

# Variables Causing Dropout in Chivi South District Primary and Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

Schools exist to develop the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of every learner. The main aim is to ensure that exposure to an educational process equips the learners that will enrich their knowledge and skills for future use as individuals and for the benefit of society. Dropout is cause for concern and warrants an in-depth investigation to see the variables that cause it. This study sought to investigate the variables causing dropout in Chivi South primary and secondary schools. The study employed the quantitative paradigm. For data collection, closed questionnaires were used. The major findings were that there is high dropout rate due to orphanage, lack of fees, search for employment in neighbouring countries, parents who place less value on education, early marriages and poor performance at school. The study recommends that the government has to put in place poverty alleviation programmes to capacitate communities with fees payment plans and assist those who live in poverty living conditions. There is need for education campaigns so that some parents who do not value schooling get to know its importance.

**Keywords:** dropout, completion rates, school, primary school, secondary school

## 1. Background

Zimbabwe has experienced high levels of school completion rates from the onset of independence at both primary and secondary school level. Despite the policy of Education For All (EFA) that was promulgated by the Zimbabwean government in its 1987 Education Act, as amended in 2006, there are downstream issues that are causing children to drop out of school in some parts of the country. Although education is considered as a fundamental right and provided to all regardless of sex, colour, creed or race (Education Act, 1987 as amended), dropout still remains a cause for concern at both primary and secondary school level. It is the objective of any educational planner that when students start a cohort, they should sail through without any dropout. Leaving school before completion might negatively affect the future status of the individual child since schooling is the bedrock upon which all forms of paying employment are based.

Before independence in Zimbabwe, educational planning was used by the colonialist government as an instrument to deprive the blacks of education. Several strings were used to stop Africans from sailing through an education system. There were long distances from one school to another and most children found it difficult to walk for such long distances. Schools were very few and that was the educational planning of the day. The learners could not contain the cold particularly during the winter season. As such, learners experienced high rate of drop out. For educational planning to be effective, it must be concerned with the progress made or not made by students, with unforeseen obstacles that arise and with how to overcome them. The educational planner should ensure that there are no obstacles to the progression of a cohort. Education is a tool which is used a basis for socio-economic development and it is assumed that if one is exposed to it throughout the cohort, one attains a treasure for individual and societal development. There is need therefore to investigate the causes of dropout from school. Students are at the centre stage of this practice and it is ideal to get the causes from the student perspective. With the onset of independence, schools mushroomed at both primary and secondary level and the expectation was that pupils would move with their cohorts until they complete their schooling. This is not the case with many children particularly in rural settings.

Many governments might fail to meet Education For All (EFA) Goal 3 which aims at promoting learning and life skills for young people and adults by 2015 if dropout rate among learners is still rampant. If students are dropping out of school, there is no way in which their learning needs can be catered for. According to Coombs (1970, p. 14) educational planning, in its broadest generic sense, is the application of rational, systematic analysis to the process of educational development with the aim of making education more effective and efficient in responding to the needs and goals of its students and society. Nations cannot achieve the goal of educational development if students who start a cohort dropout of the system for whatever reasons. Students should find it an obligation to complete an educational cycle with aim of meeting their needs and that of society. Falling out of a cohort is a cause for concern for many educationists and warrants an in-depth investigation to see the root causes of the problem.

The main reason why governments make education available to all is that education is considered to develop the individual's intellect, behaviours, attitudes and abilities. Such knowledge and skills empower the individuals so that they become more productive in society. It is not ideal therefore to dropout of school for one would not acquire the necessary talents that make one highly functional in society. It is argued that a high dropout rate diminishes the pool of well qualified people from diverse backgrounds who will enter the professional and political ranks that make important policy decisions (APA, 2010). Educational attainment is one of the indicators of socio-economic development. While it is the thrust of the Zimbabwean government to improve its people through education empowerment, this might remain a dream if students dropout of school. Schools can only empower those students who are in school and who are receiving instruction from teachers.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

There are many children who drop out of school at both primary and secondary schools in Chivi South district. Although schools are established within 5km radius which makes them accessible by many children, dropout is still prevalent in many parts of the country, particularly rural folk. Governments have set up educational institutions to develop the mental, physical, social and emotional skills of every child. Some learners are seen dropping out of school and thus fail to meet the target of educational provisions set to improve their lives. It appears educational policies are silent on reducing the number of students who drop out of school as a national policy issue.

