

Full Length Research Paper

Analysis of secondary school dropout rates in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Dropping out of school is a dangerous phenomenon related with poverty, unemployment, criminality or public assistance need. The study aimed to understand the perception of students, on one hand and teachers on the other, about the causes and repercussions of school dropout. A descriptive design was adopted for the study and simple descriptive statistical tools were used in the analysis of the data collected. A sample size of 544 participants was involved in the study drawn from 481 students and 63 teachers. The study results confirmed previous studies conclusions about a prevalence of female and older students' dropouts. Poverty, age, gender, parental factors, distance from school, school location, school environment amongst others have been further buttressed as causes of school dropouts. The perceptions of teachers and students in our sample have advocated government intervention as control mechanism for school dropout in Rivers State and by extension in Nigeria. The study therefore, recommends the addressing of the issues identified by relevant stakeholders for the possible resolutions of the problems that society and communities as River State faces.

Key words: School dropout rates, causes, effects, control measures.



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INTRODUCTION

Dropping out of school is a phenomenon common in education systems of countries as it is depicted in different studies such as Burkina Faso in 2003 and Niger in 2006 (UNESCO, 2005); in Zimbabwe in 2011 (Mawere, 2012); in Nigeria in 2011 (UNICEF/FGN, 2012); etc. According to Bridgeland et al. (2006), the decision to drop out of school was referred to in an open letter to the American people as a very dangerous one for the students as dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduated to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from school themselves.

Lewin and Little (2011) define dropouts to include those whose schooling start late as a result of over-age admission, and those whose progression is delayed by repetition. Chivore in Mawere (2012) defines dropout as a pupil who ceases to attend school either temporarily or permanently, before completing the given educational cycle. In the context of this study, dropouts include

students enrolled but did not push through to completion or graduation alongside their cohorts.

There is not one single cause of drop out (Sabates et al., 2010). Drop out is often a process rather than the result of one single event, and therefore has more than one proximate cause (Hunt, 2008). Some of the causes according to research findings are presented as follows: UNESCO (2005) identified age as a reason for drop out from school as age-specific dropout rates for older children increase drastically after the age of 10, such as the case Burkina Faso in 2003 and Niger in 2006 where more than one-quarter of 14 year old children that started school dropped out. For them the opportunity cost of schooling increases significantly and with this a pressure to work or to get married. Bridgeland et al. (2006) reported that many students gave personal reasons for leaving school. A third (32%) said they had to get a job and make money; 26% said they became parents; and 22% said they had to care for a family member. Achoka (2007) identified gender as a reason for dropping out of

school as girls' and boys' dropout rates in a study of the role of the principals in a search for remedy to secondary school dropout pandemic in Kenya for the period 1992-2002 was 20 and 80% respectively.

Hunt (2008) identified a wider range of reasons such as lack of interest in school, costs, distance, pregnancy and opportunities to earn income as reasons for dropout of school. According to Hadley (2009), dropping out of school is most likely amongst those whose schooling is interrupted by periods of absence linked to seasonality, sickness and other household shocks. Taylor et al. (2010) reported over-age children as having a greater probability of dropping out and non completion than those on schedule as they are likely to have lower achievement. Dunne et al. (2010) implicated inappropriate use of corporal punishment and bullying as a reason for drop out from school. Croft (2010) identified disability also as a likely reason for drop out from school. In the views of Basumatary (2012), the most common reasons include poverty, early pregnancies/marriages, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and low self esteem.

In a country wide study in Nigeria, the UNICEF identified some barriers and bottlenecks which corroborate the known problems of out-of-school and school dropouts and these were categorized as socio-cultural, economic and political factors, including willingness and ability of families/households based on the perception of the importance and value of education, to enroll their children in school, and sustain their support until the children successfully complete their education, some of such barriers being too young to attend school; early marriage; western education perceived as incompatible with Islamic education; large family size; lower status accorded the girl-child in the family; peer pressure; children with special needs; poverty of the family; residence or location; child labour; pursuit for material wealth by youth; limited employment opportunities for school leavers; low level of political will; politicization of basic education; weak school level governance; poor financing of education in Nigeria (UNICEF/FGN, 2012).

