Interrogating the Dropout Phenomenon with Reference to Five High Schools in Bikita District of Masvingo Province: Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This study was carried out when a myriad of problems were vexing the Zimbabwean education sector, amongst them the dropout phenomenon. The dropout problem appeared to transcend all levels of the education system. The study then, was premised on the quest to determine the demographic characteristics of 2017 ordinary level student dropouts, with focus on five high schools. Second and most importantly, the study sought to examine the factors underlying the high incidence of dropouts in the selected high schools. Also at the centre of this investigation was the need to expose dropout trends by gender. The study was conducted within the framework of the descriptive survey research design. A multiple dimension questionnaire (MDQ) was developed and used to elicit the required data. On the basis of the major findings of the study and subsequent conclusions, recommendations were enunciated. Recommendations pronounced embraced a matrix of interventions and mitigation measures to control and arrest the incidence of dropouts among ordinary level students in Bikita District's high schools in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: dropout, ordinary level, education sector, high school, interventions.

Acronyms

BEAM- basic education assistance module

DPR- dropout prevalence rate

EFA- education for all

G & C- guidance and counselling

MDQ- multiple dimension questionnaire

SPS- school psychological services

OVCs- orphans and other vulnerable children

Background to the study

The colonial education system, in the then Rhodesia was fraught with numerous restrictions that tended to limit the scope of educational opportunities for the majority of Africans. This situation, according to Thompson, (1981) was further exacerbated by imbalances in the funding structure of education, which was heavily skewed in favour of the minority whites. Thus in 1980, when Zimbabwe gained independence, the ZANU (PF) Government was faced with a mammoth task to bring education to the doorsteps of the majority of Zimbabweans who were craving to get a modicum of basic education. The phenomenal expansion of the education system in the post-independence era, was a direct response to the overwhelming social demand for education, (Zvobgo, 1986).

The many impediments that negatively affected the African child from accessing basic education were largely removed through the promulgation of the policy of education for all (EFA) and the subsequent deracialisation of the education system. Thus from the quantitative dimension the ZANU (PF) government managed to fulfil its obligation to access educational opportunities to the generality of its citizenry. However in the early 1990s, critical questions regarding the relevance and quality of education began to emerge. From then onwards several initiatives were mooted to address the many dilemmas vexing the education system. Topical among the problems that began to manifest themselves were:

- High dropout rates at all levels of the education system.
- Poor academic performance of students across all sectors of the education system as depicted by public examination results.
- Declining participation of the girl child in education.
- Rising unemployment levels among school and university graduates.
- Progressive decline in the funding of the education sector by central government.
- Seasonal and recurrent political violence that triggered a mass exodus of educational personnel to neighboring and western countries.
- The eventual near total breakdown of the education system.

This study then, sought to underpin the first problem as alluded above, as the focal point of the investigation. This was against a backdrop of the observation that, the majority of students who either dropped out of school or and performed poorly academically were in actual fact beneficiaries of comprehensive government and donor educational sponsorship programmes. This in the view of the researcher was a worrisome trend that warranted a

full scale investigation. However it was necessary to find out the thrust of research on the subject of school dropout phenomenon in general and Zimbabwe in particular.

On the Zimbabwean educational landscape, only a few investigations on the topical issue underpinning the study were attempted. The studies varied in scope and purpose. These encompassed, inter alia: The Kirr Commission (1951), The Nuffield Foundation (1952), The Judges Commission (1962), Education Report on the Primary School Dropout Problem (1986) and Dorsey (1975,1987). At tertiary level Makombe (1991) pioneered an investigation on student teacher dropout from three Masvingo Teachers' Colleges. Though the Judges Report (1962) and Dorsey (1975) focused on the problem at national level, the current study addresses the problem at district level. It is against this background that this study was conceived.

