The Factors that cause the dropout rate in Zimbabwean Urban Secondary Schools and Remedies

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Abstract - *The major purpose of this study was to investigate the factors which cause student dropout in a selected urban secondary school located in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The study was informed by the post-positivist and constructivist paradigms, utilizing a combination of quantitative and qualitative data in a mixed method approach. Data was collected using closed-ended questionnaires, document analysis and semi-structured interview protocols. Sources of data, methodology and theories were triangulated to authenticate the data gathered. Respondents and interviewees/key informants were systematically and purposively sampled respectively. The main themes centred on the concept of student dropout, its causes and remedies. The study, therefore, unearthed that participants were conscious of the concept, the student/family, community and school level factors which cause it. The latter, though minimum threatened the internal efficiency of the Zimbabwean education system. An inclusive, holistic and relevant curriculum meant to cater for the diversified needs of the students was proposed.*

Keywords - *educational waste; internal efficiency; key informants; mixed method approach; new curriculum; paradigms; participants; rates*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwean post-colonial educational policies, partly influenced by the political ideology and the philosophy of the ruling government as enshrined in its 1980 Election Manifesto Zvobgo (as cited in Ngwenya, 2016)[29] and the 1948 United Nations Charter on Human Rights (Mthethwa, 2015)[24], placed education within the fundamental rights of every citizen (Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe [CRZ], 2013). This new dispensation in the provision of education was not only meant to redress the past colonial imbalances but to demonstrate the government's serious commitment to international conventions and agreements regarding the provisions of equal access, equity and quality basic education (Thomas, 2015)[35] . Colonial educational policies marginalised and bottlenecked the education of the indigenous people Zvobgo (as cited in Ngwenya, 2016)[29]. In that view, the post- colonial State had to craft the new democratic political dispensation regularised by the statutes of the land to address the discrepancies created by the regime. This thrust triggered the social demand model in the planning of education (Education Act, 2006) which gave birth to universal primary education (UPE) and education for all (EFA) goals. This approach culminated in a massive consumption of the educative enterprise by the 'knowledge thirsty' Zimbabweans at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, hence, attaining a literacy rate of 92% (Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation

[Zim-Asset] (2013 - 2018). However, this phenomenal increment in enrolments at all levels, although meant to develop the much yearned for human capital for national and economic development (Thomas, 2015) had fiscal implications which impacted heavily on the infrastructural development and resource mobilisation. Given such a background, economically minded education planners became interested in the progression of learners through the education cycle at various levels (output) with regard to the minimum utilisation of resources (inputs) as they grappled with how efficient the education system was (UNESCO, 2007)[37] within the aforementioned context. In an attempt to ensure that an education cycle at all its terminal points yielded expected outputs with minimum inputs, performance indicators such as promotion, repetition and school dropout rate (DR) need examining. It is against that backdrop of events that this paper investigated the factors which cause students to dropout from school as solutions are sought to minimise the educational waste which goes with it.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Globally, education is viewed as a powerful tool for the development of any society and the much needed human capital (Thomas, 2015), hence, the massive investments every independent government makes in the provision of education to its populace regulated by various statutes. In that direction, the primary goal of education to any given nation is to prepare individuals for the job markets by transmitting knowledge, skills, attitudes and cultural

norms from the adult world to the younger one (Thomas). In that view, an internally efficient educational system is one that churns out graduates without wasting any student years or without dropouts or repeaters (Thomas). Such a system must produce maximum outputs (i.e., students) using minimum inputs [i.e., costs/resources] (Thomas). However, education systems worldwide, Zimbabwe included are challenged by the crisis of high DR and repetition rates which are a waste in as far as its internal efficiency is concerned (UNESCO, 2009)[37]. Even the advanced American education system with its policy of 'No Child Left Behind' experiences a DR of 1.3 million high school students per annum which becomes a state burden, as they depend on public money for their health care, welfare and are more likely to be clients of the criminal justice system (Rumberger, 2011)[33]. It is within this given scenario that every economically sound educational planner intends to see how the minimum given inputs yield the maximum expected outputs within its fiscal budget allocation.

