

Dropout Syndrome among Girls in Secondary Schools and Human Resources Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

No Nation can toy with the education of the girl-child because the saying goes that educate a woman and you educate a nation. Yet girls are often dogged with challenges of access, equity, performance and retention/dropout in terms of schooling. The study sought to establish the factors of dropout among secondary school girls in Nembe Local Government (LGA) of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. One research question was formulated to guide the study. Survey design was utilized; sample of 240 was drawn from dropout girls and their parent/guardians, teachers, students in schools, youth and women leaders using the stratified random sampling technique. Questionnaire/checklist was used to collect the data which was analyzed using percentage. Poverty, teen pregnancy, peer influence and quest for money were identified as the paramount factors of dropout. It is recommended that schools be made truly free, qualitative and engaging, in order to motivate the girls toward completion.

Key words: Dropout, poverty, girl-child

1. Introduction

Education is the process through which individuals acquire adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and behaviour necessary to function optimally as a citizen (Boonprasert, 2010). It is also the belief that no nation can develop without proper formal education of its citizenry since education is considered the bedrock of all facets of development of any nation (Anho, 2011). Hence, no country can afford to toy with the education of its citizenry, especially that of the girl-child. According to the popular adage, “educate a man, and you educate an individual, but educate a woman and you educate a nation”. This buttresses the fact that education of the girl-child is a key factor in the development of the country, communities and the individuals with regard to their families, employment opportunities, economic empowerment, social accomplishment and the like (Wood, 2001).

The inception of the universal basic education (UBE) since 2000, with the main goal of education for all by the year 2015, is in recognition of the need to educate as well as develop its citizenry and the Nigerians nation. Again, the roadmap for the Nigerian education sector which was flagged off in 2009, include, among others, access and equity: standards and quality assurance (Obanya, 2010). These were steps in the right direction as gains were made in form of marginal increase in enrolment, however, there are still some challenges in terms of access, equity, achievement in school subjects and retention/dropout, especially among girls (Offorma, 2009).

Some children enroll in school but do not remain until graduation. A dropout is any student, who for one reason or the other leave school prematurely before graduation, without transferring to another school. This is most common in rural areas where there is abject poverty, ignorance and children form a recognizable part of the family labour force (Kamla-Ra, 2007). It has been strongly observed that the Nigerian girl-child has not had a fair chance to qualitative education as a result of socio-economic, school related and other societal factors (Alika & Egbochukwu, 2010). The report of UNICEF (2004) indicated that about 7.3 million children do not go to school, of which 62% are girls. Sometimes even when the educational possibilities are present the girl-child may not be able to access them. Access to education has been defined by Offorma (2009) to include availability, convenience, ability and the opportunity to be educated and according to her, despite concerted efforts to push their cause forward, millions of girls still cannot access education or dropout of school because of their peculiar circumstances. Nigeria is among the 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa reported to have more than one million girls out of school (UNICEF, 2003). The results of the study of Okpukpara and Chikwuone (2011) reiterated that the probability of dropout among girls is 23% compared to 12% for boys, in urban areas and that drop out for girls is more prominent in rural areas than boys with 16% rate for girls and 5% for boys.

The federal government of Nigerian itself has acknowledged the dropout syndrome currently ravaging the education sector. The Minister of State for Education, Barr. Ezenwo N. Wike, at the 12th girls education (GE) national steering committee meeting in Abuja, vowed that the government is poised to stamp out the drop out malaise, hence is committed to achieving the Universal Primary and Junior Secondary Education (MDG2) and eliminate gender disparity in education (MDG3) by 2015 (Nigeria A-Z.com, 2012).

Bayelsa State, one of the most rural States in Nigeria, located in the wetlands of the Niger Delta is one of the Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) as classified by Joint Admission Matriculation Board

(JAMB), where there is high prevalence of dropout and low academic achievement (Okeke, Nzewi & Njoku, 2008). It has been reported that in this State, there is a low pupil/ students enrolment, high dropout rates among girls and that it ranked 36 out of the 36 States with regards to performance in the 2007 NECO/WAEC results (Dauda, 2010). Hence, the current governor of the state, Seriake Dickson, in his inaugural address of 14th Feb. 2012, pronounced free education and special attention to the girl-child education (Idumange, 2012).