Statement of the Problem

The dropout phenomenon has been highlighted as one amongst a host of problems vexing the Zimbabwean education system at all levels. Efforts to improve the quality of education cannot succeed against a background of adverse trends, such as the dropout phenomenon, inter alia. Manifestation of high dropouts in schools compromise school completion rates as an indicator of the internal efficiency of the education system. From a sociological perspective the dropout phenomenon has culminated into "The wasted talent debate." Hence this study was conceived against these perturbing observations, particularly at ordinary level, which was the focal point of this research.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to examine the factors that accounted for the high levels of dropouts among ordinary level students during the course of 2017. The point of focus were the then forms three and four groups of students in Bikita District of Masvingo Province. It was of interest to find out if there were any factors peculiar to Bikita district. However, the ultimate purpose of the study was to come up with sustainable and credible solutions to the dropout problem in so far as it manifested itself in high schools.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the demographic characteristics of 2017 ordinary level students who dropped out of school.
2. To expose the gender patterns of ordinary level students who dropped out of high school in 2016.
3. To interrogate the factors underlying the phenomenal levels of 2017, ordinary level student dropouts.
4. To showcase a matrix of recommended interventions designed to offset the incidence of dropouts among high school students in rural areas.

Significance of the Study.

This study was considered critically significant in several respects. It sought to expose factors that accounted for the high dropout rate among 2017 ordinary level students in Bikita District. The outcomes of this research were likely to be beneficial to a wide range of stakeholders and actors in the education sector including inter alia: central government, District education officers, heads of schools, multilateral and non- governmental organizations, teachers and the vulnerable students. The study was also considered significant in that it broadens our cognition of the psychological construct under spotlight.

Literature Review

This section reviews literature on the dropout phenomenon. Information that has unfolded over the years on the dropout phenomenon is both contradictory and inconclusive. A wide spectrum of factors has been proffered by many scholars to explain the incidence of dropouts in schools and tertiary institutions, (Dorsey, 1975, 1987; Makasi, 1989; Pintages and Creedon, 1978; Hamalin, Zetzner and Lin, 1982; Anderson, 1981 and Maslen, 1982). Factored dimensions advanced to explain the prevalence of dropouts in educational institutions by the above scholars include but not confined to:

- Age.
- Sex.
- Father's and mother's occupation.
- Level of parental education.
- Family income.
- Peer group influence.
- Health status.
- Financial factors.
- Social status.
- Nature of treatment of OVCs by foster parents.

- Child abuse.
- Nature of OVCs themselves.

Let me now explore the above and other factors as espoused by different authorities. The Nuffield Foundation (1953) reported that pupils dropped out of school on account of considerably long distances from schools, poor school facilities, voluntary nature of African education, double sessions, dull teaching, an alien school curriculum, early marriages and parents inability to pay school fees, (Dorsey, 1987). It was of utmost interest then, to find out if the factors just narrated above correlated with ordinary level students who dropped out of school in 2017, in Bikita District.

Yet in another study, Makasi, (1989), sought to examine the dropout problem in so far as it affected form II and IV secondary school students in Masvingo Region. His findings attested to the following as associated with dropping out: school girl pregnancies, indiscipline, embezzlement of examination fees by some school heads etc. however other scholars had different views on what causes students to drop out. For instance Pantages and Creedon (1978) concluded from their studies that the level of parental education had a bearing on whether a student would drop out of school or not. They further postulated that higher levels of parental education significantly decreased a student's chances of dropping out. These findings were further corroborated by Hermalin, at alia, (1982) who reveals that educated parents preferred to send their children to school irrespective of gender. It was not surprising to observe a high incidence of dropping out among the target group for this study since most of them were mainly orphans who lacked authentic parental support.

Peer influence was also considered as important in determining chances of persisting or dropping out of school, (Anderson, 1981). It was observed that, where peer influence was positive, chances of persistence for the majority of the peer group's members was reported as quite high, whereas, when peer group influence was in the negative scale, the peer group members were likely to drop out. Marshalling examples from Australian and American Universities, Maslen, (1980) reported evidence that suggested that the majority of students who dropped out, did so on account of increasing financial difficulties. The above studies then, demonstrate that when conditions of negative peer group influence and financial difficulties coexist, the chances of dropping out become almost 100%. Against this background it was of interest to find out what field information would reflect on the causes of the dropout problem.