A national study conducted in Zimbabwe by the Plan International Gender Officer (PIGO) in 2016 revealed that 3 650 secondary school girls had dropped out of school since January to marry, compared to 261 boys at the same time (Kadirire, 2016). The situation was believed to be so prevalent in Zimbabwean schools investigated such that even 12 year olds dropped out for similar reasons as well (Kadirire).A case in point is that of a 19 year old who was forced to marry a 50 year old in Matabeleland North Province (MNP) when she was 15 only to divorce later due to abuse. Later on, the orphaned girl became a commercial sex-worker and is looking after her siblings aged 14 and 10 in a child-headed family (Natsianda, 2017)[27]. Similarly cases of 13 year olds being forced into marriage are rampant in MNP (Natsianda).

On the other hand, during the same period the study also revealed that in the primary schools 305 girls had equally dropped out compared to only 13 boys who did so during the same period. Even when women who were aged 40-45 were interrogated as to when most of them got married, it seems the majority of them did so at 19 years, although the study reveals that the majority of girls who dropout nowadays get married at 16 years. Boys have also joined the band wagon too as evidenced by a 16 year old school dropout who committed suicide after his girlfriend had passed on a cellphone gift he had given her to another boyfriend as her token of love (Ncube, 2017)[26]. The boy was overwhelmed by the fact that his girlfriend had dumped him, the cellphone had been borrowed from his uncle and both mother and daughter were threatening him with statutory rape to eliminate him from the love equation (Ncube). This is a cause of concern to the Zimbabwean education planner when one considers that most 12 year olds in Zimbabwe are supposed to be completing their primary cycle or in form one and at 16 or 19, they are expected to proceed to Lower Six or tertiary institutions respectively. The latter age group affects the development of the much needed human capital as desired

by every developing country considering the massive educational expenditure (i.e., public funds) invested in the system. The statistic seems to defeat the equality and equity debate on gender in as far as access to education is concerned in pursuant of UPE and EFA goals as desired by every democratic government.

Moreover, another grave concern to the study is that of the DR as reported in Matabeleland South Province (MSP) recently. The Provincial Education Director (PED) reported that 31% of the 20 342 (6 306) pupils who had completed the primary cycle in 2015 dropped out due to long distances, failure to pay fees, teenage pregnancies and being non-readers giving a transition rate of 69% (Dube-Matutu, 2016a)[4]. The latter is against that of 2014 (67.4%). The prevalence of teenage pregnancies is corroborated by the sex orgies and beer binge high school girls engage in nocturnally in pubs in the same Province unabated (Staff Reporter, 2016). The findings are further buttressed by the study which was conducted by the Zimbabwe Vulnerable Assessment Committee (Zim-Vac) which revealed that 32% of rural pupils nationally dropout of school due to similar factors inclusive of disability, poverty or hunger and lack of interest (Tshili, 2016)[36].

By the same token, Makomborero (2016) in his study of students dropout at higher and tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, observed that 40 000 students nationwide dropped out due to failure to register, access lectures or write exams. Of these 9 000 (22.5%) were in their final year which resulted in their waste of money and time. This has led to 50% of higher and tertiary female students resorting to transactional sex so as to access education, food, accommodation and other educational services due to poverty (Makomborero), a sorry state of affair to parents and guardians who invest so much in the girl child's education when her basic and biological needs are put in the limelight. Student dropout will no doubt escalate if what Midlands State University (MSU) has introduced in its 2017 academic year is anything to go by. MSU, hit hard by the plummeting country's economy has introduced stringent measures. Students have been informed that all those who fail to register over non-payment of fees or are not on the university's approved payment plan would not be allowed to attend lessons or sit for examinations (Chadenga, 2017)[2]. In the same light, students who do not produce evidence of class attendance and continuous assessment would not write examinations (Chadenga).

