity.

Shange's treatment of his sons and daughters in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* reflects the patriarchal values that dictate gender roles and expectations. It is widely evident that Shange's overall behaviour shows patriarchal dominance and violence. His violent abuse, which includes physical beatings and public humiliation, primarily directed at his wife, Kauna, who bears the brunt of his anger, and by extension, the female children, symbolises the patriarchal neglect and oppression of women in the family. This treatment indirectly affects his daughters, who suffer the consequences of a violent and unstable household and the devaluation of women's roles.

Although there is less direct mention of how he treats sons, patriarchal contexts like this often afford sons more privilege and less direct violence compared to daughters. Sons are generally positioned as future inheritors of patriarchal authority, while daughters are more vulnerable to neglect and secondary status. Shange's violent assertion of masculinity and control underscores a gendered hierarchy where male offspring are presumably favoured, while daughters and the mother face subjugation and abuse. But in actual fact, this supposed "favouring" of the boy child nurtures broken boys who later on in their adult life uphold the toxic masculinity they unconsciously inherited from the society that breeds them.

Across these texts, Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Neshani's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, a recurrent theme emerges: socio-cultural forces dictate the contours of boyhood, simultaneously providing frameworks for identity and imposing limitations on emotional and personal development. Agu's militarised initiation, Nhamo's privileged yet socially constrained upbringing, and the boys in Oshaantu's traditional village life illustrate that African boys navigate complex intersections of cultural expectation, gendered socialisation, and historical circumstance. Moreover, the novels highlight the consequences of

socio-cultural neglect. The absence of nurturing guidance, coupled with rigid gender norms, fosters vulnerability and psychological strain. In *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu's lack of parental and community support exposes him to exploitation, emphasising that boyhood in conflict zones is socially constructed not only through privilege but also through abandonment. Dangarembga's depiction of Nhamo underscores that social advantage does not shield boys from pressures imposed by patriarchal and colonial expectations. Andreas illustrates that in rural contexts, boys are taught to suppress emotional awareness, linking socio-cultural conditioning to the perpetuation of emotional repression across generations.

In essence, the socio-cultural dimension of boyhood in these novels underscores a duality: boys are both privileged and constrained, agents and victims of the social systems they inhabit. The texts collectively suggest that the African boy-child's identity is forged through a tension between external expectations and internal needs, revealing a complex interplay of culture, power, and vulnerability.

4.2.2 Economic dimensions of boyhood

The economic dimension of boyhood in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) is crucial in understanding how boys develop identity, agency, and emotional responses to their environments. The economic dimensions of boyhood in the selected novels illustrate how poverty, social class, and systemic inequalities shape male development and notions of masculinity. Economic structures in African societies often impose constraints on boys' access to education, livelihoods, and social mobility, reinforcing patterns of marginalisation alongside traditional socio-cultural pressures (Lunga, 2023).

In *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu's childhood is directly affected by the economic devastation wrought by civil war. With the collapse of his family's livelihood and the destruction of his community, Agu is forced into a survival economy where children become commodities in a militarised context. Uzodinma Iweala's novel presents the most visceral economic exploitation, where the

boy protagonist, Agu, is refashioned into a direct, disposable, military-economic asset in a context of total war and failed statehood. Agu's idyllic, middle-class existence is predicated on a stable civilian economy, represented by his father's teaching job and the presence of consumer goods. When the civil war erupts, this economy is instantly destroyed. Survival becomes the sole economic activity, based on flight and scavenging.

Iweala skilfully illustrates how war destroys the economic and social fabric of Agu's community, and with it, the possibility of a protected or gradual transition from childhood to adulthood. Before war disrupts his life, Agu expresses pride in his academic achievement: *"I am liking school because I am always knowing the answer to every question"* (Iweala, 2005, p. 10). This statement signifies that education had once served as a pathway toward economic mobility, identity formation, and belonging. However, when war erupts, the economic system crumbles. Agu becomes separated from his family and is forced into a militia group where boyhood is replaced by survival. Agu's recruitment in the militia is an economic transaction, though not involving wages in a traditional sense. Agu's youth is valuable because it guarantees pliability and disposability. He is cheaper to maintain, easier to indoctrinate, and his death carries less political cost than that of an adult. His primary function is combat labour, killing, looting, and guarding, which sustains the military-economic structure of the Commandant's faction.

The Brigade's existence is self-financing through looting and territorial control. Agu's participation makes him a crucial element in the extraction of wealth (food, goods, money) from the controlled villages. His "wage" is essentially survival, food, and the illusion of power and belonging. The sexual abuse Agu endures, often linked to the Commandant's desire for dominance and control, can be viewed as the ultimate form of economic ownership over his body, rendering him property without recourse or self-determination. Agu's boyhood is thus transformed into a commodity whose value is determined by its utility in violence and war. The economic dimension here is one of militarised exploitation. The Commandant uses basic resources such as food, clothing, and physical safety as economic weapons to command obedience: *"If I am not doing what they are wanting, then they are not giving me food"* (Iweala, 2005, p. 20). Scarcity becomes a tool of control, and the gun becomes a substitute for economic

agency. Boys like Agu adopt violent masculine roles not because they are empowered, but because the collapse of economic order leaves them no alternative. He remarks: *"I am a soldier. It is what I must be now"* (Iweala, 2005, p.35). This shows how economic collapse forcibly transforms identity, accelerating the boy's psychological and emotional maturity in unnatural and traumatic ways. The economic dimension, therefore, does not just deprive Agu, it reshapes him into a figure of violent masculinity, where survival and identity are tied to militarised power rather than social or personal development.

Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, centred on the struggles of Tambu, and by extension, her brother Nhamo, explores a subtle, yet powerful, economy of aspiration and resource allocation within a patriarchal, transitional society. While the focus is on Tambu, the narrative hinges on the economic fate of the boys, particularly Nhamo. *Nervous Conditions* examines economic inequality in a postcolonial context. In *Nervous Conditions*, the economy shapes boyhood primarily through educational privilege and patriarchal inheritance. The boy-child is seen as the future economic provider, while girls are relegated to domestic support roles. Tambu narrates that her brother Nhamo is sent to school because:

It had been my uncle's idea that Nhamo should go to school at the mission. Nhamo, if given the chance, my uncle said, would distinguish himself academically, at least sufficiently to enter a decent profession. With the money earned in this way, my uncle said, Nhamo would lift our branch of the family out of the squalor in which we were living. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 17)

Here, masculine economic responsibility is naturalised. Yet, this economic privilege isolates Nhamo emotionally. Having access to education elevates him above his family, encouraging arrogance and emotional detachment as his sister, Tambudzai, narrates:

Before he went to the mission, we had been able to agree that although our squalor was brutal, it was uncompromisingly ours; that the burden of dispelling it was, as a result, ours too. But then something that he saw at the mission turned his mind to thinking that our homestead no longer had any claim upon him. Helping in the fields or with livestock or the firewood, any of the tasks he used to do willingly before he went to the mission, became a bad joke. (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 19)

Nhamo's emerging masculine identity is shaped not by emotional development but by economic hierarchy. However, Dangarembga demonstrates the fragility of this economic ideal when Nhamo dies unexpectedly. His death destabilises the family's economic expectations and reveals how the boy-child is burdened with adult responsibilities before emotional and psychological maturity. His boyhood becomes not a time of growth, but an identity built on economic pressure, performance, and eventual collapse.

