Research Article

The Effects and Interventions of Dropping Out of Primary and Secondary Education in Bulawayo Metropolitan Schools

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Abstract: *School dropout symptoms are prevalent among primary and secondary education students, but very little is known about the background to these symptoms yet. The exclusion of students from school are directly related to lower attendance rates, increased course failures, and can set a student on a path of disengagement from school that will keep them from receiving a high school diploma and further affect their chances of enrolling in post-secondary schooling and realizing many life-long career opportunities. The study sought to investigate school dropout drivers, effects and interventions related to primary and secondary schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan region. The qualitative methodology inspired by the constructivist philosophy was employed and it considered case study design the ideal due to the subjective and inductive nature of the problem. It also utilized questionnaires and interviews directed towards school dropouts themselves and their parents, school authorities, teachers and Education Officers sampled purposively. The study established that cost of schooling was the highest driver, followed by belonging to child- headed families, the attitudes and behaviour of students, as well as early marriages and pregnancies. The major impacts of the school dropout include high crime rates, prostitution, early marriages and drug abuse. The recommendations included the need for an urgent revisit of teaching methods for them to be interesting and motivating to the learners. The issue of teacher/pupil ratio needed attention as those ballooning figures made effective learning almost impossible.*

Keywords: Dropout Antecedent, Primary And Secondary Education, Community, Dropout Rate.

INTRODUCTION

School dropout can be defined simply as any person who fails to earn a high school certificate. In practice, however, it can be a challenge to identify students who will drop out with precision. Dropouts have relatively high rates of mobility and school transfers can make graduation a difficult achievement to track. Although the primary education rate increased from 81% to 92% in 2015, hundreds of millions of children still leave school before completion (World Bank, 2015; UNESCO, 2007). The World Bank (2015) further pegs the number of out of school children, many of whom are dropouts, at 58 million with more than half being in Africa, a situation that does not ogre well with the Millennium Development Goals targeted for 2015. However, the issue is that the school dropouts exist and these dropouts have consequences for the communities and the country. The reasons for the problem also vary from place to place and Bulawayo metropolitan in Zimbabwe cannot be exempted.

Background to the Study

Globally, the problem of school dropouts is experienced by both developed and underdeveloped countries (Zvobgo, 1996). The first address of the then United States of America (USA) president, Barack Obama, vowed to commit his efforts to ending dropouts in public high schools (Farringson, 2012). This speech indicated that the issue of school dropouts is critical to developed countries as well. However, the reasons and magnitude tend to vary with developing countries being hit the most, due to less regard for the quality of education offered (Yilmaz & Kilicoglu 2013).

A study carried out in India indicated that children leave school due to financial problems (UNESCO Report, 2000). The situation is also dire in Bangladesh, where the dropout rate in Secondary schools between 2005 and 2007 was as high as 41% and the reason was lack of parental interest (Bangladesh News.com, 2005). The European Union too, has its share of problems in as far as dropouts are concerned (Latif *et al.,* 2015). There are also dropouts in America, although data collected varies with variables such as periods, data collection methods and the tracking systems used. By the year 2000, the American Goal 2, of at least 90% on school completion, had still not been achieved (Woods *et al.,* 2006).

In the global perspective, too, the area of school dropout dates to as far as 1927, if not earlier, when it was then called "school leaving". During that time, dropping out of school was linked to what Fuller (1927) explained as the "mental inferiority" (Young, 2002; & Walters, 2013). This mental inferiority referred to situations whereby the learner felt inadequate to the learning environment and decided to drop out. The authorities made an effort to evaluate dropout literature collectively, rather than in isolation. Doll *et al.* (2013) classify early literature on dropouts under push, pull and

fall-out factors. Analysis of the three factors varied with time. At one time, the pull-out factors were classified as the chief causes, but later they were overtaken by push out factors depending on the ages and levels of the pupils. The push out category is when the school environment force learners to leave school, whilst the pull-out category is when attractions or distractions entice learners to leave school. Fall out factors, on the other hand, are caused by academic failure leading to learners leaving school (Doll *et al.,* 2013). However, the area of school dropout causes has some common ground, albeit there being some differences in the interrelationships and causal factors of the phenomenon. Most of the causes of dropping out of school lie in individual factors, family factors, institutional, as well as community factors (Mawere, 2012).