The subject of the dropout phenomenon has stimulated intense debate in academic circles. Consequently many scholars have tended to explain causes of the dropout problem from a variety of perspectives. For instance Doll, Eslami and Walters (2013) set out to investigate the pull, push and falling out factors with the quest to provide a framework for understanding the diverse dimensions of the dropout phenomenon. According to these researchers push factors include: school consequent on attendance or discipline, while pull factors embrace out of school enticements like jobs and family related circumstances. Falling out factors refer to disengagement in students not caused by either of the categories of factors presented above. Thus it was of intense interest to find out if data eventually gathered in the field was to replicate or approximated to these categories of factors underlying the dropout phenomenon from the Zimbabwean perspective. The study by Doll et al (2013) reported the highest rates of push factors among male students. Conversely female students registered the highest of pull factors. These key differences in dropout trends among male and female students attest to the need for remedial measures that are differentiated by gender to get the best intervention outcomes. The questionnaire design for the current study articulated the gender issue, as it elicited data for causes of high school dropouts by gender. Overall the Doll, et al (2013) study concluded that   there was credence for each type of dropout antecedent, whether being a push, pull or a falling out factor. The current study was inspired by these precursor enquiries on the dropout phenomenon. However the ultimate intention was to explore a variety of intervention models to combat and conquer the dropout problem.

Yet in another study, Rumberger and Lanson, (1998) examined the incidence of student mobility between the 8th and 12th grades and its effects on school completion. This was against a background that students in the United States of America changed schools frequently. The study revealed that measures of social and academic engagement such as low grades, misbehavior and high absenteeism predicted both whether students changed schools or dropped out. The study further indicated that '…..students who made even one non-promotional school change between the 8th and 12th grades were twice likely to not complete high school than students who did not change schools.' With regards to the current study it was not possible to make inferences in relation to trends alluded above. Since the study only elicited information on causes of the dropout problem issues of whether the same students who dropped out had previously changed schools or not fell outside the purview of the study. However this seems to be another fertile area for research with regards to the Zimbabwean education sector. It would be of interest to determine the nature of correlation between student mobility and the incidence of dropping out.

In 2013, Cabus and De Witte, made an ingenious attempt to evaluate enrolment decision of students for (i) different intensity levels of dropout prevention policy and (ii) different levels of economic development. The results of the study indicated that the model used had a high probability of yielding forecast data for school

dropout out trends in the Netherlands by the year 2020. The way the model was constructed allowed for the distinction between the influence of policy making and economic growth on early school leaving. Conclusions that emerged from this study pointed to two strategies for controlling the dropout phenomenon: a stricter state sponsored policy with regards to school leaving and an increase in prospects for employment as a result of economic development. These observations are against a worrisome trend in Zimbabwe, where graduate unemployment is rampant. Since completing high school or university has not been a guarantee for employment, this has fuelled dropouts in schools, colleges and universities. The data that was collected in the field was also analysed to find if economic factors had a bearing on high school dropout problem in Zimbabwe. However the above study had decided limitations. The empirical model adopted for the study was tested only in the Netherlands, hence generalizability of results has to be done with great caution. Consequently extrapolation of findings to other settings can result in practical misgivings. Similarly the current study was also confined not only to Zimbabwe but to a single District: Bikita.

More recently Gould and Weller (2015) conducted an investigation and came up with 21 reasons why kids take themselves out of school. According to the researchers the top 5 causes in ascending order of significance were:

- I had to make money to support my family.
- School wasn't relevant to my life.
- I became a caregiver.
- I was bored.
- I was failing too many classes.

The factors proffered above show striking linkages between dropping out and other conditions. For instance research results demonstrated that dropping out was tied to socioeconomic status. Kids from low income families were 2.4 times more likely to drop out than their middle class family counterparts. The study recommended that teachers and principals should take a more individualized approach to ward off the problem of boring and irrelevant institution that featured prominently as causes of dropping out among high school students. Thus the current study drew invaluable insights on both the causes and measures to contain the dropout phenomenon from the studies reported above.