Furthermore, the novel highlights how economic systems privilege boys while simultaneously neglecting their emotional well-being. Boys are groomed for economic productivity, but not for relational or emotional capacity, demonstrating how socio-economic structures shape boyhood into an instrument rather than an identity. Nhamo benefits from his family's relative wealth and patriarchal privilege, enabling him to attend a mission school while his sisters face barriers to education. Education functions as both an economic and social lever; boys are groomed for upward mobility, whereas girls must negotiate societal constraints that limit their agency.

The unequal distribution of economic resources fosters a hierarchy within families, with boys positioned as inheritors of privilege and future heads of households. However, this privilege is not without psychological cost, as it enforces rigid expectations and isolates boys from nurturing familial and communal ties. Tambu's exclusion is based on the rationale that resources are scarce, and the investment in a girl is deemed economically riskier (due to marriage taking her away from the family and her primary role being domestic). Her only access to the education economy is through self-driven, entrepreneurial means (growing and selling vegetables).

Nhamo's economic elevation through education ultimately alienates him. He rejects the traditional economy and the poverty of the homestead, becoming a "nervous condition" - a product of Westernised economic expectations that severs his emotional and social ties. His death symbolises the fragility of colonial economic promise and the psychological cost of abandoning one's origins for an elusive, Westernised success. The boy's pathway to economic salvation is also the path to cultural and personal disintegration.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, the economic dimension of boyhood is framed within rural subsistence life, where agricultural labor and livestock ownership are central to masculine identity. Boys in Oshaantu are raised to understand that manhood is proven through physical labor, land productivity, and the ability to maintain authority in the household.

Lunga (2023) reflects on the cultural expectation that men must endure hardship silently. This expectation begins in childhood, where boys are encouraged to suppress emotional vulnerability and prepare for future economic responsibility. Economic pressure in the rural context is generational. Boys observe fathers who are absent as they seek employment or who struggle under cultural expectations of providing. The lack of emotional modeling creates a cycle where boys inherit responsibility but not the emotional tools to manage it. Andreas shows how boys grow up internalizing the belief that economic contribution is synonymous with emotional worth. Unlike *Nervous Conditions*, where education marks economic value, in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, labour ability and resource control define masculine identity. Boys are denied emotional development because economic survival demands maturity before psychological readiness.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, economic hardship is intertwined with rural social structures. Male characters are socially obligated to provide for their families, but limited resources in the village impede the fulfilment of these roles. Boys grow up internalising these economic pressures, understanding early on that masculinity is partially defined by the ability to maintain financial stability. Andreas depicts the psychological and social consequences of poverty-driven frustration, where men may resort to aggression or authoritarian behaviour, as depicted by the character Shange, to assert authority in contexts of economic scarcity. Here, the economic dimension intersects with socio-cultural expectations, demonstrating that financial vulnerability compounds the challenges of boyhood.

Together, these novels reveal that economic factors significantly shape the trajectory of male childhood. Whether through war-induced deprivation, colonial-era educational privilege, or rural scarcity, boys encounter systems that constrain development while simultaneously imposing

expectations of resilience, productivity, and authority. Economic pressures thus operate as both structural limitations and cultural tools for socialising boys into specific forms of masculinity

4.2.3. Psychological dimensions of boyhood

Psychological dimensions of boyhood in the selected texts highlight the internalised effects of socio-cultural and economic pressures. The novels explore trauma, identity conflict, and emotional repression as consequences of these intersecting forces. The psychological construction of boyhood in *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) reflects the deep emotional struggles and internal conflicts faced by boys growing up in unstable socio-cultural environments. Across the three texts, boyhood is shaped by trauma, silence, emotional suppression, and the pressure to conform to culturally defined masculine norms. These psychological pressures reveal that the internal experiences of boys are frequently ignored or minimised, resulting in lasting emotional wounds, identity conflicts, and complex expressions of masculinity.

In *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu's psychological development is profoundly shaped by war. His forced recruitment into a rebel militia subjects him to extreme violence and moral injury. His narrative voice reflects a child struggling to make sense of horrors beyond his developmental capacity. The psychological trauma manifests in dissociation, numbness, and a fractured self-concept. Agu repeatedly tries to convince himself he is still a child, saying: "*I am not a bad boy. I am not a bad boy*" (Iweala, 2005, p. 29). This self-reassurance reveals internal conflict, as he attempts to reconcile the innocence of childhood with the violent identity imposed upon him. Forced to kill, Agu adopts emotional numbness as a coping mechanism: "*You are not thinking anymore... You are just doing*" (Iweala, 2005, p. 63). The trauma erodes his capacity to feel, illustrating how war steals emotional development and replaces it with a survival instinct. The absence of paternal protection after the death of his father intensifies his psychological vulnerability. Commandant functions as a distorted father figure, demanding loyalty and obedience through coercion, further destabilising Agu's sense of safety and identity. Thus, Agu embodies the psychological

consequences of a society that weaponises the boy-child, forcing premature adulthood at the cost of emotional well-being.

Psychologically, Agu undergoes severe trauma, moral confusion, and identity fragmentation. His transformation from “boy to beast” reflects both the loss of innocence and the corrosion of empathy. Iweala uses grotesque imagery - pain, bodily distortion, and animal metaphors to externalise Agu’s psychological breakdown. The grotesque thus captures the mental dissonance of a child trapped between life and death, human and beast, innocence and guilt. Iweala’s use of a fragmented narrative voice mirrors Agu’s fractured psyche, revealing the psychological toll of forced militancy and the internalisation of violence as a survival mechanism. Agu’s internal conflict - between the moral innocence of childhood and the brutal masculinity imposed by the Commandant - illustrates the psychological fragmentation that defines neglected African boyhood in conflict zones (Iweala, 2005).

Similarly, in *Beasts of No Nation*, the character Strika epitomises the profound psychological trauma embedded in the experience of child soldiers. Strika's psychological dimensions reveal the crippling effects of war on boyhood, especially through silence, expression, vulnerability, and damaged identity. Strika's silence is a key psychological marker. After the trauma of witnessing his parents' deaths, he becomes almost mute, a manifestation of his emotional repression and the overwhelming trauma inflicted on him by the brutal conflict. His silence symbolises more than just muteness; it represents a psychological defence mechanism against the harsh realities of his environment. Unable to communicate verbally, Strika resorts to drawing disturbing images of violence, such as severed heads. This mode of expression through art becomes a crucial outlet for his internalised pain and a way to communicate what words cannot encompass, illustrating the profound fragmentation of his identity. Furthermore, Strika exists as a victim of coercive power in a violent social order dominated by the Commandant. The abusive control exerted upon him and other child soldiers parallels an exploitative surrogate parental relationship, where survival depends on submission rather than freedom, which deepens Strika’s psychological vulnerability. His silence also reflects the broader silencing of child soldiers who are often stripped of agency and voice amid conflict.