The effects of school drop out on the individual and the society at large ranges from crime to economic losses and their multiplier effects (Lynch, 2014; Jason, 2009; Swaim et al., 1997; Jone, 1977). According to Lynch (2014), the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that dropouts bring in just \$20,241 annually, which is \$10,000 less than high school graduates and over \$36,000 less than a person holding a bachelor's degree. The poverty rate for dropouts is over twice as high as college grads, and the unemployment rate for dropouts is generally four percentage points higher than the national average. In the end, the lifetime earnings of high school dropouts are \$260,000 LESS than peers who earn a diploma. In addition, over 80% of the incarcerated population is high school dropouts which make the issue that of every member of the community.

However, according to studies, indications are strong that these barriers to graduation are not insurmountable (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In Nigeria and specifically in Rivers State, the first and most important challenge is that there is no record or accessible records of national or state concerns in school dropouts in terms of empirical facts and figures on causes and effects. The second challenge by the fact of the first becomes almost a mirage.

Problem statement

A statement by the minister of state education has it that Nigeria has 10 million primary and secondary schools' dropouts. This pronouncement was based on a statistics contained in a statement signed by the Special Assistant to the Minister on Media, in Abuja. However, the distribution of this figure according to the various states of the federation is not known. All studies aimed at this menace have been regional and localized in parts of the country individual efforts.

Rivers State is richly endowed with natural resources, human and materials alike. It is also challenged with development of the human resource endowment in the face of past people unfriendly government policies. Rivers State is the hub of the country's main economic stay and it is common knowledge that the State in particular and the larger Niger Delta Region are very volatile following long time of neglect. This scenario, account for the unverified yet high population of youth at whims of the perpetrators of this volatile atmosphere. These youth are the same group of persons involved in all manner of social vices in the name of sharing from the national cake, militancy and self-determination rather than being in the schools.

Literatures so far surveyed have no record of study on this topic on a national scale like the last country study on out-of-school children in which only the risk of school dropout was mentioned in passing. The situation is even worse in Rivers State, hence the drive to do an analysis of the causes and effects with a view to elicit from respondents possible control measures to the menace of secondary school dropout cases in the State. The dearth or Lack of research on such an important subject has negative impact to society's social, economic and political development that cannot be underestimated or ignored.

Research questions

Four research questions were addressed by this study, they include:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the students and teachers?
2. What are the perceptions of students and teachers of

Table 1. Sampling frame.

Rivers West Senatorial Zone	Sample Frame		Sample size
Provinces in the zone	Ahoada	Degema	
LGAs in the zone	4	4	
Sample LGAs	Ahoada East	Degema	
Sampled Schools	3	3	
Projected students' sample size	300	300	600
Actual students' sample size	284	197	481
Projected teachers' sample	All	All	
Actual teachers' sample	27	36	63
Total Sample			544

the causes of school dropout?

3. What are the perceptions of teachers of the effects of school dropouts?

4. What are the perceptions of students and teachers of the control measures of school dropout?

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive design was adopted for this study. Population was comprised of all secondary school students and teachers in Rivers State. Multi-staging sampling technique was adopted for selection of sample for this study. Firstly, purposive sampling was carried out to select the Rivers West Senatorial Zone from the 3 zones of the State according to the following criteria of equality (representativeness) of all the zones. Secondly, stratified random sampling technique was used to select 2 local government areas out of 8 spread evenly in 2 provinces (Ahoada and Degema) in the zone of the old Rivers State. Random sampling technique was finally used to select 6 public secondary schools, 3 each from the two provinces of the zone. The sample size was 544, as shown by the sample distribution as represented in Table 1.

Data collection and analyses

Two researcher developed instruments were used for data collection. These include: Students' Perception of School Dropout Questionnaire, SPSPDQ and Teachers' Perception of School Dropout Questionnaire, TSPDQ. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used in analyzing data generated according to the research questions

RESULTS

The results obtained in this study are presented

according to the research questions as follows:

RQ1. What are the demographic characteristics of the students and teachers?