Contributing to the growing literature on school dropout problem, Burrus and Roberts (2012) among many other issues, addressed the synergy between prevalence, risk factors and remedial strategies. However this section undertook to underpin remedial measures only. Burrus and Roberts (2012) came up with a myriad of measures designed to combat the dropout problem. These are chronicled below as follows:

- Early identification of students with a high probability of dropping out.
- To account for a constellation of the following factors which in most cases precipitate dropping out: income differentials, unemployment, poverty, health, crime and drugs.
- Identification of students in need of intervention while there is still time.
- To account for demographic and self-identified factors, (Allensworth, 2005; Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 2004).
- The Bridgeland et al, (2006) study alludes to the need to address the issue of learning and school climate.
- Identification of schools with very poor annual graduation rates (i.e dropout factories).

The insights drawn from the foregoing review of related literature were collated with trends depicted from field data. The focus was on both the causes and solutions to the dropout phenomenon. The synthesis of such harmonized data was designed to yield ingenious interventions and mitigation models to control and combat the dropout problem.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited from a variety of perspectives. It was confined to the secondary education sector. Yet still it did not cover the whole secondary school landscape. Only five high schools were the focal point of the investigation. The five schools were sampled from only one district (Bikita) of Masvingo Province. Focus was beamed at ordinary level students drawn from forms 3 and 4 respectively. Thus the study sought to examine the dropout phenomenon by cause and gender trends in so far as it manifested itself in 2017. It should be noted therefore that since the study was conducted within a specific timeframe, there was no guarantee that dropout trends depicted at the time of the study would persist overtime. The other limiting factor was that this was predominantly a quantitative survey reliant upon mainly one data gathering instrument, the questionnaire. In view of the above limitations, generalizability of the study findings would have to be done with great caution.

Delimitations of the Study

The first delimiting factor was the location of the study. The enquiry was conducted in Bikita District of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. The second delimiting factor were the variables that underpinned the study.

Principally the investigation was designed to interrogate the dropout phenomenon in so far as it obtained in five high schools at ordinary level in 2017. The third and critical delimiting factor was the methodological dimension. The study was based on the descriptive research design, a purposive sample and a single but multidimensional questionnaire.

Research Methodology
The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The design was considered ideal for this investigation because it is most appropriate for studying contemporary phenomena, (Good, 1972; Leedy, 1985; Woolfolk, 1998).   The population and sample for the study were five senior teachers from the five randomly selected high schools in Bikita District. The five senior teachers spearheaded the completion of the multiple dimension questionnaire. The district had a secondary school establishment of 40. Thus the five secondary schools that were the focal point of this study constituted over 10%, and this was considered representative enough to be basis for credible generalizations about the district. The number of dropouts could not be predetermined as this eventually emerged after the data collection process in the field. A multiple dimension questionnaire (MDQ) was developed for the purpose of the study by the researcher. It was structured around the key research objectives that propelled the study. On the basis of the information collected using the questionnaire, data were presented in tables and subsequently used to address the key research concerns, (Guilford & Fruchter, 1981).

Findings and Discussion
Table 1
Socio-economic background of all 2017 ordinary level dropouts by form and by gender for the five (N=5) high schools in Bikita District.

CATEGORY	FORM 3 M F		FORM 4 M F		TOTAL
ORPHANS (BOTH PARENTS DECEASED)	6	6	3	3	18
ORPHANRS (ONE PARENT DECEASED)	2	4	4	4	14
BRAEDWINNER UNEMPLOYED	4	12	6	10	32
DISABLED AND POOR	4	4	2	2	12
HOUSEHOLD EXTREMELY POOR	5	8	7	6	26
LIVING IN CHILD HEADED FAMILY	2	3	2	3	10
BREADWINNER CHRONICALLY ILL	3	12	3	2	20
TOTALS	26	49	27	30	132
ENROLMENT BY FORM AND BY GENDER	299	292	318	318	1227