Girls find themselves out of school for a number of reasons which include: child labour, poverty, lack of sponsorship, quest for money, bereavement, truancy, broken home, engagement as house helps and single parenthood (Okeke et al 2008). Uche and Maliki (2011) have attributed youth militancy and subsequent school dropout to poverty, unemployment, low level of education and ignorance, among others. In the face of hardship, it is more likely for girls to dropout of school than boys. Poverty status of household has a strong influence on girls than boys education – 21% for girls and 5% for boys (Okpukpara & Chukwone 2011). Obanye (2010) reiterated that poverty and poor economics militate against girls schooling because even though education is purportedly free, there are always hidden, indirect, illegal costs. Also Alika and Egbochukwu (2009) reported that socio-economic status of girls has significant impact on their ability to complete school.

Quest for money has been shown to be one of the reasons why girls drop out of school. Kukreti and Sexena (2007) identified desire for money, peer influence, parental irresponsibility as factors of drop out syndrome among girls. The study of Inokoba and Maliki (2011) listed quest for money and ignorance at the root of school drop out and other vices.

Quality of education and poor performance can also lead to school dropout among girls. Antwi-Danso & Edet (2011) reported that teacher's hostile attitude towards girls and poor performance are some academic factors that contribute to girls school dropout. Inadequate teaching staff both in quality and quantity and lack of infrastructure vital for quality education are among the factors leading to high level of school dropout in Bayelsa state (Balouga, 2009; Idumange, 2012).

Teenage pregnancy is also a major contributor to the scourge of school dropout. Majority of girls admitted dropping out of school as a result of pregnancy and some became pregnant even in primary six (Antwi-Danso & Edet, 2011). There was a high correlation between pregnancy and school drop out of girls in the study of Maliki (2011).

In difficult terrain separating human settlements –swamps, rivers, creeks, sparsely populated areas, children are forced or tempted to leave school prematurely for petty employment or commercial/ household activities (Obanya, 2010). In the difficult terrain of the wetlands of the Niger Delta coupled with epileptic or non-existent utilities and social amenities, children are easily tempted to leave school, before graduation (Balouga, 2009; Uche & Maliki, 2011). In Bayelsa, the peculiar riverine terrain makes deployment of teachers to rural areas very difficult, schools for migrant fishermen only exist in statute books, they are non-functional and the morale of the rural teacher is low, hence there is an increase in school dropout rates and illiteracy levels (Idumange 2012).

Nembe Local Government of Bayelsa State located in the swampy wetlands comprises rural fishing settlements sprinkled around the creeks of the Niger Delta. The terrain is therefore a difficult one, transportation is by boats carved out of tree trunks and social amenities are almost non-existent. There is a dearth of recreational facilities and the major outlet for the youths is interaction among themselves which eventually lead to sexual activities. Even though the area is rich with oil reserve that is being shipped off by the oil companies, apart from the few oil workers, contractors and the politicians, who flaunt their so called wealth, most of the indigenes live in grinding poverty. Schools are ill-equipped and poorly staffed, as such, student easily loose interest and dropout.

Hence, in order to escape the rot and deprivation and *live big* like the politicians, youths would rather stay out of school and engage in *money spinning ventures* such as oil bunkering, kidnapping, intimidation and political thuggery (Inokoba & Maliki, 2011). There is also the oil companies practice of stay-at-home pay to disgruntled youths which further increase their quest for money and diminishing interest in school (Mckenzie, 2004). The girls are not left out, they become attracted to this flamboyant and *easy life style* and as such become easy sexual preys to indigenous boys/men who have *made it*, the oil men and security forces sent by government or petrobusinesses to contain insurgency (Odoemena, 2008).