## **3. Main research question**

What are the variables causing dropout in Chivi South district primary and secondary schools?

## **4. Research questions**

- 4.1 How do schools cause dropout among learners in Chivi South?
- 4.2 To what extent do teachers contribute towards dropout among learners in schools?
- 4.3 What student factors contribute towards dropout in schools?
- 4.4 How does family status and socio-economic background contribute to dropout from school?
- 4.5 To what extent do religious inclinations cause school dropout?

## **5. Conceptions of dropout**

The concept dropout refers to students who withdraw from school or college without completing graduation requirements for reasons other than enrolling in another school or college (Unger, 2007, p. 365). Dropout is basically looked from three conceptions which are push factors, pull factors and falling out factors. To that end, some authors developed a framework that explains why students drop out. Jordan et al. (1994) identified push and pull dropout factors. Push factors include tests, attendance and discipline policies, and even consequences of poor behaviour and they result from adverse situations within the school environment. Pull factors include, among others, financial worries, out-of-school employment, family needs, or even family changes, such as marriage or childbirth pull students away from school. These are factors inside the students that divert them from completing school. Such factors also include illnesses. Watt and Roessingh (1994, p. 293) added a third factor called falling out of school, which occurs when a student does not show significant academic progress in schoolwork and becomes apathetic or even disillusioned with school completion. Insufficient personal and educational support cause falling out. The students are disengaged and are in a low gear or lured out by things they need or want. They eventually disappear or fall out from the system.

## **6. Theoretical framework**

This study is premised on Goffman's theory of student engagement and the alternative, alienation from the school institution. The theory highlights that students dropout of school due distractors that are within the school and home environments. The theory documents a tug-of-war between teachers' efforts to capture their students' attention and the multiple stimuli that distract students from pursuing their formal studies. The authors convincingly apply this model to the overcrowded and chaotic environments in which many children grow up (Yair and Gazit as cited in Bekele, 2006).

## **7. Literature**

Literature points to the fact that reasons for dropout can be divided into four categories which include, among others, individual, school, family and neighbourhood based (Tas, Selvitopu, Bora and Demirkaya, 2013). Dropout is a major concern in many parts of the world (De Ridder, Pape, Cuyppers, Johnsen, Holmen, Westin and Bjorngaard, 2013). School dropout can be viewed as a systemic problem which is attributed to some extent by reduction in education budgets. Such cuts in the education budget in the name of cost recovery measures lead to unsatisfactory treatment of the problem. The Zimbabwean scenario was that education was to be offered as a free

service but in the interest of paucity of resources, payment of fees was introduced (Education Act 1987, as amended, 1991, 2006). This affected the provision of education to the poor, people with disabilities and the disadvantaged. It is argued that disability that is not cared for is a major cause of drop out from school (Zablocki and Krezmien, 2012). Dropout is said to be high in schools with high incidence of disabilities among learners. Due to distance from school and sometimes lack of motivation from school environment, learners with disabilities see no reason to continue coming to school and drop out. Dropout is regarded as an educational crisis and in countries where it is experienced, a disproportionate number are students of colour, students living in poverty and students with disabilities (Stayton, 2011; Iachini, Buettner, Anderson-Butcher and Reno, 2013). Dropout is not only a Zimbabwean phenomenon but it is also experienced in many other countries globally. It is argued that about 9 per cent of the students in Israel drop out of school (Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics as cited in Kapeliuk, Reich & Bar-Lev, 2004). School dropout is also rampant in the United States where a figure of about 10.9 percent dropout of school (US Department of Education, 2001). It is argued that home environments and parenting practices are forceful in causing school dropout among their children (Yair and Gazit as cited in Bekele, 2006). Researchers should not therefore ignore such forceful factors in student dropout from school. Educationists trace the drop-out phenomenon to poor reading skills. Indeed, studies show that students with low reading proficiency are 20 times more likely to drop out than classmates with average or superior reading skills (Unger, 2007).

Children are said to dropout of school due to personal, family and school characteristics. Dropout is grouped into three categories which include among others, social background which has factors like race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, inner-city residence), academic background which include ability, test scores, grade-repeating history); and academically related behaviours like engagement with school, school grades, course completions and failures, truancy, school disciplinary encounters). Students themselves are at fault for taking such unwise actions of dropping out from school (Lee and Burkam, 2003).