Table 1 above summarises the demographic characteristics of the 132 dropouts observed in the selected five high schools in Bikita district of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. Of the 132 school dropouts at ordinary level in 2017, 75 were form 3 pupils while 57 were form fours. Overall gender distribution stood at 53 boys and 79 girls. Ages of the pupils were not captured therefore it was not possible to calculate the mean ages of both forms 3 and 4 pupils and the overall mean age. The highest number of dropouts came from unemployed guardians. This is in sync with the current prevailing economic climate were unemployment levels pitch above 90%. Similarly 32 of the dropouts were orphans attesting to the high toll of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It was not surprising that quite a huge figure (26) of the dropouts came from highly impoverished households, due to a constellation of socio-economic and political conditions obtaining in the country. The other downstream effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is that many people in Zimbabwe are chronically ill. To this effect the study established that 20 students who dropped out came from such a background. The table above reveals that 12 of the 132 dropouts were from disabled and poor parents while lastly 10 came from child headed families. It must be noted that while the demographic characteristics had a bearing on dropping out, these conditions should not be construed to or confound the specific factors underlying the incidence of dropping out of school. Tables 2 to 7 below attempt to give a more vigorous treatment of the antecedents to dropping out of school at ordinary level with reference to five high schools in Bikita District in 2017.

Table 2

Causes of dropouts among 2017 ordinary level students by form and by gender at Fashu High School in Bikita District.

CAUSE OF DROPOUT	FORM 3 M	F	FORM 4 M	F	TOTAL
Voluntary withdrawal	1	8	1	1	11
Early marriage		2			2
Orphanhood	1	1			2
Could not raise examination fees			2		2
Failed to raise fees			3	1	4
TOTALS	2	11	6	2	21
ENROLMENT BY FORM AND BY GENDER	54	48	52	42	196

Table 2 above shows that in 2017, a total of 21 ordinary level students dropped out of Fashu High School. The 21 dropouts comprised 8 boys and 13 girls. Above half (11) of the dropouts left school on account of reasons intrinsic to themselves. Reasons for leaving school were not apparent as the students made voluntary withdrawals. Other reasons for dropping out included financial difficulties (6), early marriages (2) and condition of orphanhood (2). The dropout prevalence rate (DPR) at Fashu High School, at ordinary level in 2017 was 10.7%.

Table 3

Causes of dropouts among 2017 ordinary level students by form and by gender at Chirumba High School in Bikita District.

CAUSE OF DROPOUT	FORM 3 M	F	FORM 4 M	F	TOTAL
Financial difficulties	1	2	1	2	6
Parents disabled and poor	1	0	1	2	4
Poverty	2	5	3	3	13
TOTALS	4	7	5	7	23
ENROLMENT BY FORM AND BY GENDER	58	70	76	84	288

Table 3 above summarises dropout trends by cause, form and by gender at Chirumba High School for 2017. A total of 23 ordinary level students dropped out of school. Of this total 11 dropped out at form 3 level while 12 left school at form 4 level. In terms of gender distribution when all the 23 dropouts are considered, 9 were boys while 14 were girls. Hence for the reference period and for the level under spotlight more girls left high school than boys. A close examination of causes proffered for dropping out reveals poverty as an underlying factor. Also notable is the fact that more form 4 students left school than form 3 Students. The reasons for these differentials by form, in terms of the above observed trends fall outside the purview of this study and would require an independent investigation. Nonetheless the dropout prevalence rate (DPR) at Chirumba High school for 2017 ordinary level students was pegged at 8%.

Table 4

Causes of dropouts among 2017 ordinary level students by form and by gender at Kudadisa High School in Bikita District.