On the issue of transactional sex, a study conducted in 2015 revealed that out of those who did so, 6 000 of them were diagnosed with Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), a serious dent on the achievements the Zimbabwean government has made in achieving the higher literacy rates it prides on (Zim-Asset, 2013-2018) and the development of human capital amid the HIV/AIDs scourge which has bedevilled society of late. Such a development is retrogressive, more so that the study conducted by the Female Students Network Trust

(FSNT) revealed that 74% of the female students in tertiary institutions were being sexually harassed or abused by male staffers in exchange for higher grades (Online Writer, 2017)[32]. This syndicate of female abusers including non-academic male staffers prey on the flock they should be shepherding unashamedly as they claim that it is part of their supplementary job benefits. The 'hapless' and 'impressionable' ladies due to their impoverished background are awarded higher grades in exchange for sex which ends up compromising their performance in the job market and ruining their future as well. On the way, some dropout due to pregnancies, worse still contract HIV and a coterie of STIs (Online Writer). If this Sodom and Gomorrah affair prevailing at these higher institutions of learning goes unchecked, students may leave school due to pregnancies or HIV/AIDS. Absenteeism which goes with the latter ailment may creep in as well thus compromising the quality of education such a student receives. Such a development would be confirming studies which were conducted in Tanzania, South Africa and Kenya which revealed that HIV students drop out of school because of the stigma or defacto discrimination associated with it (Ngodu, 2010)[28].

It is this educational waste as revealed by the glaring statistics delineated above and the high risk behaviour students in Zimbabwe engage in, some at a tender age which compelled the researcher to investigate the factors which cause student DR in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province as solutions to minimise the malaise are sought.

3. WHAT IS STUDENT DROPOUT?

When a cohort begins an educational journey at whatever entry point, an education planner is interested in knowing how many of these have been promoted to the next grade, how many repeated the same grade and how many left school all together to probably join later or never to come back again (UNESCO, 2009). These are performance indicators which may be used to evaluate the internal efficiency of any given education system. Since the intention of this paper was meant to investigate the DR in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, the researcher zeroed in on this factor.

DR in simple terms "measures the proportion of students who leave schooling and in most cases it is calculated as a remainder after subtracting from the enrolment those who repeat and those who are promoted to the next grade" (Ngodu, 2010, p. 35)[28]. Similarly, the Online Collins English Dictionary (2017, n.p.) views DR as a "person who leaves a school or college without having completed the course of study." Therefore, in this context DR is failure by a student to complete an education cycle within a given timeframe for whatever reasons. The person may leave school forever or may be re-admitted at a later stage although his or her cohort would have completed the education cycle. Fundamental economics reveals that dropouts are costly to both the student, government and

society at large (Rumberger, 2011)[33]. The salary differentials brought about by different qualifications, makes lower income earners contribute less income tax to the national fiscal policy (Rumberger). Similarly this poor economic outcome due to low levels of education may force them to engage in criminal behaviour, have poor health and experience higher rates of mortality rate (Rumberger). Most importantly, school dropouts in general impacts heavily on the citizens as they do not get the returns of the money invested in the individual since the state uses taxes (i.e., public funds) to fund education (Rumburger), hence this research.

3.1 The Causes Of Student Dropout At School

School DR is a multifaceted discipline so are its causes. A study conducted in the 19 Romanian schools by UNICEF revealed that the causes of school dropout may be grouped in relation to their different three levels: students and their families, community and school (Zaharia, 2009)[38], an orientation adopted by this study.

3.2 Students And Their Families

3.2.1 Financial problems

Large, dysfunctional and poverty stricken families were found to have problems of providing adequate basic needs for all their children (i.e., food, clothing and shelter). Such families usually found it difficult to meet the private costs (i.e., tuition fees, levies, buying uniforms, stationery, transport costs and pocket money) of schooling which individuals incur in pursuit of the education enterprise. In Zimbabwe, this development was publicly manifested in the nineties as soon as the provision of education was commercialised and government subsidies were either removed or reduced (Education Act, 1991). However, to the Zimbabwean's agro-based economy, such dropouts became a blessing in disguise to the parents. Older students provided the much needed child labour in the fields or pastures while the younger ones looked after their siblings as the peasant mothers went about their chores.