Table 2(a) shows the demographics of students that participated in the study. The table shows that there were more Riverine students (59%); male (64%); younger students (65%); and students of educated parents (95%). The table also shows that student' parents are predominantly civil servants (52.6%), followed by entrepreneurs (37.4%) and agro-base subsistent self-employers (10%). Lastly, the table shows that there were fewer participants from junior (43.5%) than those from the senior section (56.5%) of the schools.

Table 2(b) shows that there are more teachers in the Riverine schools; 57% than there are in the upland 43%; about twice more male teachers 63.5% than female 36.5%; about 90% of bachelor's degree holders and about 50% less experienced teachers in the secondary school system in Rivers State.

RQ2. What is the perception of students and teachers of the causes of school dropout?

Table 3(a) shows students perceptions of causes of students' dropout from secondary schools in Rivers State. The table shows that more girl students, older students, more students of broken home background and more students involved in social vices tend to drop out of school. The table shows that students from rich homes, friends of school dropouts and distant resident students are likely not to drop out of school. However, on the average, students drop out of school is unlikely accounted for by the causes identified by students.

Table 3(b) shows the ranking of the perceptions of teachers on ten causes of school dropouts in Rivers State. Poverty was ranked highest with 9.08 points as a

Table 2(a). Demographical characteristics of students.

Variable		Frequency	Percent (%)	Cum. Percent (%)
School location	Riverine	284	59.0	59.0
	Upland	197	41.0	100.0
Student gender	Male	308	64.0	64.0
	Female	173	36.0	100.0
Student age	9-15years	311	64.7	64.7
	16+years	170	35.3	100.0
Parent education	None	21	4.4	4.4
	Primary	39	8.1	12.5
	Secondary	222	46.2	58.6
	Tertiary	199	41.4	100.0
Parents occupation	Civil servant	253	52.6	52.6
	Business	180	37.4	90.0
	Agriculture	48	10.0	100.0
Student section	JSS	209	43.5	43.5
	SSS	272	56.5	100.0

Table 2(b). Demographical characteristics of teachers.

Variable		Frequency	Percent (%)	Cum. Percent (%)
School Location	Riverine	36	57.1	57.1
	Upland	27	42.9	100.0
Teacher Gender	Male	40	63.5	63.5
	Female	23	36.5	100.0
Teacher Qualification	NCE	6	9.5	9.5
	Bachelors	56	88.9	98.4
	Masters	1	1.6	100.0
Teacher Experience	1-5years	31	49.2	49.2
	6-10years	23	36.5	85.7
	7-15years	5	7.9	93.7
	16+years	4	6.3	100.0

cause of school dropout followed by students' quest for quick riches, 6.52 points; early parenthood, 6.44; parents educational background, 6.44 and lowest being teacher/students relationship, 3.63 points. 55% (51-86%) of teachers are of the opinion that all the factors identified are causes of students' dropout from secondary schools in Rivers State.

RQ3. What is the perception of teachers of the effects of school dropouts?

Table 4 shows the ranking of the perceptions of teachers on the effects of school dropout in Rivers State. All variables are ranked almost equally as possible effects of school dropout amongst students in secondary schools in Rivers State. However, restiveness in the society is ranked slightly highest followed by stealing and lastly

Table 3(a). Students' perception of causes of school dropout.

Variable		Frequency	Percent (%)	Mean	SD
More female students dropout	D	125	26.00	3.04	1.01
	A	356	74.00		
More older students dropout	D	176	36.59	2.76	0.94
	A	305	63.41		
More students from rich home dropout	D	279	58.21	2.35	1.03
	A	201	41.79		
More uneducated parented dropout	D	314	65.28	2.13	1.02
	A	167	34.72		
More broken-homed students dropout	D	216	54.91	2.56	0.99
	A	265	55.09		
More students in social vices dropout	D	224	46.47	2.56	1.08
	A	259	53.43		
More friends of dropouts dropout	D	305	63.40	2.27	1.01
	A	176	36.60		
More distant student dropout	D	132	35.14	2.21	1.05
	A	169	64.86		
Mean perception of causes of school dropout		481	100	2.49	0.31

Table 3(b). Perception of teachers on causes of school dropout.