The narrative employs a fragmented, stream-of-consciousness style to depict his internal struggle, oscillating between fear, guilt, and desensitisation. Agu experiences post-traumatic stress as he reconciles his childhood innocence with the atrocities he commits. Iweala emphasises that the boy-child's psyche is both socially constructed and violently manipulated, with societal neglect compounding the effects of economic and cultural disruption. The text presents a stark commentary on how external forces such as war, social expectation, and exploitation translate into profound psychological consequences for boys.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel explores a subtler form of psychological distress affecting the boys, Nhamo and Babamukuru, rooted in the colonial-era burden of aspiration and cultural alienation. The pressure to succeed within a Westernised, academic structure creates a "nervous condition" of the soul. Nhamo, as the chosen son, carries the immense psychological weight of being the family's sole hope for economic and social salvation. This pressure dictates his identity, stripping him of the freedom of typical boyhood.

While *Nervous Conditions* centres on Tambu, it offers a nuanced portrayal of her brother, Nhamo, whose psychological development reflects internalised patriarchy and identity conflict. Sent to mission school and treated as intellectually superior, Nhamo internalises notions of male privilege, leading him to devalue his cultural origins and family connections. He grows increasingly emotionally distant. His psychological transformation is not simply arrogance, but a manifestation of colonial mimicry, where self-worth becomes attached to Western identity. Nhamo's sense of superiority masks insecurity; he must constantly perform masculinity to justify the educational and social privilege afforded to him.

Presumably, Nhamo's irritability and emotional withdrawal are the psychological fallout of having his personal identity subsumed by his function as the "educated boy." His success is mandatory, leading to intense performance anxiety and a psychological distance from his uneducated family, whom he begins to view as obstacles to his progress. The pursuit of a Western education forces Nhamo into a psychological rift. To succeed, he must fully embrace the values of the colonial elite, leading to a deep alienation from his Shona heritage. He deliberately rejects his native

language and the poverty of the homestead. His disdain for the rural setting reveals the psychological rift:

He talked fluently in English with my father... The rest of us spoke to Nhamo in Shona, to which, when he did answer, he answered in English, making a point of speaking slowly, deliberately, enunciating each syllable clearly so that we could understand....But the situation was not entirely hopeless. When a significant issue did arise so that it was necessary to discuss matters in depth, Nhamo's Shona - grammar, vocabulary, accent, and all - would miraculously return for the duration of the discussion, only to disappear again mysteriously once the issue was settled. (Dangarembga, 1998, p. 85)

Nhamo's psychological state is one of profound cultural homelessness. He is neither fully accepted by the white world he aspires to, nor is he capable of reintegrating into his traditional home, making his emotional experience one of perpetual, unresolved tension. Furthermore, the novel reveals that boys are discouraged from emotional expression, unlike girls, whose suffering is visible and socially narrated. Nhamo's emotional life remains concealed, eventually contributing to a quiet psychological decline that parallels Nyasha's more visible distress. Colonial education and patriarchal expectation, therefore, produce alienation and emotional repression, shaping Nhamo's identity and emotional development.

Nervous Conditions explores the psychological dimensions through Nhamo and Tambu's contrasting experiences. Nhamo, though privileged, is constrained by the pressures of colonial education and patriarchal expectations. His early death signifies the fragility of boyhood under systemic stress, underscoring that privilege alone does not safeguard mental health. Tambu's psychological development, while central, also reflects the impact of male dominance on the boy-child's formation; boys learn early that emotional repression and aggression are markers of masculinity, internalising behaviour that limits empathy and self-awareness.

Neshani Andreas's novel, *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, focusing on the systemic oppression of women through patriarchal inheritance laws, portrays a boyhood psychology marked by unearned entitlement and passive indifference to female suffering. Shange, Kauna's husband,

embodies the psychological conditioning of patriarchal privilege. In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, psychological neglect is portrayed through the experiences of boys in rural Namibian communities where emotional expression is deeply gendered. Although the narrative focuses on women, it indirectly shows the emotional abandonment of boys, who witness gender-based violence and internalise destructive masculine norms.

The most telling psychological dimension of the male relative's role in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* is their passive indifference to the injustice inflicted upon Kauna, Shange's widow. They benefit from the system that actively impoverishes her. While not malicious, their inability to perceive the injustice, or their silent acceptance of the narrative pushed by the elder males of the clan, reflects the ease with which patriarchal privilege is internalised. The novel's focus on the male relatives manipulating the widow and stripping her of all her husband owned shows how patriarchy psychologically trains boys to be unquestioning beneficiaries of female oppression. The psychological harm here is to the boy's moral development, as his privileged position allows him to escape the burden of empathy and the necessity of questioning the status quo.

According to Wheeler (2022), boys learn that emotional expression is equated with weakness: "A man must not cry. A man must stand" (p. 48). Such social conditioning trains boys to suppress vulnerability, producing internalised emotional silence. The domestic abuse endured by men and the observed suffering of children in violent homes underscore how boys learn to normalise emotional pain and aggression. They experience trauma not through direct violence alone, but through witnessing the suffering of women, shaping their understanding of relationships, authority, and selfhood. The expectation that boys must grow into providers and protectors results in an emotional burden that is unacknowledged by their families and communities. The psychological impact is long-term: boys enter adulthood without tools for emotional communication, reinforcing cycles of emotional detachment.

Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* highlights the intergenerational transmission of psychological conditioning in rural contexts. Boys are socialised to internalise aggression,

emotional suppression, and dominance as hallmarks of masculinity. Exposure to domestic violence and systemic inequality cultivates fear, anxiety, and suppressed emotional intelligence. Andreas demonstrates that the psychological consequences of boyhood are not solely individual but embedded within community norms, transmitted across generations through observation, expectation, and practice.

Across the three novels, psychological dimensions of boyhood are consistently shaped by a combination of socio-cultural expectations, economic limitations, and historical context. Boys are socialised to navigate complex environments that reward toughness, resilience, and dominance while punishing vulnerability and emotional openness. The texts collectively reveal that such conditioning, when compounded by structural neglect or conflict, fosters long-term psychological distress, trauma, and identity conflict.

4.3 Socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of the boy child in African societies (Objective two)

The notion of the "neglected boy-child" in African societies is complex, often obscured by the more visible narrative of female oppression. However, as demonstrated in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, boys are subjected to a specific form of neglect rooted in hyper-masculine expectations, economic burden, and the failure of protective societal institutions. This neglect is not an absence of attention, but a destructive misdirection of attention that moulds boys into tools for war, profit, or patriarchy, often at the cost of their psychological and emotional well-being.