Currently the hard hitting economic meltdown being experienced by Zimbabweans seems to be affecting the social fabric of the family system as evidenced by weird cases reported in the print media. A case in point is that of a polygamous father who had 11 children and was failing to fend for them and had his fourth wife seeking arbitration from a competent juridical court for negligence (Karuva, 2017)[15]. In his defence the father claimed that his failure to support his family was not out of choice, but was because the family was too large for him to maintain. He further claimed that he was not only failing to sustain it but to pay maternity and school fees for his children.

Likewise, poverty driven cases are equally prevalent in Zimbabwe as evidenced by a mother who bashed her 9 year old Grade 3 dropout son for eating porridge without her permission (Dube-Matutu, 2016b)[5]. The boy sustained severe injuries all over his body as a result of multiple assaults by his mother and was consequently

withdrawn from school as some form of punishment (Dube-Matutu). Such cases are going to be an order of the day since the cash-stripped government intends to introduce other means of generating revenue (Newsday Reporter, 2017). Children from low-income earners whose parents struggle to put food on the table would no doubt be strong candidates for truancy at school and absenteeism would also be the order of the day (Ngodu, 2010[28]; Netsianda, 2017)[27]. Truancy of a different magnitude is equally alive in MSP high schools as reported in the print media. A school which had an enrolment of 140 students was on the verge of closing as the student population had dropped to 84. The downward trend of the enrolment in the Province was so bad that the Ministry once mooted closing down 40 schools which caused an outcry from various stakeholders (Muvundusi & Tafirrenyika, 2017)[25]. The reasons being advanced were that students were skipping the border to South Africa in search of employment with some engaging in gold panning activities to eke a living (Mupunde, 2017).

In a similar fashion, a secondary and primary school in MNP which had an enrolment of 169 and 202 at the beginning of the year had their enrolments dropping to 143 and 174 respectively at the commencement of second term (Netsianda, 2017). This scenario, gloomy as it is, might culminate in the reversal of the UPE and EFA policies Zimbabwe adopted at post independence if unchecked. The Zimbabwean government propelled by its socialist ideology invested so much in education as it viewed it as a means to acquire basic skills and knowledge relevant to life and to prepare students adequately to proceed with further education (Ngodu, 2010)[28].

3.2.2 Parents' Educational Example

The study further revealed that students whose parents had limited education rarely dropped out. Their motivation was that they did not want to be as semi-skilled workers as their parents were.

3.2.3 Siblings' Education Example

Similarly, if the elder sibling leaves school early, the younger ones would also follow suit.

3.2.4 Dysfunctional Families

Such families did not have the capacity to provide material needs (private costs) for their children, such as the polygamous family alluded to above. Trials and tribulations families undergo such as divorce, alcoholism and domestic violence presage school dropout. In the latter situation, a case in MSP is graphically reported of a disgruntled man who terminated his life after bashing his live-in girlfriend lights out in the presence of their two-year old daughter (Dube-Matutu, 2017c)[6]. The reasons advanced were that the woman had rejected the boyfriend's marriage proposal who later became violent and she consequently dumped him (Dube-Matutu). The child obviously would be truamatised for the rest of her life with this experience more so that most illiterate and impoverished families are ignorant of free government counselling and guidance facilities on offer in such a

development. The painful truth in this hard-hitting economic crisis is that there are higher chances of the orphaned child to become a dropout candidate before she commences school. The realities of the Zimbabwean economy at the present moment is that it does not accommodate an extra mouth to feed and the concept of the traditional extended family is gradually phasing out, let alone the emergence of urbanisation coupled with civilisation which gave faulty emphasis to the concept of a nucleus family. However, through the grace of the Lord, voluntary organisations do sometimes chip in to offer assistance or adopt such vulnerable children.