Dropout has serious consequences. There are negative effects associated with dropout which affect both the individual and society. Dropout has serious educational deficiencies. The individual who drops out will have difficulties in finding a good and well-paid job in the future. These individuals also have higher tendencies to work in jobs that are illegal, are likely to experience health problems, have increased demand for social services, and will cause high crime rates (Tas, Selvitopu, Bora and Demirkaya, 2013). The issue of leaving school without the requisite qualifications has serious implications in terms of productivity of the individual. Learners who drop-out of school become less productive due to low educational levels and attainment.

## **8. Research Methodology**

This study was grounded in the positivist philosophy and was quantitative by nature. Quantitative research is very useful for identifying prevalence rates, relationships and cause and effect relationships, which under certain conditions can be generalised from the sample to the population (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2004). The study thus employed the descriptive survey design in order to identify the dropout prevalence rate in Chivi South district. For data collection, the closed questionnaire was used. Probability sampling was done using simple random technique where all individuals had an equal chance of being selected for the study. A total of 100 respondents were sampled to answer the closed questionnaire. There was 100% response rate and this made analysis easier.

## 9. Data presentation and analysis

Variables related to causes of dropout from school	Agree N %	Not Sure N %	Disagree N %
1. Orphanage is a major cause	85 (85)	5 (5)	10 (10)
2. Pregnancy is causing dropout	15 (15)	4 (4)	81 (81)
3. Some dropout to look for employment in neighbouring countries	100 (100)	0 (0)	0 (0)
4. Parents with very little concern for schooling	90 (90)	0 (0)	10 (10)
5. Some opt for early marriages	50 (50)	13 (13)	37 (37)
1. Emotional school leadership	12 (12)	28 (28)	60 (60)
2. Poor performance in school work	59 (59)	3 (3)	38 (38)
3. Bullying by others students	13 (13)	2 (2)	85 (85)
4. Poverty living conditions	68 (68)	4 (4)	28 (28)
5. Incompetent teachers	47 (47)	5 (5)	48 (48)
6. Caring for HIV and AIDS parents/relatives	50 (50)	3 (3)	47 (47)
7. Polygamous families	95 (95)	1 (1)	4 (4)
8. Some kind of disability	29 (29)	16 (16)	55 (55)
9. Parents with religious beliefs that never care for school	79 (79)	2 (2)	19 (19)
10. Lack of fees	52 (52)	0 (0)	48 (48)
11. Poor teaching by teachers	39 (39)	17 (17)	44 (44)
12. Poor home background	45 (45)	15 (15)	40 (40)
13. Peer pressure	68 (68)	9 (9)	13 (13)
14. Poor health	11 (11)	17 (17)	72 (72)
15. Lack of interest in school work	23 (23)	7 (7)	70 (70)
16. Lack of interesting subjects at school	64 (64)	13 (13)	23 (23)

## 10. Discussion

Responding to the growing concern for dropout in primary and secondary schools in Chivi south district, the purpose of this descriptive study was to understand the causes of dropout. Variables that rank high were discussed. Orphanage is coming up as a major cause for dropout as 85% agreed, 5% were not sure while 10% disagreed. This means that orphanage is a cause for concern. Today, the AIDS pandemic is claiming many people's lives and they are leaving their children as orphans without anybody to support them. Of all things that might stop going on after the death of parents is schooling because nobody pays the fees for the orphans let alone clothing and food. Students who drop-out of school are prone to high risks of poverty and are likely to suffer social exclusion throughout their lives (Estêvão and Álvares, 2014).

One other variable that is ranking high is the issue of search for employment from the neighbouring country, South Africa. 100% agreed that children dropout of school in search for employment. The economic crack down in 2008 resulted in many people leaving school in search for bread and butter issues. When they came back, they attracted those who remained behind and they were made to think that leaving school is better. This is a major cause of dropout. It is argued that dropout limits an individual's range of life chances. It leads to looking for low paying employment and exposing oneself to very slim chances of mobility (Estêvão and Álvares, 2014).

Polygamous families are a cause for concern. This was expressed by 95% of the respondents who feel that there are parents who fail to motivate their children to go school as this task is left to the mother. Payment of levies and fees is considered the responsibility of the mother because the father has many wives to look after. Some religious sects have as many as five or six wives with many children. It becomes extremely difficult to cater for school levies and fees and hence children dropout.