CAUSE OF DROPOUT	FORM 3 M	F	FORM 4 M	F	TOTAL
Financial difficulties	3	5	2	4	14
Early marriage		2		1	3
Substance abuse	1		1		2
Religious factors		2		2	4
TOTALS	4	9	3	7	23
ENROLMENT BY FORM AND BY GENDER	48	37	46	35	166

Table 4 above indicates that a total of 23 ordinary level students dropped out of Kudadisa High School in 2017. These comprised 7 boys and 16 girls. More girls than boys dropped out of Kudadisa high School. In terms of the distribution of dropouts by form, more students at form 3 level (13) left school than (10) who dropped out at form 4 level. A big proportion (14) of the 23 dropouts left high school on account of financial difficulties. However an insignificant number (3) dropped out of high school due to early marriages while (2) and (4) were victims of substance abuse and religious influence respectively. Given Kudadisa High School's low enrolment at ordinary level in 2017, the 23 dropouts constituted a significant dropout prevalence rate (DPR) of 14% as

compared to Chirumba High School which had the same number of dropouts but had a bigger enrolment at ordinary level.

Table 5

Causes of dropouts among 2017 ordinary level students by form and by gender at Mazungunye Government High School in Bikita District.

CAUSE OF DROPOUT	FORM 3 M	F	FORM 4 M	F	TOTAL
Early marriage	0	2	0	3	5
Voluntary withdrawal	3	2	3	2	10
Employment opportunities	3	0	3	1	7
Financial difficulties	1	1	0	1	3
TOTALS	7	5	6	7	25
ENROLMENT BY FORM AND BY GENDER	23	32	31	35	121

Table 5 above shows that a total of 25 ordinary level students dropped out of Mazungunye Government High School. These were made up of 13 boys and 12 girls. Distribution by form reveals that 12 students dropped out at form 3 level as compared to 13 students who dropped out at form 4 level. Forty percent (40%) of the students dropped out of school voluntarily. Quite interestingly 7 students left school to take up employment opportunities. It's unclear as to whether it was formal or self-employment. The more usual reasons for dropping out were early marriages (5) and financial difficulties (3). The dropout prevalence rate (DPR) for 2017 ordinary level students at Mazungunye Government High School stood at 20.66%. This was a very high rate of dropouts considering the small size of enrolment at ordinary level at the school. Comparatively this was the highest dropout prevalence rate when all the five schools were considered.

Table 6:

Causes of dropouts among 2017 ordinary level students by form and by gender at Gwindingwi High School in Bikita District.

CAUSE OF DROPOUT	FORM 3 M	F	FORM 4 M	F	TOTAL
Pregnancy		12		5	17
Self- induced	2	5	3	2	12
Substance abuse	7		4		11
TOTALS	9	17	7	7	40
ENROLMENT BY FORM AND BY GENDER	116	105	113	122	456

Once again table 6 above indicates that a total of 40 ordinary level students left school at Gwindingwi High School in 2017. These comprised 16 boys and 24 girls. This scenario replicates the trend were more girls than boys tend to drop out of school. Surprisingly more form 3 (26) students dropped out school than form fours (14). At Gwindingwi High school, the majority of students (17) dropped out due to pregnancy. The other causes for dropping out were: personal reasons (12) and substance abuse (11). The proximity of Gwindingwi High School to Nyika Growth point had a strong bearing on the patterns and magnitude of the dropout phenomenon. In terms of figures Gwindingwi High School had the largest number of dropouts. However the high enrolment at ordinary level tends to obscure the dropout prevalence rate (DPR) which stands at 8.77%.

Table 7

Summary of causes of dropouts among 2017 ordinary level students by form and by gender for the five (N=5) high schools in Bikita District.

CAUSE OF DROPOUT	FORM 3		FORM 4		TOTAL
	M	F	M	F	
Voluntary withdrawal	4	10	4	3	21
Early marriage		6		4	10
Pregnancy		12		5	17
Orphanhood	1	1			2
Failure to raise examination fees				2	2
Failure to raise school fees			3	1	4
Financial difficulties	4	8	3	7	23
Parents disabled and poor	1		1	2	4
General poverty	2	5	3	3	13
Religious and cultural factors		2		2	4
Substance abuse	8		5		13
Uptake of employment opportunities	3		3	1	7
Self-induced	2	5	3	2	12
TOTALS	26	49	27	30	132
ENROLMENT BY FORM AND BY GENDER	299	292	318	318	1227

Summary of dropout causes and trends by form and by gender.