The findings reveal that neglect of the African boy-child stems from deeply embedded socio-cultural structures, including patriarchal hierarchies, gender bias in socialisation, and postcolonial disorientation. While many African societies have rightly prioritised the empowerment of the girl-child, these texts expose the unintended consequence - boys are left without guidance in redefining their roles within changing gender dynamics. In Iweala's novel, the sudden collapse of civilian life leads to the cultural substitution of nurture with violence. The boy, Agu, is neglected

in the sense that his fundamental right to safety and emotional development is denied. Instead, society, represented by the military unit, demands that he transition instantly into a brutal man. This neglect is fuelled by the ideological rejection of childhood weakness, as articulated by the Commandant, who preaches a distorted form of self-reliance through violence: *"We are men now. We are no longer children. If you are having pity in your heart, you cannot be a soldier. A soldier is being hard like stone."* (p. 98)

The resulting neglect is the emotional starvation and the systematic trauma of the child soldier. Society refuses to recognise his need for protection, substituting it with the cultural expectation that he must become "hard." The neglect is a form of hyper-masculine imposition, forcing him to neglect his own humanity to survive. He has lost his moral compass, replaced by the immediate utility of a weapon. The study implicitly links Agu's plight to structural and cultural failures within war-torn African societies. Traditional patriarchal expectations require boys to remain behind during evacuation ("the men stay back"), exposing them to danger. This gendered norm of male bravery and sacrifice positions the boy-child as expendable.

The collapse of communal protection systems, elders, family, and moral instruction renders Agu vulnerable to exploitation by militarised adults. The Commandant, who becomes a peculiar parody of a father figure, perverts the cultural role of mentorship into domination and sexual abuse. The study reveals how war, patriarchy, and cultural silence about male suffering together contribute to the boy's neglect. Furthermore, the dehumanisation of children through militarisation is both a cultural and political failure. In societies that value obedience and endurance in men, the boy's suffering is normalised and unacknowledged. The novel's grotesque style, with its focus on bodily degradation and bestial imagery, symbolises the destruction of those socio-cultural institutions meant to nurture and protect the boy child

In *Beasts of No Nation*, the collapse of traditional authority during wartime dismantles the moral and social frameworks that once protected children. Agu's forced enlistment exemplifies how boys, deprived of family and community, become tools for warlords who exploit their need for belonging and approval. The militarisation of masculinity turns the boy-child into an agent of

destruction while simultaneously erasing his vulnerability. The Commandant's influence represents a perverted father figure, replacing love and mentorship with domination and violence. *Beasts of No Nation* exposes how the glorification of militarised masculinity in conflict zones leads to psychological desensitisation and a permanent rupture in the moral development of the boy-child. Societal silence regarding male trauma exacerbates this neglect, as boys are expected to suppress fear and grief in favour of strength and aggression.

Nervous Conditions (1988), exhibits neglect in a more complex yet equally detrimental manner. Within the patriarchal family structure, boys are groomed to occupy spaces of privilege without being emotionally prepared for the responsibilities that accompany them. Babamukuru's role as an authoritarian patriarch models dominance rather than empathy. Nhamo, as a result, inherits a skewed sense of masculinity that values education and modernity but dismisses humility and communal belonging. Dangarembga critiques the colonial system's reinforcement of gender hierarchies, which alienate boys from their families and cultures. The boy-child becomes emotionally neglected as he is pressured to embody an impossible ideal - both the torchbearer of Western progress and the custodian of African patriarchy. This contradiction leads to an identity crisis that mirrors the broader postcolonial tension within African societies.

In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Andreas (2001), identifies neglect as a cultural cycle that begins within the household. Boys are socialised to perceive caregiving, emotional expression, and vulnerability as feminine weaknesses. The community's silence on male emotional needs normalises neglect. Andreas implies that while women bear the visible burden of oppression, men suffer silently from the emotional poverty created by the same system. The boy-child's neglect thus becomes invisible - hidden beneath societal expectations that define manhood through control, endurance, and economic provision. Consequently, African societies fail to nurture emotionally intelligent men, perpetuating patterns of domestic violence, emotional distance, and broken family structures.

Across the three novels, socio-cultural neglect emerges not as deliberate cruelty but as a structural oversight sustained by patriarchal norms and postcolonial dislocation. The boy-child is

neglected not because he is undervalued, but because he is overburdened by unrealistic expectations of strength and stoicism.

4.4 The intersection of masculinity and vulnerability in the selected novels (Objective Three)

The intersection of masculinity and vulnerability is a profound theme in African literature, revealing how societal, cultural, and political pressures mould and often distort male identity, leading to both outward aggression and internal disintegration. Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001) offer a triptych of perspectives on the dynamic of masculinity versus vulnerability. In these novels, the performance of male strength - be it patriarch, soldier, or husband- is shown to be a fragile defence against a vulnerability rooted in colonialism, war trauma, and rigid patriarchy. First, masculinity is a social performance: practices and expectations (not essential traits) constitute what a community accepts as “manly” (Connell, 1995; Morrell, 2001). Second, vulnerability is not simply the opposite of masculinity but a condition that coexists with it and often becomes concealed by masculine performance. The three novels together highlight how social structures require performance of toughness while simultaneously generating the conditions for emotional, moral, and psychological fragility.

Iweala's novel is the starkest demonstration of masculinity forced upon a child from the outside. Agu's transformation from boy to soldier makes visible the coercive manufacture of a violent masculinity and the psychic costs that ensue. The Commandant's pedagogy is explicit: manhood equals obedience, killing, and endurance. Agu's repeated, anguished line: “*I am feeling like I am not even me anymore. I am not Agu. I am a soldier*” (Iweala, 2005, p. 43) - captures the core crisis: identity erasure as the price of survival. The phrase registers dissociation, a classic trauma response, and shows how externally imposed masculinity restructures subjectivity. Two interrelated features deserve emphasis. First, masculinity in Iweala is performative under duress. The child is taught to “perform” fearlessness: “*They are telling me to kill, and I am killing*” (Iweala, 2005, p. 59). The syntactic bluntness reflects moral numbness; linguistic fragmentation in the narrative parallels psychological fragmentation. Secondly, vulnerability is present but forcibly muted. Agu witnesses atrocities and experiences guilt: “*I am seeing blood everywhere I am*

looking" (Iweala, 2005, p. 67) - but the social world offers no rituals or language to process this suffering. Instead, masculinity is institutionalised through the militia's rewards and punishments, turning vulnerability into liability.

Iweala also shows how the absence of stable adult models (fathers, community elders) exacerbates vulnerability. Early on, Agu notes, "*My father is dead. My mother is gone. There is nobody to be telling me what is good and what is bad*" (Iweala, 2005, p. 12). The community's collapse removes mediating structures that might allow grief, moral instruction, or psychological repair. In short, militarised masculinity displaces mentorship with exploitation; vulnerability remains but loses social recognition and avenues for healing.