However, global perspectives expose some gaps in the problem of dropouts. Methodically, for example, De Witte (2013) posit that qualitative research dominates literature on dropouts. They argue that the school dropout phenomenon is a complex one, which involves meaning as well as values. The Qualitative methodology is ideal for the nature of such phenomenon that requires interpretation as well as judgement. In agreement, Hunt (2008) states that many studies were quantitative and lacked in-depth accounts that are contextual. The author also bemoaned the scarcity of studies that carried out investigations with the dropouts themselves. Furthermore, Hunt (2008) expresses concern over the validity of the resources and the documents used in the studies. Another gap was the seeming failure by literature to show the processes that gradually lead to dropping out (Hunt, 2008). He also laments the lack of stories by the dropouts themselves, the teachers, the household members as well as the context in which the phenomenon occurs. This study, therefore, seeks to use the qualitative methods in order to capture the perceptions of the different participants.

From the school dropout figures provided in this study, it was evident that in the Bulawayo community some pupils dropped out of school prematurely. Although the actual major reasons for this school dropout rate was unknown in this case, authorities cited quite a number of them. Authorities cite individual factors, family factors, school factors and community factors as some of them (Doll *et al.,* 2013). It was also a fact that there were consequences to the school dropout phenomenon. These include unemployment, poverty, poor health, sustained dependence and crime (De Witte, 2013). On the other hand, interventions that were commonly cited included early childhood education schemes, school-community collaboration, systematic renewal as well as check and connect methods.

Studies on school dropouts in Zimbabwe tend to emphasize on rural settings (Mawere, 2012). The near silence on urban settings almost gives the impression that urban setups are immune to the school dropout challenge. Available statistics show otherwise. Statistics on dropouts in Reigate District in Bulawayo show that during the period 2013 to 2015, 1100 learners dropped out of both primary and secondary schools. Of these learners, 514 were males, whilst 586 were females. Primary schools had 442 whilst secondary schools had 658. The figures reflected that there were more school dropouts at secondary level than at primary. More girls than boys dropped out at both primary and secondary level. This is an area of concern indeed, as far as the vulnerable girl child is concerned. What is even more worrying being that some school authorities claimed that there were no dropouts in their schools and yet such former students were seen roaming the streets.

District figures also showed that there were 4512 male and 5062 female orphans at both primary and secondary level, which brought the total to 9574. These could be potential dropouts in the future. In this case, again, the girl child was more affected than the boys. Furthermore, the researchers' participation in the 2012 Censors exercise brought to light the fact that there were many school dropouts in the area of Pumula Township. The young local populace did not seem to be fully utilizing the educational facilities available in the area, but instead spent time roaming the streets and being a nuisance to the community.

The focus of the current study, therefore, was to investigate the dropout causes, the effects and possible interventions in the context of the study area, albeit with a critical eye on the efficiency and effectiveness of the education delivery system provided. The problem in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province is that some learners dropped out of school before finishing a basic Primary and Secondary school course. The gaps highlighted globally, continentally and locally also instigated the researchers to carry out this study with a view of reducing this phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem

The problem was that some learners in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province exit school before graduating regardless of the fact that the government introduced such policies as Education for All and BEAM. It is against this background that the researchers developed interest in investigating effects and interventions of opting out of primary and secondary education

Research Questions

The questions that guided the research were:
- Why are some learners in Bulawayo Province primary and secondary schools dropping out of school before graduating?
- What are the effects and interventions of opting out of primary and secondary education?

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept school dropout and related model approaches. Jabareen (2009) defines a conceptual framework as, "... a network or 'plane' of linked concepts." (p.49). The concepts, which may be heterogeneous, form components that construct a framework. Jabareen goes on to say, "In our contemporary times, most social phenomena are complex and linked to multiple bodies of knowledge that belong to different disciplines" (p.49). For this reason, better understanding of such phenomena required a multidisciplinary approach. The qualitative methodology served as adequate approach for investigating these complex phenomena. A conceptual framework is an important process of mapping out theoretical concepts to form a representation of the study (Sinclair, 2007). The conceptual framework discussion ensued with guidelines from Bolden, Lois (2008).