Consequently, there is a preponderance of teenage pregnancy, children giving birth to children littering the riverine settlements of the Niger Delta, some of whom are of mixed race (Odeomene, 2010). Thus, perpetuating single parenthood and the vicious cycle of dropout, illiteracy, poverty and ignorance. Many girls therefore drop out of school permanently while others go round in circles, dropping out and returning, the school becoming more like a revolving door. As a result, many of them have low level of academic achievement, poor quality of education and outright illiteracy. The question therefore is what are the factors of dropout syndrome among secondary school girls in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State?

Hence, the purpose of the study is to investigate and establish the factors responsible for school dropout among secondary school students in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State.

2. Research Question

To guide the study, one research question was formulated:

What are the contributing factors to secondary schools girls dropping out of school?

3. Methodology

The survey research design was employed for the study because it aims at determining the nature of situations, as it exists at the time of investigation. It suits this particular study since it concerns itself with ascertaining and establishing the status quo, facts or pieces of information at the time of research, presenting such information as they are.

The population for study comprised women and youth leaders in the communities, teachers the secondary schools, the dropout girls themselves, parents/guardians/relations of dropout girls and students (girls) currently enrolled in Junior secondary school 3 (JSS3) through Senior Secondary school 3 (SSS3) in each school. The local government area consists of thirteen wards with a secondary school in each of them. The stratified/simple random sampling technique was used to select 8 wards, 16 women leaders, 16 youths leaders, 16 teachers, 64 students (girls) currently enrolled, 64 dropout girls and 64 parents/guardians/relatives of the dropouts, yielding a sample size of 240. Nembe LGA is one of the 8 local government areas of Bayelsa state located in the Niger Delta. Apart from a sprinkling of teachers, politicians and contractors, the people here are predominantly fishermen and petty traders, barely irking out existence. There is mixture of Christians and idol worshippers and majority are barely literate. Respondents' age ranged between 14 and 58 and they are predominantly single.

The instrument consisted of a questionnaire/checklist, titled Dropout Syndrome Checklist (DSC) that was in two parts, I & II. Part I comprised 5 items seeking background information such as age, sex, occupation, marital status and level of education. Part II had 10 items of statements that reflected reasons for dropping out-poverty, pregnancy, ill health, peer pressure, quest for money etc. Respondents were to tick yes or no to these statements. The instrument was validated by other experts in psychology as well as tests, measurements and evaluation. Reliability was established by administering the instrument on communities in the unsampled wards and using the test re-test procedure and Cronchbach Coefficient Alpha Correlation, estimate of 0.74 was realized.

Using the list of names and addresses provided by some friendly teachers and students, the researcher and her assistants visited respondents in their homes and administered the questionnaire. It was self completed by some of the students and teachers while others were interviewed using the items in the questionnaire. The exercise took about a week and retention rate was about 100%. The resulting data were coded and analyzed using simple percentages and summaries of results are presented in the following table.

4. RESULTS

The research question sought to establish the contributory factors of school dropout among secondary school girls in Nembe LGA of Bayelsa State. Data were analyzed using percentages and the results are presented in table 1.

Table 1

Contributing factors to girls dropout of secondary school (N=240)

Contributing factors of dropout from school	No. Of Yes	%	No. of No	%	Total No.	Total %
Poverty	214	89	26	11	240	100
Quest for money	148	62	92	38	240	100
Poor academic performance	36	15	204	85	240	100
Pregnancy	178	74	62	26	240	100
Ill health	12	05	228	95	240	100
Difficult terrain/distance from school	5	02	235	98	240	100
Death of parents	26	11	214	89	240	100
Peer influence	158	66	82	34	240	100
Abandonment by parents (father)	125	52	115	48	240	100
Lack of interest in school	89	37	151	63	240	100

The result on table 1 shows that poverty is the highest contributing factor to school dropout among girls (89%). This is followed by teenage pregnancy (74%). Peer influence (66%). Quest for money (62%), abandonment by parents – father (52%) and lack of interest in school (37%). other lesser contributing factors are

poor academic performance (15%), death of parents (11%), ill health (5%) and difficult terrain/distance from school (2%).