Table 7 above shows that among the reasons proffered, six major causes of dropouts, in descending order of magnitude were: Financial difficulties, pregnancy, general poverty, and substance abuse, self-induced and early marriages. Due to the just cited reasons a total of 132 pupils dropped out of the five high schools at ordinary level in Bikita district in 2017. An overview of the dropout trends by form shows that 75 form 3 students dropped out of school while 57 form 4 students also dropped out. The total enrolment of ordinary level students in the five schools was 1227, and distributed as follows: 617 boys and 610 girls. Of the 132, 2017 school dropouts 53 were boys while 79 were girls. The gender distribution of dropouts as a proportion of the total figure of dropouts is boys: 40.15% and girls: 59.85%.

From the foregoing it is apparent that more girls than boys dropped out of the five high schools in 2017. However it was of interest to establish the proportion of the total number of dropouts in relation to the total enrolment of ordinary level students in the five high schools selected for this investigation in Bikita District. Pursuant to this it was found out that 10.76% of Students dropped out. The observed dropout prevalence rate of (10.76%) for 2017 ordinary level students in the selected five high schools in Bikita District, represents a significant proportion of the overall students' enrolment at this level. In addition, this also represents a burden on the national budget as investment made in the students up to when they dropped out won't translate into meaningful economic activity. The dropout phenomenon in this context represents a loss at individual, family, community and national levels, hence the need for ingenious interventions to control it.

Proposed Interventions

The multiple dimension questionnaire (MDQ) sought among other issues teachers' opinions on how the incidence of dropouts could be controlled. Consequently the five high schools that formed the focal point of this investigation made submissions to this effect. Chirumba High School recommended the intervention of central government in the payment of examination fees. Further to this it was noted that the girl child needed more support to offset the trend were more girls dropped out more than boys. The same high school also recommended the absolute vocationalisation of the education system so as to empower vulnerable students with survival skills, both in school and after formal schooling. Gwindingwi High School had the highest dropouts in terms of numbers. The school recommended the strengthening of the guidance and counselling unit within schools for it to offer viable psychosocial support to orphans and vulnerable children. In addition the school hinted that central government should through the social welfare department make more BEAM payouts to OVCs. Serious follow up on all dropouts and their subsequent rehabilitation was also suggested as a control measure.

Mazungunye Government High School also came with a raft of measures it deemed appropriate in controlling the incidence of dropouts. First and foremost they recommended the use of role models and highly influential personalities to conscientise students on the importance of completing the educational cycle. Secondly the school suggested the systematic management of benefactor organizations to rationalize their operations so that there is no duplication of effort and that all forms of educational assistance are channeled where they are

most deserved. Schools were also advised to take deliberate measures to control the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse. Schools were expected to ring fence the girl child against sexual abuse that resulted in early marriages and teenage pregnancies. Submissions made by Kudadisa and Fashu high schools directly overlapped with recommendations from the three high schools alluded to above. It would be of interest to find out the extent to which the above submissions compare with the overall recommendations of the study.

Conclusions

As the study unfolded, several conclusions were drawn. The study concluded that factors underlying the dropout problem were associated with the school and its settings, home background circumstances, the outside world and the unique characteristics of individual dropouts themselves. The study observed that the level of parental education had a strong bearing for either exacerbating or diminishing prospects for dropping out. In addition to this dropping out of high school was found to be inextricably linked to the socio- economic status of parents as well. Students from low income families had a higher probability of dropping out than their middle class family counterparts, (Gould and Weller, 2015). Inferring from Doll, at al's 2013 study it was possible to conclude that the highest rates of push factors were reported among males while females dominated statistics on pull factors. However it was also possible to conclude from Rumberger and Lanson' 1998 study that for both males and females, students who frequently changed schools had higher chances of dropping out of high school.

It was also concluded that where prospects for post school employment are high, incidences of dropping out are significantly reduced. However since completing high school, college or university is not a guarantee for formal employment in Zimbabwe, this has fuelled a high incidence of drop outs across the whole education sector. The rampancy of graduate unemployment in the country attest to this scenario. Conservative estimates put the unemployment rate in Zimbabwe at 95%.