The origins of the concept of school dropout has already been described in the background to the study. However, the term was originally associated with early leaving of school with the measurement of school dropout paradigm shifting from place to place and with time. Countries like Portugal were until 1991 recording low learner graduation levels of about 85% but with no research being carried out to determine the causes (Alvarez & Pedro, 2013). However, the dropout statistics in various countries have since been used by the European Union (EU) to determine targets and policies. Generally, the school dropout concept has been associated with limited life opportunities as well as poor employment, leading to poverty and low social status for individuals. Dropout levels are also used as a measure of institutional progression and success and have undesirable effects on individuals and societies (MOESAC, 2012)). The determination of school dropout phenomenon levels is very important not only to individuals but to societies at large. The researcher, therefore, wishes to explore this phenomenon in the study area in order to determine mitigating measures. The approach to be used is based on the Systems Model of linking resources to input, processes and outputs within an environment. The approach will now be outlined below.

The Systems Model Concept

According to Banathy (1992), "the system view is a certain way of looking at ourselves, at the environment we live in, at all the systems that surround us, and those that we are part of" (p.15). Figure 2.1 below elaborately shows the systems model.
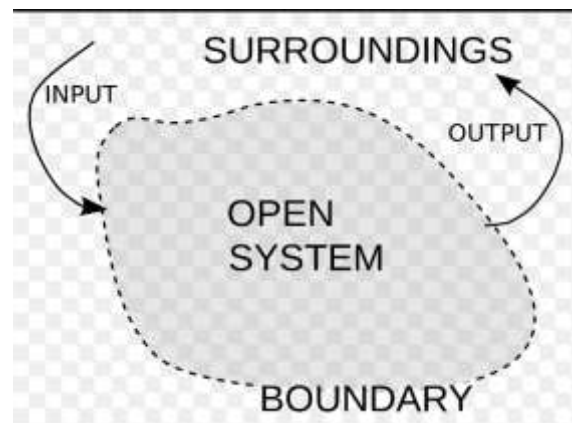

Figure 1: Systems Theory diagram Bronfebrenner (2012)

In the open systems model, the inputs provide the resources necessary for the functioning of the system. It means that the first concept, on major causes of learners dropping out of school, identifies the pull out or push out forces in the institutions. The school, being a system, resembles the Systems model, whereby the institution absorbs resources as inputs, in order to transform them into finished products (Joseph & Reigeluth, 2009). These inputs include learners, teachers and the learning/teaching materials. In a way, that shows how the school resembles a mill, which receives raw materials and processes them to fine or finished products. It then means that an unfinished product as an output indicates the system's shortcomings requiring a review. In the same manner, the school system has to be analyzed with a critical eye, in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness.

Both the finished and unfinished products also became areas of interest in order to identify corrective measures. In this case, the national policies, the programmes, the teaching methods and strategies as well as the curriculum itself, to mention but a few, became areas of scrutiny. However, since Joseph & Reigeluth (2009) argue against analyzing the components of the system in isolation, there had to be a holistic approach that addressed the whole system if the machine was to function coherently. It implied that necessary interventions also needed identification to address the anomaly. There was, therefore, reason to evaluate the inclusion of the product in the community, especially the unfinished product, hence the determination of the effects in the community. It showed that the school system did not only absorb resources, but also released the products to the same community, as outputs. In the same manner, the environment also provided feedback to the system that assisted in reforming the institutions' operations. The researcher has mentioned the interventions in the concept section above. In the next section, the study then viewed some system models that related to the study.

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- **The Systems-Environmental Model**

The systems-environmental model shows a bird eye's view, which describes the system in the context of the environment (Banathy, 1992). In that case, the stud used the qualitative methodology that focused on concepts in the context of the study area.

- **Functions/Structure Model**

The functions/structure model shows the still picture lens view which reviews education at a given period. It enables the researcher to evaluate processes of the system. The process includes reviewing its goals, purposes and functions (Banathy, 1992). In the same manner, the study viewed the performance of education over a period in order to determine its effectiveness and its ability to embrace various categories of learners in general.

- **The Process Models**

In the case of the process model, focus is on the motion picture lens view. It helps in assessing the way in which the school receives processes and transforms inputs to achieve its goals (Banathy, 1992). That was again an area of interest for the study in determining some of the possible causes of learners dropping out of school.