5. Discussion

The result of the study has indicated poverty as the main reason for girls dropping out of secondary school in Nembe LGA of Bayelsa state; respondents overwhelmingly identified poverty as the major factor (89%). Poverty indeed breeds ignorance and illiteracy which make such individuals vulnerable to sexual predators and peer pressure, to seek for crumbs from men, hence, teenage pregnancy and dropout. In the investigation of Maliki (2011), 76% of respondents indicated that low socio-economic status contributed immensely to teenage girls dropping out of school, mostly as a result of pregnancy. Also Obanya (2010) identified poverty as the major militating factor against girl-child education, even when it is purportedly free as a result of indirect and illegal costs.

Teenage pregnancy has been shown to be a factor of school drop out among girls (74%). This is not surprising because this a part of the poverty trap, as they are easily seduced and deceived into sexual activities, ostensibly for financial gains, which eventually lead to pregnancy and dropout. Educational failure and school dropout have been identified as the negative effect of teenage pregnancy (Antwi-Danso & Edet, 2011; Robin, 2011)

Peer influence and quest for money have also been identified as major contributors to school dropout – 66% and 62% respectively. There is always the tendency to *make it* and *look good* and no teenager hardly want to be left out, they always want to have that sense of identification. Inokoba & Maliki (2011) pointed quest for money as one of the causes of school dropout and related vices. Kukreti and Sexena (2007) also included peer pressure and quest for money as factors of school dropout among girls.

Abandonment by parents, especially the father and lack of interest in school also showed strong as contributing to school dropout – 52% and 37% respectively. Once the child is abandoned by the father and the mother is poor, the chances of finishing school are slimmer and the tendency is to lose, interest in school. It is not surprising because most of these teenagers were born by single teenage mothers and fathered by oil and other migrant workers who are long gone. Some of them have never ever met their fathers and even the psychological impact could be enormous. According to Odoemena (2010), in the riverine settlements of the Niger Delta, children give birth to children which lead to school dropout, illiteracy and ignorance.

Poor academic performance though only 15%, howbeit, contribute to drop out. In Antwi-Danso & Edet (2011) study 51% of respondents agreed that academic performance is a factor of school dropout . Death of parent which scores 11% could lead to lack of funds for education leading to drop-out. Ill health which had 5% score, especially among the poor, understandably can militate against completion of school. Even though, only 2% of respondents regarded difficult terrain/distance from school as impediment to finishing school, it has been pointed out by Balouga (2009) that in the difficult wetland terrain of Niger Delta coupled with dearth of social amenities, children are easily tempted to leave school before graduation.

6. Conclusion/Recommendation

This study has revealed that the factors contributing to drop out among secondary school girls in Nembe LGA of Bayelsa state are namely poverty, teenage pregnancy, peer influence, quest for money, abandonment by parents (father), lack of interest in school, poor academic performance, death of parents, ill health and difficult terrain in that order. It is important to note that head teachers and other school authorities claimed there are no dropout and as such would not provide any data on dropout/enrollment, perhaps for political and funding reasons. According to them, there are really no dropouts that these girls only come and go at will. However, for any meaningful intervention on the girls dropout syndrome to take place, there has to be sincerity and transparency on the part of all stake holders. For the MDGs-2 and the MDGs-3 as well as total human resources development to be achieved in Bayelsa State and indeed Nigeria, the scourge of girl-child drop out of school syndrome has to be contained.

The setting up of the Girl Education (GE) national steering committee by the federal government and the declaration of free education, free uniform and school meals by the Bayelsa State governor in his inaugural address are all right steps in the right direction. However, this *Project counter girl's dropout syndrome* is a very crucial one that requires all hands on deck. Schools need to be rehabilitated and properly equipped for qualitative education. Non-governmental organizations need to collaborate with government to pay advocacy visits to the state in order to sensitize women, especially in the rural areas. Mothers unions, women leaders and other related groups need to work towards ensuring that the enabling environment is created for access, retention and completion of education by the girl-child. Attention should shift from enrollment to active participation.

Since poverty has been shown to be at the root of their drop out from schools, if schools are truly free, qualitative and engaging, these girls would be motivated to rise above other challenges and move towards

actualization and development of their full potentials. Thus, guaranteeing an inclusive human resources development and achievement of all facets of the Millennium Development Goals for the Nigerian nation.

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