3.2.5 Edge-Of-Law Activities

Zaharia's (2009) study further revealed that prostitution, membership of street gangs or of beggars' network almost leads to children dropping out of school. This trait was observed in students who were moving from low secondary to higher one. The sex orgies and beer binges school dropouts engage in as reported earlier on in this research are typical examples. In the same fashion, Zimbabwean newspapers are awash with local syndicates who lure young girls to their brothels under the guise that they would be offered employment. When initiated into the trade, it becomes difficult for them to divorce from it. Such a situation would culminate in the production of sick mothers who at a later date would give birth to sick children who would gradually dropout from school either due to illness or death or to look after an ill parent or to bereave their parents' death (Zaharia).

3.2.6 Employment

On the contrary, some students were found to be envying school dropouts who engage in shoddy jobs such as 'car washing' or 'park marshalling' to earn a living. This edge of wanting to make money during term time compelled them to engage in unskilled work, prostitution or begging. Such behaviours centre on poverty and the economic hardships the populace is continuously being confronted with (Muguwu, 2017)[17]. Zimbabweans residing in places where gold panning is rife complain that their communities have been polluted. Prostitution is the order of the day, marriages are being wrecked and young girls are engaging in prostitution resulting in the spread of HIV/AIDS (Masara & Tshili, 2017)[19]. Driven by the edge to have money, children in such communities no longer see the need for education as they see the illiterates making cash in the shafts (Masara & Tshili). In the same vein, a study conducted in Tanzania, revealed that some children living with terminally ill parents or guardians or in child-headed families drop out of school to work so that they can support their families and siblings (Ngodu, 2010).

3.2.7 Lack Of Trust In The Education System

When learners at school see successful school-leavers roaming the streets without further prospects of ever getting a decent job they would no doubt leave school. Currently, according to the Zimbabwean Statistic (Zim-Stat) Report, 94.5% of 6.3m people defined as employed are working in the informal economy including graduates

from various tertiary institutions (Mashaya, 2017)[21]. This situation has been made worse by the job freeze which was introduced in 2013 by government in its attempt to cut down on public expenditure as advised by International financiers. The larger employing agent in Zimbabwe at the moment is the informal market where some professionals have resorted to selling airtime besides selling used clothes which are imported from the Far East. Aspiring students in this scenario do not see the light at the end of the educational tunnel, hence, the national and provincial DR as reported earlier on. A new development which is believed to have triggered massive DRs in MSP is the introduction of the new curriculum which parents resent (Muvundusi & Tafirenyika, 2017)[25].

3.2.8   Migration

This according to the study is a problem in the sense that children who drop out of school with the prospect of getting a job to sustain their living, when things do not work out as anticipated join school at beyond school-going age. Others are destined to that type of lifestyle forever. In Zimbabwe, schools which lie on the periphery of the country are the most affected ones more so in MSP where most students exit school and use unorthodox means migrating to South Africa in search of good living (Mupunde, 2017). When they see their age mates who migrated, come back home during Christmas to splash their moneys which they would have saved for a year in a lavish manner, they are forced to think that life is greener and better out there, only to discover that they have been flattered.

3.3   Community Level Factors

3.3.1   The Early Marriage Custom

Although Zaharia's (2009) [38]study revealed that, the practice was prevalent in rural areas; contemporary studies in Zimbabwe confirm that the evil is equally present in the urban too (Kadirire, 2016[14]; Tshili, 2016)[36]. Poverty, teenage pregnancies, cult practices seem to catapult early marriages when it comes to the girl child. A case in point is that of an ailing mother who packed the clothes of her 16 year old daughter and delivered her to a 40 year old man for a forced union (Karuva, 2017). She made sure that the two were intimate by guarding the door to the hut; thereafter she left ceremoniously (Karuva). However, she ran out of luck when her neighbors reported the crime to the police and she was apprehended together with the culprit. Her offence was that of being an accomplice to the crime, more so that in a landmark ruling handed down by the Constitutional Court in 2016 marriages of children under the age of 18 were outlawed (CRZ, 2013). Galvanised by this ruling, the Zimbabwean government is working flat out to align the court's ruling to the new constitution in its attempt to abolish marriages of children as it seeks to domesticate the provisions of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Model Laws which were adopted in 2016 (Machivenyika, 2017)[16].