Conceptually, the study sought to assess how schools receive inputs and transforms them to outputs and outcomes with minimal wastages. Dropouts are viewed as wastages that could be avoided if schools and other stakeholders understand the dropout drivers and the effects of the phenomenon. Schools also need to be aware of mitigation measures that could be implemented to alleviate or eradicate the problem in the study area. In order to achieve this goal, the researcher sought to evaluate the education process considering aspects such as the school goals, the quality of education offered, the prevailing school climate, as well as the teaching and learning environment in general. The study, therefore, envisaged schools that accommodate and transform whole cohorts of learners from the first level of education up to graduation level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Basically, there were many types of research methodologies that were at the disposal of studies depending on issues such as the purpose and the situation involved. These included quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies. This study used the qualitative methodology, which involved reasoning and describing, as well as interpreting data. Creswell (1998) defines a qualitative research as, "An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The study builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports details views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting". In this case, the study tries to investigate a social and human case, that of dropouts, in its natural setting, the schools and communities. The methodology has been selected for its close links with the selected theory, the

Constructivist Grounded Theory as well as the case study design (Creswell, 1998). Creswell (2007, p.35) associates quality studies to terms such as "constructivist, interpretive, feminist methodology, postmodernist, and naturalistic research". The choice of the qualitative methodology also lies in its ability to enable the study of a population with the intention of hearing the silent voices, thereby unpacking a complex phenomenon. The methodology empowers participants to share stories in the comfort of their homes, and workplaces, without being shifted to a laboratory. Thus, everything is captured is in the context of the natural environment and not artificial. Some complex phenomena cannot be measured statistically (Creswell, 2007; & Creswell, 2014).

A population consisted of all persons or items of interest, whilst the sample was a portion of the people in a population (Hanlo & Larget, 2011). Chaturvedi (2015) avers by defining population as, "...including all people or items with the characteristics one wishes to understand" (p.12). In this study, the population consisted of all Primary and Secondary schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, as well as their communities. Bulawayo Metropolitan Province consists of five Districts, namely, Reigate, Mzilikazi, Bulawayo Central, Khami and Imbizo. Most schools are in the urban areas whilst a few were in the peri-urban area. Both the categories of schools are considered to balance both urban and rural set ups.

The study used the purposive sampling method. The purpose of sampling was to reduce costs, time and workload associated with studying the entire population. Phrasisombath (2010) states that there were five components required in order to produce a coherent study. In this study, the sample of the population consisted of Primary and Secondary schools from Reigate and Khami Districts and the institutions' catchment areas. The Bulawayo Central business area was also considered. The participants in the sample frame included communities, Heads and teachers, education officers, psychologists, social welfare officers, Child Protection Committees, SDC/SDAs, BEAM Committees, ZRP Liaison officers, the dropouts themselves, current learners, their parents, churches and the general public in the study area. Since the area of coverage was rather large, the study needed to incorporate and induct some assistants. Interviews were conducted with education officials, parents and some of the dropouts themselves with questionnaires distributed to heads of schools and teachers.

FINDINGS

The study established that there are many reasons learners leave school and they are almost similar at primary and secondary level. In one way or the other, dropout causes tend to be similar in urban and peri-urban although they differ in terms of magnitude as well as severity in most cases there are no stand-alone

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causes but they interlink. The major causes of dropouts in Reigate and Khami districts were discussed showing the interrelationships amongst these causes and also highlighting differences between the districts, where they occurred.

The Costs of Schooling

The costs of schooling were found to be the top most cause of dropouts. Both interviewees and those who participated in questionnaires agreed that families had been hit by hard economic times, resulting in them failing to pay fees and levies as well as providing necessities to children. These requirements could be in the form of food, stationery and uniforms. The problem was said to be further aggravated by the stringent rules put in place by some school administrations authorities. Learners were sent home for non-payment of fees and levies The cost of schooling was cited as a major driver of school dropouts (Mukudi, 2004). In some areas in Zimbabwe, some parents were more concerned with food on the table rather than buy stationery for the pupils and these pupils wasted much time not writing (Kurebwa & Mabhanda, 2015). There were also demands of items such as winter and summer uniforms and proper sports attires for different disciplines and education officers concurred with these sentiments too. However, they looked at both sides of the coin, whereby the school had day to day running costs, not to mention repair and maintenance costs, feeding supplementary items and affiliations, to mention but a few. There were also issues of discipline and standards to be met by the school for it to be recognized as one and at the end of the day, parents had to take responsibility. Failure to take responsibility further degenerated into disciplinary behavior traits on the part of the learner in that they indulged in truancy, absenteeism and even stealing.