For the five high schools that were the focal point of the investigation it emerged that, for the year 2017 more girls (79) than boys (53) dropped out at ordinary level. Thus for the observed trends of drop outs it was established that the reasons that featured prominently as underlying factors were: voluntary withdrawals (N=21), teenage pregnancies (N=17), Financial difficulties (N=14 and Poverty (N=13). Reasons accounting for these modal frequencies when pooled together amounted to almost half the dropouts. The study also concluded that the observed dropout prevalence rate (DPR) of (10.76%) for 2017 ordinary level students in the selected five schools represented a significant proportion (N=132) of the overall students population at the focal level, (N=1227). In the light of the foregoing it was finally concluded that the dropout problem depicted a magnitudinal loss to the dropouts themselves, their families of origin, the community and the nation at large, hence the need for ingenious interventions to control it.

Recommendations

On the basis of the above documented conclusions, a number of recommendations were evolved on how to deal with and control the dropout problem. Cognisance should be made of the fact that though the study was based on the five schools in Zimbabwe, the recommendations promulgated hereunder are applicable in whole or in part to a variety of educational settings elsewhere in the world in as far as controlling the dropout problem is concerned.

- The study recommended drastic curriculum reforms to attune the education sector to the socio economic needs of society as a measure to restore public confidence in the schooling system.
- It was observed that financial difficulties ranked highest on the causes of dropouts. Thus it was recommended that the central government should revive the basic education assistance module (BEAM), to cushion OVCs against the perennial problem of educational funding.
- Central government is also enjoined to coordinate all internal and external educational assistance programmes for equitable distribution and mainstreaming with national budgetary provisions for education.
- The study observed gender stereotypes with regards to the influence of push and pull factors of dropping out of high school. In this connection it was recommended that remedial measures be differentiated by gender in order to get the best intervention outcomes, (Doll et al, 2013).
- It was also recommended that the government should promulgate a strict state sponsored policy on school leaving, since it is the sole largest funder of public education. Unwarranted incidences of leaving school should be sanctioned by some form of consequences and serious follow up. However, as alluded above high school enrolment retention rates can only be maintained if prospects for post school employment can be guaranteed.
- The study recommended the need for early identification of students with a high probability of dropping out. To this end, students' bahaviour surveillance programmes need to be brought on board.
- In addition to the above it was suggested that school authorities should maintain regular communication with parents with regards to any peculiar observations about students for interventions to be made

before students dropped out, (Barrus and Roberts, 2012).

- Submissions from the five selected high schools recommended the broadening of state sponsored interventions to avert the prevalence of the dropout problem. It was hinted that the state should deliberately reduce the severity of the following factors in precipitating the dropout problem: income differentials, unemployment, crime, poverty, health, sexual abuse, alcohol abuse and teenage pregnancies.

- The study observed that a significant number of students left school because of dull teaching and unconducive school and learning environments. It is incumbent upon school directors to improve both the learning conditions and the overall school climate, (Bridgeland, et al 2006).

- As a preemptive measure it was recommended that Provincial and District Offices carry out periodical reviews of schools with very high dropout prevalence rates (dropout factories). Such reviews would inter alia sanction identified schools to submit comprehensive work plans to reduce high dropout rates. The said offices would then make consistent follow up to ensure implementation of DPR reduction plans.

- The submissions from the five high schools also indicated that programmes aimed at supporting the girl child should be bolstered to avert a trend were more girls are dropping out than boys. However reducing the overall dropout prevalence rate remains the central focus.

- The study recommended the intensification of psychosocial support services to OVCs through the school psychological services department (SPS). In this connection guidance and counselling should be entrenched in schools, notwithstanding the fact that Guidance and Counselling has not been institutionalized as a formal department. The potential for the G&C department to play a significant role towards controlling inter alia, the dropout problem cannot be overlooked.

- The final recommendation rests on the scope for further research. It would be interesting to find out whether there is an association between changing schools (student mobility) and dropping out of school from the Zimbabwean context.

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