Despite efforts made by the government to provide education for all, payment programmes like Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM), there are some parents who have very little concern for the education of their children. 90% of the respondents expressed that view. School dropout inhibits full participation in community life. Dropouts display deficits in interpretation and expression skills, speech organisation and critical capacity. They show signs of low self-image due to low incomes in a society (Estêvão and Álvares, 2014).

There are some parents who have religious beliefs that have church activities during school time. 79% of the respondents confirmed that church activities are done during school time and these take a long time before children come back to school. They hold church activities away from their homes and this might take even a month. Such religious beliefs affect the attendance of pupils at school and consequently result in student dropout. Poor performance in school work is a cause for dropout in the area. This was highlighted by 59% of the

respondents. When children realise that they are not doing well at school, they tend to think of leaving school early. It is argued that good performance in class a motivating factor that keeps one going on smoothly. School dropout is associated with a strong risk for sickness and disability in young adulthood (De Ridder, Pape, Cuyper, Johnsen, Holmen, Westin and Bjorngaard, 2013). Communities will not benefit from the individuals who dropout of school. In the US, two thirds of all high school dropouts come from the low-ability (Unger, 2007).

One another variable causing dropout in the area is lack of interest in the subjects learnt. At least 64% of the respondents highlighted that some pupils dropout due to lack of interesting subjects in the school curriculum. The school curriculum that does not cater for the development of the whole child fails to motivate some students and eventually fall out of the school system.

Poverty living conditions are being pointed to as one major reason for school dropout. 68% of the respondents highlighted that students who live in poor conditions are likely to dropout of school. Students who come from poor families with poor cultural backgrounds normally get entangled in the vicious cycle of poverty and eventually dropout of school to make ends meet. It is argued that poor families are not able to bear costs of education (Haibo, 2014). If parents are not able to provide their children with basics like food and clothing, they are not likely to manage to get school fees and levies. There are continuous education costs which most families can not cope with. In some cases, out of lack of concern for schooling, parents would ask their children to join in fund raising activities that enable to get them money to buy food. In a study on reasons for dropout for vocational high school students it was found out that most of the families supported their children but some could not due to low socio-economic status (Tas, Selvitopu, Bora and Demirkaya, 2013).

45% of the respondents point to poor teaching as one of the causes of school dropout in the area. This percentage shows that there are issues to do with the quality of education offered. Where the quality of education is poor, there is no motivation to keep oneself on track and the option is to dropout. If the quality of education is low, students may opt out of school. There are quite a number of variables that contribute towards low quality education. These include large class sizes, attitudes of teachers, leadership effectiveness, shortage of textbooks, mobility of the students due to land redistribution, among others. These factors bear a negative impact on the provision of quality education. Attitudes and behaviours of teachers, peers and school administration have major effects on students who are at dropout risk (Tas, Selvitopu, Bora and Demirkaya, 2013).

## 11. Conclusions

The study has made several conclusion discussed underneath. Dropout is a result of parents who have very little concern for their children's schooling and they hardly encourage their children to do be at school all the time. There are parents who hold religious beliefs which discourage children to be at school and that consequently leads to student dropout due to continuous absence from school. They take children to church activities for long periods and children end up not valuing presence at school. Polygamous families are a cause for dropout since the father relegates the responsibility of fees payment to each mother in the home. The study concludes dropout is caused by search for employment in neighbouring countries. Orphanage causes dropout because the child headed families cannot sponsor their educational demands and hence dropout of school. Peer pressure is a cause for dropout since some students fall prey to what their friends tell them to do. Some students dropout due to early marriages. Dropout is also caused by lack of fees. The study also concludes that poor performance is a cause for dropout.

## 12. Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusions, it is recommended that:

- The Ministry of education should set up campaigns that educate parents on the importance of education and the need for continuing with the cohort.
- The government should look into strategies to stem poverty from communities so that they have the capacity to pay fees for their children and for those who are disadvantaged
- Schools need to explain to students the effects of breaking away from school early in search of employment.
- Schools should provide a curriculum that is both academic and vocational/technical so as to cater for needs of all students.
- Guidance and counselling has to be offered to students so as to shun early marriages.
- Schools should offer effective remedial programmes for students who lag behind in a bid to improve their learning capacity and keep them on track.
- Policy makers should think of strategies that prevent or reduce dropout so that learners and society can benefit from continuous learning of students.

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