Dangarembga offers a powerful illustration of how social expectations of masculinity can produce vulnerability. In *Nervous Conditions*, masculinity is entangled with colonial education and patriarchal entitlement. Nhamo's advancement through formal schooling marks him as "successful" by patriarchal standards; yet success isolates him. Tambu observes a change in him: "*Nhamo had forgotten how to speak Shona properly*" (Dangarembga, 1988, p. 83). This linguistic detail signals cultural estrangement and the psychological cost of conforming to colonial masculinities as elucidated by Fanon in his book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1970). In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explores the concept of "double consciousness", a term that describes the internal conflict experienced by colonised individuals who navigate their identity within a society that devalues their existence. He posits that the colonised are often forced to adopt the values and norms of the colonisers, leading to a profound sense of alienation and psychological distress. This alienation is not merely a personal struggle but a collective experience shared by those subjected to colonial rule. Fanon's analysis reveals how colonialism creates a massive psycho-existential complex, where both the colonised and the coloniser are trapped in a cycle of mutual dehumanisation and identity crisis.

Masculine performance in *Nervous Conditions* is aspirational and competitive. Boys are trained to embody rationality, leadership, and public authority, qualities valued by both the patriarchal family and colonial institutions. Babamukuru (the patriarch) embodies the ideal male figure:

authoritative and triumphant in the colonial order, but emotionally distant. The novel shows that such authority often masks an inner brittleness: enforced stoicism prevents acknowledgement of loneliness, fear, or moral doubt.

Nhamo's sudden death, an abrupt rupture of the expected trajectory, is symbolically freighted. It draws a line between outward masculine advancement and inner fragility: gaining the external signs of manhood (education, status) does not inoculate one against psychological breakdown. Tambu's reflections suggest that colonial patriarchy produces men who are formally empowered yet emotionally bereft. The phrase often attributed to the title's concern, *Nervous Conditions*, thus resonates: the entire social order generates conditions that degrade mental well-being for both sexes, but in gendered ways.

Andreas writes from a rural Namibian context where patriarchal traditions shape everyday life; there, the intersection of masculinity and vulnerability appears as quiet, routinised suffering. Men are expected to be providers and stoic heads of households, and boys learn by watching. The narrator records the patriarchal rule of emotional suppression: "A man must not show weakness, even when his heart is breaking" (Andreas, 2001, p. 64). That proverb succinctly codes vulnerability as forbidden.

The intersection of culture and masculinity is clearly exemplified in Andreas's work through the well-crafted characters. Shange's conduct in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* represents a destructive form of toxic masculinity, consistent with Connell's (2020) conception of hegemonic masculinity, which positions dominance and control as central to male identity. His physical abuse of Kauna illustrates how violence becomes normalised within patriarchal societies as a means through which men assert authority, a pattern also emphasised by Jewkes and Morrell (2018) in their analysis of gender-based violence as a mechanism for maintaining male power. Shange's blatant infidelity further reinforces patriarchal expectations by trivialising marital commitment and undermining his wife's dignity. This behaviour aligns with Rhode's (2003) argument that infidelity is often constructed as a masculine privilege, enabling the objectification and devaluation of women. Moreover, Shange's inconsistent persona - displaying kindness to

others while remaining abusive at home - demonstrates the duplicitous nature of toxic masculinity, whereby outward respectability conceals private cruelty and leaves victims such as Kauna without meaningful support.

Shange's disregard for the emotional needs of his daughter, Kandiwapa, exposes the intergenerational ramifications of toxic masculinity, corresponding to Hooks' (2015) critique of patriarchal systems that neglect men's nurturing roles. As Kandiwapa witnesses her mother's suffering, she absorbs trauma and distorted perceptions of gender roles, reflecting Jewkes et al.'s (2020) findings on how exposure to domestic violence fuels recurring cycles of relational harm. Shange's failure to offer protection or emotional care reinforces a model of masculinity that prioritises dominance rather than empathy, thereby sustaining inequalities that weaken familial bonds. Through this characterisation, Andreas not only critiques the societal norms that enable such destructive behaviour but also aligns with Alawode' (2024) call for systemic interventions to challenge cultural practices that legitimise abuse and to encourage more equitable and humane expressions of masculinity. Ultimately, Shange's character demonstrates how unchecked male dominance inflicts profound suffering on women and children while reinforcing broader structural inequalities, underscoring the pressing need for societal transformation to dismantle toxic masculinity and prevent the continuation of generational trauma.

Victor, Michael's cousin, embodies another dimension of harmful masculinity through his reckless sexual conduct. His frequent pursuit of multiple sexual partners - described as chasing "every dress and skirt" (Andreas, 2001, p. 16) - reflects a hypersexualised form of masculinity that equates male worth with sexual conquest, as noted by Harrington (2021). Ultimately, Victor's behaviour leads to his demise, as his lack of responsibility results in his contracting and dying from AIDS. Andreas employs Victor's narrative to interrogate a social culture that normalises hyper sexuality and glorifies male promiscuity, revealing its damaging effects on individuals as well as on families and communities more broadly. Victor's actions exemplify the patterns identified by Rhode (2003), who argues that hyper sexuality perpetuates cycles of harm, including the transmission of sexually transmitted infections and the emotional disintegration of family structures.

Two dynamics are salient in the three texts. First, masculinity is reproduced intergenerationally: boys imitate fathers who hide anxieties; these habits calcify into a culture of emotional illiteracy. Wheeler's observation: "*Our men die before their time because they carry everything on their shoulders*" (Wheeler, 2022, p. 55). Masculinity casts male endurance as a pathology, a socially mandated martyrdom that leaves no space for grief, confession, or repair. Secondly, vulnerability is not spectacular but endemic: it takes the form of depression, alcoholism, or domestic cruelty, outcomes of chronic emotional bottling. Because community norms valorise public control, private pain becomes invisible and untreated. Andreas also highlights how gendered expectations affect relationships: the suppression of vulnerability damages intimacy and propagates cycles of violence. Boys who learn that "a man must not tremble" become men who cannot connect, reinforcing structural gender harms. Thus, vulnerability is transmitted as an absence, the absence of models for emotional health.

4.5 Chapter summary

The analysis of the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood across Iweala, Dangarembga, and Andreas underscores the multidimensional nature of male childhood in African contexts. The African boy-child is simultaneously privileged and constrained: he is groomed to assume authority and resilience, yet often denied the emotional, educational, and social resources necessary for holistic development.

Socio-cultural norms prescribe a rigid version of masculinity, economic conditions mediate access to opportunity and survival, and psychological development is influenced by both structural pressures and interpersonal relationships. *Beasts of No Nation* illustrates the devastating effects of war and militarisation on boys; *Nervous Conditions* emphasises the subtle but pervasive effects of colonial patriarchy on identity and opportunity; *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* highlights how rural economic scarcity and traditional norms produce cycles of behavioural and psychological conditioning. Collectively, the novels portray African boys as complex figures navigating social expectations, economic realities, and personal vulnerability, revealing the often-overlooked cost of neglect and systemic constraint.