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Poverty	63	9.08	1.97
Parental interest	63	6.23	2.57
parent educational background	63	5.94	2.33
Student pursuit of wealth	63	6.52	2.29
Student early parenthood	63	6.44	2.73
Parent health	63	4.38	2.14
Student health	63	4.41	2.11
School environment	63	4.27	2.20
Teacher competence	63	3.76	2.64
Teacher/student relationship	63	3.63	2.91
Mean teacher perception	63	5.47	0.31

Table 4. Perception of teachers on effects of school dropout.

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Restiveness	63	2.22	0.85
Stealing	63	2.08	0.77
Future manpower gap	63	1.70	0.75
Mean teacher perception	63	2.00	0.78

Table 5(a). Perception of students on control measures.

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Provision of school lunch	481	1.96	1.32
Free boarding	481	2.85	1.11
Free education	481	4.12	1.17
All child school policy	481	2.92	1.17
Improved school facilities	481	3.13	1.39
Mean students' perception	481	3.00	1.23

Table 5(b). Perception of teachers on control measures.

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Government legislation and proper enforcement	63	5.89	2.18
Improved Parent Socioeconomic status	63	5.78	1.20
Involvement of youth in enlightenment	63	4.73	1.94
Scholarship awards	63	3.37	1.89
Prosecution of noncompliant parents	63	3.83	1.92
Provision of school lunch	63	4.11	1.92
Infrastructural development	63	2.95	2.36
Corporal punishment	63	2.95	2.36
Mean teachers' perception	63	4.51	1.97

future manpower gap. The table finally shows that the mean perception of teachers 40% (24 to 56%) of teachers is that all these factors identified are potential effects of the menace of students' dropout from secondary school in Rivers State.

RQ4. What is the perception of students and teachers of the control measures of school dropout?

Table 5(a) shows the perceptions of students on control measures for the problem of secondary school dropout in Rivers State in order of importance. Free education was ranked most important control measure followed by improved school facilities and lastly by school lunch. On the average, 60% (35-87%) of students are of the opinion that the provision and or implementation of the variables would reduce students' dropout rate in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 5(b) shows perception of teachers of control measures for the problem of students' dropout from school in order of importance. Government legislation, improved parents socioeconomic status, scholarship awards were ranked highest as control measures for school dropout while corporal punishment, prosecution of defaulting parents and school lunch ranked low. 57% (32-81%) of teachers are of the opinion that, the provision and or implementation of the measures would stem students' drop out from secondary schools in Rivers

State.

DISCUSSION

From the results, the following findings were made:

Demographics of students and teachers

The study reveals that there were more riverine students, male students; younger students; students of educated parents, students of civil servants parents and lastly, fewer participants from junior than their senior section counterparts. The reasons may not be far from the enrolment pattern in the area investigated like the entire Rivers State and Nigeria at large where there are more male students, younger students, students of educated parents, students of civil servant parents, etc in our society. The same trend is also replicated among the teachers that made the sample size in the secondary school system in Rivers State.

Perceptions on causes of students' dropout from school

Students shared the perception that students' gender and age are causes of school dropout with more female and

older students' dropouts in this study. This trend may not be unconnected with pockets of cases of early marriages, poverty, economic hardships as well as religious and traditional beliefs that work against educating girl child as previous study in Zimbabwe posits (Mawere, 2012; UNICEF/FGN, 2012). This trend is also corroborated by the state of the minister of education that of the 10 million dropouts from primary and secondary schools, 7.5 million are females (Niyi, 2012). Others studies also corroborate and or disagree with this finding such as the finding of 23.59% female and 15.60% male dropouts in primary schools in Delta state of Nigeria (Duze, 2011) and more male (58.57%) than female (41.42%) dropouts in Delta State secondary schools (Nakpodia, 2010) and whereas a non-significant correlation between some variables among female students and dropout rate in Ogoja zone of Cross Rivers State (Eneji et al., 2013).