3.3.2   Having A Child

This factor according to the study creeps in when school going students see their peers nursing a baby. They leave school for the love of having a child too. The habit has been found to be prevalent in dysfunctional and poor families; hence the need for the siblings to be near-perfect paragons of emulation in as far as excelling in school studies is concerned. Sometimes poor results at school due to inappropriate pedagogies or curriculum may cause this lack of interest in schooling and divert the attention of the student.

3.3.3   Lack Of Individual Security In The Area

The study revealed that teachers in high risky and crime ridden areas were afraid to interact with the parents or guardians of students who would be engaging in risky behaviour due to fear. The student may have engaged in risky behaviour or crime to eke a living for the family that way. To stop such a practice might result in reprisals from the affected parents or the involved student. This lack of common ground and cooperation between the parents and teachers may lead to rampant school dropout.

3.3.4   The Custom Of Discontinuing Education After A Certain Level

When children observe that their classmates or siblings are dropping out at a certain level to pursue menial jobs or join street kids or engage in prostitution or migrate to greener pastures, they will also do the like. This practice in Zimbabwe is prone to areas near the four borders, mining settlements, small towns, growth points or villages lying along highways. In urban settlements, brothels and night clubs have mushroomed with some streets being turned into permanent territories by street kids or gangsters.

3.4   School Level Factors

3.4.1   Frequent repeating of grades

This situation emerges when there is emphasis of passing every form before being promoted to the next. Although repeating a form to the students has its own merits, the embarrassment of being left behind by their peers, or being mocked by their siblings who catch up with them may be frustrating if they are not well counselled or guided to the extent of leaving school.

3.4.2   Insufficient student integration

If the school has no proper system of initiating the new students in the main stream of the school system, it may cause some misgivings. New students need to be assured that there would be no bullying of any type in the school system if they are to settle comfortably. Nowadays the element of cyber bullying using the social media has sprouted as well.

3.4.3   Poor relationships with teachers and classmates

If students are not well motivated by their teachers, incapable ones are labelled, and the teaching pedagogies employed are not child-centred and those who engage in learning are afraid of failing an exam, then they are likely to dropout from school.

Finally, the distance between the home and the school is a factor, let alone, with the introduction of Early Childhood Education which caters for 4 year olds and above in the primary. Although in Zimbabwe, it was government policy to build a primary school every 5 km and a secondary one every 15 km in rural areas (Zvobgo, 2004)[39], it seems this dream was not achieved in some areas. Students in West Nicholson areas in Gwanda appear to be walking distances ranging from 15 km to 40 km (Mupunde, 2017) and those in MNP from 20 km to 50 km for schooling and exams respectively (Netsianda, 2017)[27]. The issue of distance seems to be affecting the viability of both primary and secondary schools in MSP and MNP. In the former, one primary school was reported having seven Grade 7 pupils (Mapunde) against a teacher/pupil ratio of 1:40.

4. HOW SCHOOL DR MAY BE PREVENTED IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM?

A number of preventative measures have been suggested by different researchers such that even those suggested in this study are not exhaustive. Preventive intervention strategies suggested in this paper are school related although teachers at any stage may identify such and report them to relevant authorities as they see them fit. Zimbabwe in its attempt to reform its education system which might arrest the DR at several levels of the education cycle has introduced a new educational curriculum meant to cater for children with diversified learning skills amidst an outcry from the public (Mashaya, 2017[20]; Muguwu, 2017). This new curriculum is meant to introduce a holistic and vocationalised education system as opposed to an academic oriented one which characterised the colonial regime's which was inherited at post independence (Nziramasanga Presidential Commission of Inquiry on Education and Training [CIET], 1999).