Child-Headed Families

Child- headed families were also rated the second driver of school dropouts. Such families included children whose parents had migrated to other countries to find employment. A small proportion was composed of orphans, but normally those were left with relatives. However, the decay of extended families in communities was further aggravating this problem. Participants in all the categories complained of unbecoming behavior by those children who were left alone and had no respect for other people around them. The findings of the study seemed to confirm, and support assertions made by Mloyi (2011) who associated child-headed family lack respect and added that they are subjected to abuse in the society. The participants cited the fact that those children received a lot of money, in foreign currency, from their parents who were abroad and abused it by throwing "Vuzu"' parties with teenage friends of both sexes, indulging in drug abuse as well as sexual activities. Such parties were free-for-all gatherings for teenagers, thereby affecting many school-going teenage boys and girls. The adults were bitter about the parties that were not

only a threat to the children's education, but also their health, as there were stories of the teens having free-for-all sex, which would even be unprotected. Parents were worried of the behavior in light of the HIV and Aids epidemic. Education Officials responsible for Guidance and Counselling expressed concern over the issue and claimed it was very difficult to control, as even neighbours had failed to control it. The teenagers had too much money to spend that was used for things other than schooling and peer pressure played its part in drawing other children to these mischievous teenagers. At the end of it all they considered schooling to be of no help as they already had all they require.

Attitudes, Values and Behaviours of Learners

Attitudes, values and behaviour of learners were found to be some of the key drivers of dropping out of school. Education officer interviewees expressed great concern on that cause. They cited particular cases of indiscipline involving especially secondary school learners. There had been incidences of drunkenness at school, drug abuse and even sexual intercourse in the school premises some of which resulted in pregnancies and early marriages. At times, their arrogance and ego could not withstand the consequent disciplinary measures resulting in dropping out of the school.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study showed that the cost of schooling was the highest driver, followed by child-headed families, the attitudes and behaviour of students, family background and early marriages and pregnancies in that descending order. Other factors like peer pressure, distance from school and early employment were also causes of dropouts, but to a lesser extent. Migration scored the least, despite the limelight given in the study. Despite migration being the list contributor, the study still feels that a deeper and more intensive study could come up with a different result. As stated previously, it is very difficult to determine the rate of migration in the area and how much of it is temporary and how much is permanent and what the real repercussions are on the school going children. The migration factor is also not a stand-alone but is linked to other factors such as child-headed families which were found to be key drivers of dropouts.

Recommendations

The study encourages accordance of more importance to special classes as they availed remedial therapy since only secondary school in the two districts offered special classes. Similarly, the study's monitoring of the Performance Lag Address Programme (PLAP) programme which targeted slow learners with its slogan, "No child left behind", demonstrated that the initiative was useful for preventing learners from leaving school just because they were low performers. The creation of child friendly schools was found to be an important factor in preventing learners from leaving school as it was

related to Discipline and the School Social environment raised by authorities. The Early Childhood and Systematic Renewal interventions were also recommended by school authorities as quite pertinent in preparing children from the foundation. Home Grown Feeding Programme is also recommended as it had already increased the school enrolments. However, it needed to be consistent if it was to be useful since some learners would drop out again as soon as it stopped. The study also calls for amendments to teaching methods to make them interesting and motivating to the learners. For instance, it suggests an end to rote learning and lecture methods and their replacement with more interactive and hands on methods allowing creativity and problem-solving activities. The issue of teacher/pupil ratio needed attention as those ballooning figures made effective learning almost impossible. Schools needed to be supported with adequate resources that included teachers and proper infrastructure. Some school authorities and teachers introduce the study some cases of learners packed in store rooms, most of whom ECD learners.

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