Students and teachers share the opinion that socioeconomic status in the form of wealth and poverty is a cause of school dropout in this study. Whereas students posit that students of low socioeconomic status tend to dropout more than their counterparts from the rich homes, teachers ranked poverty as the strongest cause among other causes of school dropout. This trend of poverty driven dropout of students from schools may not be unconnected with the average very per capita income of the ordinary Nigerians whose wards actually constitute the majority of students' population in public schools. This finding corroborates those of other researchers in school dropout phenomenon in primary schools in Pakistan (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Hammond et al., 2007; Shah et al., 2011).

Whereas other factors such as students' broken home background, students' peer involvement in social vices were perceived as causes of students' dropout of school by students, students who are friends of school dropouts and students who are distant residents from school were perceived to be more unlikely to drop out of school. In summary, both students and teachers were quantitatively of similar view as students shared the view that an average of 49.8% (43.6-56%) of all the factors identified are causes of students' dropout from and teachers were of the view that a whopping average of 55% (51-86%) of all the factors identified are causes of students' dropout from secondary schools in Rivers State.

Perceptions on effects of students' dropout of school

The ranking of the perceptions of teachers on the effects of school dropout in Rivers State that all the effects identified are almost equally ranked as possible effects of school dropout amongst students in secondary schools in Rivers State. However, restiveness in the society is ranked slightly highest followed by stealing and lastly future manpower gap. These effects of school dropout, individually and collectively, would only account for

increased crime as it is in the developed countries like the United States of America, USA where 22% daily jailing rate for young black men who drop out of high school was reported in 2009 (Sum et al., 2009). Table 4 finally shows that teachers are of perception that an average 40% (24-56%) of the factors identified are potential effects of the menace of students' dropout from secondary school in Rivers State.

Perception of control measures of students' dropout of school

Free education and scholarship awards were ranked highest control measures for students' dropout of school by students and teachers respectively. Similarly, economic empowerment of parents was jointly considered a control measure by students and teachers just as school lunch provision was considered the least of measures to check students' dropout from school. In the same way, the perceptions of students and teachers on control measures for the problems of secondary school dropout in Rivers State appear to agree even in proportion. Both students with an average expressed opinion of 60% (35-87%) and teachers with an average opinion of 57% (32-81%) of the identified control measures posit that provision and or implementation of these measures would impact positively on the problem of students' dropout of school in Rivers State. This may not be unconnected with the education at all levels especially the secondary school level is becoming unaffordable to the vast majority of the populace that is currently life below the poverty margin in Rivers State. This finding corroborate with the findings of overriding common characteristic of schools in poverty-stricken areas with high rates of unemployment, crime, and ill health where 60% of the black students inhabitants (Balfanz et al., 2004; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; American Psychological Association, 2012).

Conclusion

This study has revealed that the common causes and effects of students drop out of secondary schools in particular and schools generally also hold sway in this part of the world as was the findings of the UNICEF country study of the issues around school dropouts. Poverty, age, gender, parental factors, distance from school, school location, school environment amongst others have been further buttressed as causes of school dropouts.

The effects as shown by this study also agree with common effects of future manpower gap and criminality in the society. The perceptions of the units of analyses have advocated government intervention as control mechanism for school dropout in Rivers State and by

extension Nigeria.

Recommendation

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby proposed by the researcher:

1. To secure the future of the leaders of tomorrow, this study is recommended for expansion in scope to cover the length and breadth, school ownership types, parents, not-easy to reach school-aged youth, etc of Rivers State for better informed decision making by relevant authorities.
2. To secure the education for all declaration policy of Rivers State, monitoring of the where about of purported dropouts be conducted on annual basis to ascertain the actual dropout from those students that only changed schools to better or cheaper schools.
3. The operation of a central schools database by the Rivers State Ministry of Education is encouraged and surveys conducted to find out enrolment and completion rates of students in the schools in the State.

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