This multidimensional analysis aligns with broader scholarship on African masculinity, which emphasises the interplay between culture, economy, and psychology in shaping male identities. The findings underscore the importance of reimagining boyhood in African societies, advocating for structures that allow emotional expression, equitable access to education, and protection from systemic neglect. By foregrounding the boy-child's experiences in literature, these texts contribute to a deeper understanding of gendered socialisation, vulnerability, and resilience in African contexts.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations derived from the findings and discussions in Chapter Four of this study, which explored *The Plight of a Neglected African Boy-Child* through the selected novels: Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). The overarching objective of the study was to illuminate the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological challenges faced by the African boy-child as represented in contemporary African fiction.

The analysis in Chapter Four established that the condition of the African boy-child is shaped by a complex interplay of socio-cultural expectations, economic deprivation, patriarchal conditioning, and emotional neglect. The selected novels collectively demonstrate how African societies, while investing heavily in the preservation of masculine authority, simultaneously fail to nurture the emotional, moral, and psychological growth of their boys.

This chapter, therefore, synthesises the main findings in relation to the research objectives, draws comprehensive conclusions from these findings, and provides recommendations for literary, educational, and policy interventions aimed at addressing the neglect of the African boy-child. The chapter concludes with suggestions for further research that may expand upon the present study's insights.

5.2.1 Socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood

The analysis revealed that the socio-cultural formation of boyhood in African societies is deeply influenced by patriarchal ideologies that privilege male dominance while discouraging emotional vulnerability. In *Beasts of No Nation*, Iweala (2005) depicts the disintegration of Agu's childhood identity under the pressures of militarised masculinity and societal violence. Agu's forced

participation in warfare reflects the destruction of traditional rites of passage and the collapse of communal mentorship. His psychological fragmentation - "*I am feeling like I am not even me anymore*" (p. 43) - illustrates how the violent construction of manhood erases the boy's humanity.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga (1988) portrays a different dimension of socio-cultural conditioning through Nhamo's internalisation of colonial masculinity. His sense of superiority, acquired through Western education, alienates him from his cultural roots and family. His death symbolises the collapse of a psyche torn between African identity and colonial ideals of manhood. Similarly, Babamukuru's rigid authoritarianism exemplifies the emotional imprisonment that patriarchal masculinity imposes on African men.

In Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001), masculinity is defined through domestic authority and endurance. Boys and men are socialised to suppress emotions and prioritize control, as expressed in the line, "*A man must not show weakness, even when his heart is breaking*" (p. 64). This cultural teaching results in emotional stunting and strained familial relationships. Collectively, the novels underscore that the socialisation of boys into rigid masculine roles fosters emotional isolation, moral confusion, and psychological trauma - constituting a form of neglect embedded in cultural systems.

Economically, the study found that poverty, inequality, and social instability intensify the vulnerability of the boy-child. In *Beasts of No Nation*, the disintegration of family and community due to war reveals how economic deprivation exposes boys to manipulation and exploitation. In *Nervous Conditions*, the unequal access to education based on gender and class highlights how socio-economic structures privilege boys materially while neglecting their emotional and ethical development. In *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, Andreas portrays the economic burdens placed on men as a continuation of boyhood expectations - men carry everything on their shoulders, reflecting how boys are conditioned from an early age to associate self-worth with economic provision, often at the cost of emotional well-being.

Psychologically, the novels expose the devastating consequences of trauma, repression, and social alienation. Agu's emotional numbness and recurring nightmares represent the internal scars of neglected boyhood. Nhamo's alienation from home and culture, and the emotional vacancy of the men in Andreas's novel, collectively portray a pattern of psychological suffering perpetuated by socio-cultural conditioning. The study thus concludes that African boyhood is characterised by a persistent tension between societal expectations and personal identity, leading to profound internal conflict.

5.2.2 Socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of the boy-child

The study identified several socio-cultural factors that contribute to the persistent neglect of the boy-child in African societies. Chief among these are patriarchal norms, gender bias, colonial legacies, and the erosion of traditional family structures.

Patriarchal ideology positions boys as future heads of households and custodians of authority, which paradoxically results in their emotional neglect. Boys are often denied affection, guidance, and moral mentorship under the pretext of strengthening them for leadership. As seen in *Nervous Conditions*, Nhamo's privileged education isolates him from his family and community, while in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, rural boys are taught to emulate emotionally detached fathers. Such cultural practices cultivate a false sense of power that conceals emotional deficiency. Furthermore, the study found that the erosion of family and community networks due to modernisation, war, and migration diminishes the social spaces where boys traditionally received guidance from elders. In *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu's descent into violence is facilitated by the absence of parental and communal protection - a metaphor for societal abandonment. The Commandant becomes a distorted father figure, reinforcing violent masculinity.

Colonial and postcolonial gender ideologies also reinforce neglect by framing the boy-child as inherently privileged and therefore unworthy of attention in contemporary gender discourse. This oversight perpetuates a cycle of emotional neglect, where boys are socialised to suppress vulnerability and equate affection with weakness. Thus, the socio-cultural neglect of the boy-

child arises not from material deprivation alone, but from the systematic denial of emotional expression, moral mentorship, and spiritual grounding - factors crucial for holistic development.

5.2.3 The intersection of masculinity and vulnerability

The third major finding of the study is that masculinity and vulnerability coexist as interdependent forces in the formation of African boyhood. Across the three novels, the attempt to suppress vulnerability becomes the central source of male suffering and dysfunction.

In *Beasts of No Nation*, Iweala (2005) reveals that Agu's forced militarisation transforms vulnerability into survival. His fear, guilt, and longing for his mother reveal a deeply human core suppressed by violence. The narrative demonstrates that emotional vulnerability persists even within hyper-masculine environments, challenging the myth of male invulnerability.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga (1988) shows how patriarchal and colonial ideals of masculinity imprison men within emotional repression. Both Nhamo and Babamukuru represent the façade of masculine success that conceals deep-seated insecurity and alienation. Their inability to communicate affection or weakness highlights the internal contradictions of colonial patriarchy.

Andreas (2001), in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*, illustrates the quiet suffering of men burdened by societal expectations. Her portrayal of society's expectations of boys and men encapsulates the emotional toll of patriarchal masculinity. Vulnerability, rather than being an antithesis to manhood, becomes an unacknowledged dimension of male identity. The intersection of masculinity and vulnerability across these novels underscores the need to re-conceptualise African masculinity as inclusive of emotional sensitivity and psychological well-being. The study concludes that acknowledging vulnerability as an integral aspect of manhood is essential for breaking cycles of emotional neglect and violence.

5.3 Conclusion

The study set out to explore *The Plight of a Neglected African Boy-Child* through Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). The analysis was guided by three objectives: to examine the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood; to investigate the socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of the boy child; and to analyse the intersection of masculinity and vulnerability as depicted in the selected novels. From these objectives, the study has drawn several key conclusions regarding the complex realities of African boyhood.

Firstly, the study concludes that the African boy-child is both privileged and vulnerable within patriarchal societal structures. While culturally valued as the future bearer of family name, authority, and tradition, the boy child also faces emotional neglect, moral isolation, and social disconnection. In *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu's fall into violence shows how denying childhood and emotional care leads to the dehumanisation of boys. Similarly, in *Nervous Conditions*, Nhamo's alienation from his family and cultural identity highlights how colonial patriarchy distorts both male privilege and emotional growth. Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* also shows that boys, though appearing dominant in adulthood, carry deep psychological wounds caused by restrictive gender expectations during childhood.

Secondly, the study concludes that the neglect of the boy-child is structurally embedded within African socio-cultural and economic systems. Traditional expectations of toughness, stoicism, and authority deprive boys of nurturing relationships and moral mentorship. Patriarchy not only dictates how boys must behave but also restricts how they can feel. The result is a cycle of emotional illiteracy that reproduces male aggression, domestic instability, and social alienation. Moreover, economic pressures, such as poverty, unemployment, and the demand for male provision, reinforce these patterns of neglect. Boys are conditioned to measure their worth by economic productivity rather than emotional balance, a process visible in both Dangarembga's and Andreas's depictions of male identity.

Thirdly, the study established that masculinity and vulnerability intersect rather than oppose one another. The selected novels collectively reveal that true strength arises not from emotional suppression but from self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to express vulnerability. Iweala's portrayal of Agu demonstrates that moments of weakness, his tears, fear, and longing for his mother, are expressions of humanity, not failure. Dangarembga's depiction of Babamukuru and Nhamo illustrates that emotional repression, rather than vulnerability, leads to psychological instability. Andreas's male characters, burdened by unspoken suffering, reflect how the denial of vulnerability contributes to broken relationships and premature death.

Drawing on Gyntri Spivak's work on the subaltern, Spivak asks the key question of whether the subaltern can speak. For quite some time, women have been regarded as the subalterns, but recently, there has been a paradigm shift, and men have become the subalterns. In contemporary African society, men's voices are often marginalised. This supports Spivak's (1988) argument that the voice of the subaltern (in this case, the voice of men in a female-dominated African society) is rarely heard. She highlights that the voice and space of the subaltern are subjugated within the dominant discourse, either consciously or unconsciously. Additionally, stereotypical masculinity is often portrayed by the three novels in this study as normal, natural, and universal across many societies. Patriarchy (an ideology that privileges men), without equipping them with the emotional and psychological stamina, as portrayed by the characters like Shange, Agu, and Babamukuru, paradoxically marginalises them. The African society, powered by Western ideas, particularly feminist movements, is slowly succeeding in asserting dominance and subordination of men, enforcing the stigma that they initially intended to erase, and widening the gender inequality gap.

Therefore, the study concludes that African societies must re-conceptualise masculinity by integrating emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, and compassion into the socialisation of boys. The neglect of the boy-child, though less visible than that of the girl child, has far-reaching implications for gender relations, family stability, and community health. Addressing this neglect requires both cultural introspection and structural reform.

Finally, the study concludes that African literature plays a crucial role in challenging dominant narratives of masculinity and in humanising the experiences of boys. Although this study was an exploration of literary texts, it is tempting to view its findings as a microcosm of the 21st-century African society. Through the narrative strategies of trauma, introspection, and realism, the selected authors give voice to the silenced emotions of the African boy-child, encouraging readers and scholars to confront the unseen dimensions of male suffering. Their works collectively emphasise that healing and transformation within African societies must begin with empathy for both genders and a redefinition of what it means to be human.

5.4. Recommendations

Based on the conclusion derived from this study, the following recommendations are suggested for educators, policymakers, literary scholars, and African communities. These recommendations focus on the socio-cultural, educational, and literary aspects of masculinity and aim to foster equitable gender development within African communities.

5.4.1. Socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of boyhood (Objective 1)

African educational systems should incorporate well-structured programs that promote emotional literacy, empathy, and self-expression among males. Educational institutions should serve as secure environments where males can openly engage in conversations about mental health, identity, and gender roles without apprehension of judgment. This will confront the stereotype that masculinity necessitates emotional restraint.

Gender equity initiatives should acknowledge that empowering females must be complemented by the emotional and social development of boys. Awareness initiatives should seek to dispel the misconception that males are inherently resilient and consequently do not need guidance or support.

Community mentorship and role modelling, including initiation ceremonies and community-centred educational programmes, should be revitalised and adapted to contemporary contexts to foster the development of a positive male identity. Adult males, particularly fathers and

educators, must act as emotionally intelligent role models who instill in boys a sense of responsibility, empathy, and respect for others.

Addressing the stigma of mental health in boys could be another viable measure. Psychology services and counselling should be readily available to boys and young men, especially within educational institutions and areas affected by conflict. Mental health should underscore that seeking assistance is not indicative of frailty but rather an expression of self-care and resilience.

5.4.2. Socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of the boy-child (Objective Two)

African communities should reconsider cultural definitions of masculinity. There is a need to participate in collective discourse regarding masculinity, questioning conventional norms that associate manhood exclusively with authority, dominance, or economic achievement. Cultural leaders and educators ought to advocate for innovative frameworks of masculinity that incorporate vulnerability, empathy, and a sense of communal duty.

Government and non-governmental organisations should develop social policies that explicitly cater to the developmental requirements of males, encompassing education, mentorship, and mental health. This encompasses the development of platforms that enable boys and men to exchange experiences and engage in gender dialogue in conjunction with their female peers.

Economic empowerment initiatives should ensure equal targeting of all genders, offering training and opportunities that enable individuals to envisage career paths beyond conventional gender-specific roles. Alleviating poverty will lessen the constraints that compel boys to engage in exploitative systems such as child soldiering or early labour migration.

Writers, artists, and filmmakers should be encouraged to create works that depict the intricate emotional experiences of boys and men, thereby challenging detrimental stereotypes of masculine invulnerability. Literature can serve as a potent instrument for transforming cultural narratives concerning gender and emotions.

5.4.3 The intersection of masculinity and vulnerability (Objective Three)

Scholars are encouraged to further investigate depictions of the boy-child in African literature, with particular emphasis on themes of masculinity, vulnerability, and postcolonial identity. Future research may analyse contemporary works by emerging African authors to evaluate the impact of shifting cultural norms on masculine identity.

Research on boyhood should incorporate insights from psychology, sociology, and anthropology to enhance understanding of how social and economic structures influence masculine development. Such interdisciplinary efforts can serve to resolve the divide between literary studies and social policy. African gender studies should employ frameworks that encompass the experiences of both men and women regarding oppression, acknowledging that patriarchy adversely affects all genders in unique ways. The participation of the male adolescent in gender discourse will promote a more comprehensive approach to equality and empowerment.

5.5 Chapter summary

Chapter Five synthesises the major findings, conclusions, and recommendations emerging from the study of the African boy-child as depicted in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Neshani Andreas's *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* (2001). Drawing from an in-depth literary analysis, the chapter consolidates how socio-cultural, economic, and psychological forces collectively shape the lived realities of the boy-child in contemporary African societies.

The chapter reaffirms that African boyhood is constructed at the intersection of patriarchal expectations, structural inequalities, and emotional neglect. The socio-cultural analysis revealed that boys are socialised into rigid masculine roles that valorise dominance while discouraging emotional expression, resulting in profound psychological tension and alienation. In all three novels, male characters experience disrupted childhoods, fractured identities, and emotional suppression due to societal pressures that equate masculinity with stoicism, authority, and endurance. The psychological effects of militarisation in *Beasts of No Nation*, the colonial distortions of manhood in *Nervous Conditions*, and the emotionally restrictive domestic norms

in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* collectively demonstrate how boyhood is marked by both privilege and vulnerability.

The chapter further identifies patriarchal ideology, colonial legacies, and the erosion of communal support systems as dominant socio-cultural factors contributing to the neglect of boys. These forces construct the boy-child as inherently privileged and emotionally self-sufficient, thereby obscuring his need for guidance, nurturing, and psychological support. The texts reveal how this structural oversight fosters emotional illiteracy, perpetuates cycles of violence, and produces men who struggle with identity, empathy, and healthy relationships.

A key conclusion of the chapter is that masculinity and vulnerability are not opposing constructs but mutually constitutive. The selected novels illustrate that male vulnerability persists beneath patriarchal façades and remains central to understanding male suffering. The suppression of vulnerability ultimately contributes to psychological instability, moral disorientation, and social fragmentation.

The study therefore concludes that African societies must reconceptualise masculinity by integrating emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and compassion into the upbringing of boys. It argues that the neglect of the boy-child—though subtle and often unacknowledged—has significant implications for gender relations and community well-being. The chapter also emphasises that African literature serves as a critical space for interrogating cultural norms, exposing the hidden emotional lives of boys, and stimulating discourse on healthier models of masculinity.

In response to these findings, the chapter recommends interventions at educational, cultural, and policy levels. These include incorporating emotional literacy in school curricula, revitalising culturally grounded mentorship systems, expanding mental health support for boys, and promoting balanced gender equity initiatives that recognise boys' developmental needs. It further urges policymakers to craft inclusive social programmes, encourages artists to diversify representations of male vulnerability, and calls for interdisciplinary research that bridges literary studies with social sciences to deepen understanding of boyhood in Africa.

Overall, the chapter concludes that meaningful transformation in African gender discourse requires acknowledging the boy-child as both a beneficiary and victim of patriarchal structures. By foregrounding the emotional and psychological dimensions of male experiences, African societies can work towards more holistic, equitable, and humane models of gender development.

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Appendix 1 Ethical Clearance



NAMIBIA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

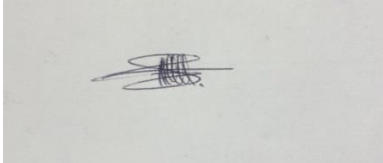
FACULTY OF HUMAN SCIENCES

RESEARCHER/SUPERVISOR DETAILS
Title (Prof/Dr/Mr/Ms/Other): MS Full names/surname of researcher: PANDULENI K MPINGE NUST staff or student number: STUDENT Contact details Work: 0813030280 Mobile: 0813945445 E-mail address: amdelight@gmail.com University: NUST Faculty: HUMAN SCIENCES Department: LANGUAGES
Title of research project: The plight of a neglected African Boy Child: An exploration of Uzodinma Iweala's <i>Beast of No Nation</i>(2005), Tsitsi Dangarembwa's <i>Nervous Conditions</i>(1988), and Neshani Andreas's <i>The Purple Violet of Oshaantu</i>(2001)
NUST students (indicate degree programme): <i>Masters of English and Applied Linguistics (09MOEL)</i>
Supervisor (Title, name and surname): Prof Max Mhene

DESKTOP STUDIES

DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER

I hereby declare that I will conduct my research in compliance with the professional code(s) of ethics and guidelines for Ethically responsible research relevant to my field of study as specified in the list herewith attached, and the 'Framework policy for the assurance and promotion of Ethically accountable research at the Namibia University of Science and Technology', even if my research poses minimal or low Ethical risk.

PANDULENI K MPINGE Name of Researcher	 Signature	Date: 31/10/2025
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Name of Supervisor (if applicable) Prof M. Mhene	 Signature	Date 31/10/2025
Name of co-supervisor (if applicable) Prof A. Hautemo	Signature	Date 31/10/2025

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	Yes	NS*	No	ACTION REQUIRED
1. Familiarity with Ethical codes of conduct				
As researcher, I have familiarised myself with the professional code(s) of ethics and guidelines for Ethically responsible research relevant to my field of study as specified in the list herewith attached, AND the policy for the assurance and promotion of Ethically accountable research at NUST	YES			If YES: Continue with the checklist. If NS/NO: Researcher must do so before proceeding.
2. The proposed research: (Proceed with the whole of Section 2)				
a) Involves gathering information directly from human subjects (individuals or groups) (e.g. by means of questionnaires, interviews, observation of subjects or working with personal data)			NO	If YES: Continue with the checklist. If NO: This checklist process does not apply to the proposed research, except if 2 (b) applies.
b) Involves gathering information directly from companies, corporations, organisations, NGOs, government departments etc. that is not available in the public domain			NO	If YES: Continue with the checklist. If NO: This checklist process does not apply to the proposed research.

Appendix 2

Language editing Letter

ACET Consultancy
Anenyasha Communication, Editing, and Training
Box 50453 Bachbrecht, Windhoek, Namibia
Cell: +264814218613
Email: mlambons@yahoo.co.uk

28 November 2025

To Whom It May Concern

LANGUAGE EDITING – PANDULENI KANDALINDISHIWO MPINGE

This letter serves to confirm that a research proposal titled **THE PLIGHT OF A NEGLECTED AFRICAN BOY-CHILD: AN EXPLORATION OF IWEALA'S BEASTS OF NO NATION** (2005), **DANGAREMBGA'S NERVOUS CONDITIONS** (1988), AND **ANDREAS' THE PURPLE VIOLET OF OSHAANTU** (2001) was submitted to me for language editing.

The research document was professionally edited, and track changes and suggestions were made in the document. The research content or the author's intentions were not altered during the editing process, and the author has the authority to accept or reject my suggestions.

Yours faithfully



PROF. (DR) NELSON MLAMBO
PhD in English
M.A. in Intercultural Communication
M.A. in English
B. A. Special Honours in English – First class
B. A. English & Linguistics