According to the Minister for Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE), it is meant to produce self-reliant students capable of creating jobs and growing the economy (Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education [CFFPASE], 2015-2022). While in essence, the new curriculum according to its advocates seeks to promote *Unhu/ubuntu/Vumunhu*, equality, inclusivity, relevance and diversity as some of its practices (Moyo, 2016; CFFPASE), there is a strong belief that it would ultimately develop and prepare students for life and work in a globalised economy (Moyo; CFFPASE).

This holistic approach to the education system seems to take cognisant of the local sociological imperatives, global changes and conforming trends that have taken place since 1999 in the Zimbabwean education system (Moyo, 2016)[22]. For example, one of the requirements of the new curriculum in line with the Nziramasanga's (1999)[30] recommendations and the CRZ (2013) is that

all subjects at Early Childhood Education (ECD) be taught in the local indigenous language (Harare Bureau, 2017). What it means is that subjects such as Science and Mathematics must be taught in the indigenous language common in that area as dictated by the constitution (Harare Bureau). This trend is not peculiar to Zimbabwe only as proposed by its advocates; as such practices have been found prevailing in countries such as Germany, China, Cuba and Russian where high standards of education have been achieved (Moyo).

That set aside, Zaharia's study (2009) offers the following preventative measures of student DR in the schools he studied. He proposes that 'second chance programmes' meant for either repeaters or those who would have left school and have come back should be streamlined according to age groups. What this means is that, a student who dropped some years back should not be integrated in the mainstream. Their way of focus, learning needs in terms of materials and learning strategies differ. This situation obtained in Zimbabwe at post-independence where those who came back to continue with their education after it had been disrupted by the liberation struggle or by the various bottlenecks which characterised the colonial education system of the past regime were accommodated in the mainstream with undue consideration of their age (Zvobgo, 2004)[39]. This created enormous pedagogical issues to the classroom practitioner as s/he tried to balance the needs of different age groups within the same category.

When it comes to repeaters, first for motivational purposes, the educator must consider what the student can perform and achieve (Zaharia, 2009)[38]. The curriculum must be rich, inclusive and should cater for diversified abilities. This is the route the Zimbabwean government is trying to undertake with its proposed 10 minimum subjects at 'O' level. The compulsory ones being: English language, Heritage studies, Agriculture, Physical Education, Sports and Mass Displays, General Science, Mathematics and an indigenous language (CFFPASE, 2015 - 2022). In addition to these are a host of electives: Computer Science, Geography, Physics, Chemistry and Biology, Additional Mathematics, Statistics, History, Sociology, Economics, Family and Religious Studies and many others.

An alternative measure which may be undertaken by school teachers is to engage the dropouts dialogically by way of exit interviews so as to establish the reasons which may have led them to leave school (Zaharia, 2009)[38]. Thereafter, the reasons established must be shared with the current students to curb the menace. By the same token, school life must approximate or resemble life out of school. Leisure activities must be packaged within the learning programmes to make school life as exciting as much as possible. Perhaps this could be one of the reasons the Zimbabwean new curriculum takes Physical Education, Sports and Mass Displays not as extracurricular activities as was the practice in the past but as core subjects. In the similar vein, teachers are

encouraged to dialogically engage the parents or guardians of the learners on ways of integrating dropouts in the mainstream without hiccups. In the engagement phenomenon, counselling and guidance programmes available to both dropouts and parents must be brought on board.

In areas where high risk behaviours are prevalent, the study suggests that a national sex education programme be developed and communicated to the students. In addition to that, local communities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should be encouraged to engage students in various support programmes such as assisting the elderly families with household chores. By the same token, a record of families involved in migration must be kept so as to monitor the students and advise them against such a ritual. Teachers too, must develop a system of monitoring a cohort from its entry point up to the exit if dropout trends are to be arrested. Most importantly, awards or prizes given at monumental Prize and Giving Ceremonies year in and out must cater for the diversified abilities students portray at any given time, if the vulnerable group is to be given the purpose of coming to school.

5. METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach (MMA) informed by the pragmatic philosophical assumptions was employed in the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative one simultaneously, thus utilising the convergence model (Creswell, 2014)[3]. The MMA was used based on the assumption that all methods have bias and weaknesses and the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data would neutralise the weaknesses of each form of data (Creswell). In addition to that, since student dropout seems to be a national phenomenon, I was convinced that the practicality entailed in the pragmatic paradigm would be best understood by using both numbers and words which entails a combination of deductive and inductive thinking (Almalki, 2016)[1]. Most importantly, the combination of methodologies on the study of the same phenomenon makes it heavily rely on triangulation Denzin (as cited in Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Tumer, 2007)[13].

For this study, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from a purposively selected public secondary school situated in the high density suburb of Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. A survey design entailing closed-ended questionnaires and a semi-structured interview protocol was employed on 14 systematically selected respondents and 5 purposively selected interviewees respectively (Creswell, 2014)[3]. The quantitative data

was screened first within the major themes of the study followed by the editing, coding and classification of qualitative one before analysis. This combination of methodology employed was based on the assumption that the post-positivist paradigm would inform the collection of quantitative data, hence, making the results generalisable to the larger population, while the constructivist worldview, would influence the gathering of qualitative data within the context of the findings (Almalki, 2016)[1]. The use of a variety of data sources, theories and methodologies was meant to validate the reliability of the discovered truth as averred by Denzin. My considered view was that the use of a MMA by way of triangulation as delineated above would cancel out the biases inherent in any particular data source, theory and particular method when used in conjunction with other data sources, theories and methods. In that way I was convinced that the use of the MMA would yield positive benefits, in that the use of differing approaches has the potential to provide a greater depth and breadth of information which is not possible when utilising singular approaches in isolation (Almalki).

Since data for this study was collected simultaneously, the two forms of data were rigorously integrated and triangulation offered opportunities for convergence and corroboration of different results derived from the different approaches employed (Almalki, 2016). The concurrent triangulation strategy employed saved time afforded this cross-sectional research (Almalki). Data was interpreted at the same time with statistical data being presented first followed by the qualitative discussion. Equal weight was given to both and the inconsistencies and controversies which emerged were dealt with within these parameters. Where serious challenges were observed, interviewees were revisited for clarity (Creswell, 2014). It is in this manner that the factors which cause student dropout in Zimbabwean public secondary schools were identified and possible solutions were sought to minimise them as the internal efficiency of the education system was sought.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings were reported under the following themes: the concept of student dropout, number of students who dropped out in 2016, causes of student dropout and measures to curb student dropout in schools.

6.1 Biographic data

Questions (1-4) sought biographic data from the respondents and the results are depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Biographic data (n=14)

Variable		
1.**Gender**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Male	2	14
Female	12	86
Total	**14**	**100**

2.**Designation**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Teacher	1	7
Senior Teacher	12	86
Head of Department	1	7
Total	**14**	**100**
3.**Acad & Prof Qualification**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
DIPED/CE	11	79
BA	2	14
BED	1	7
MED	0	0
Total	**14**	**100**
4.**Teaching Experience**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
0-5 years	1	7
6-10 years	2	14
11-15 years	1	7
16 years+	10	72*
Total	**14**	**100**

*Adjusted to give a summation of 100%

6.1.1   Quantitative data
Table 1 above reveals that 14 teachers participated in the quantitative survey. Twelve of these (86%) were females and the rest were males (14%) caused by deployment policies which are skewed towards the former. The majority of these were Senior Teachers (86%). The other respondents were a novice teacher (7%) and a Head of Department [HOD] (7%) respectively. Similarly, the holders of Diplomas or Certificates in Education (79%) were the majority, with two (14%) being holders of a Bachelor of Arts degree (i.e. a specialist subject degree without professional training).The remaining one was a holder of a Bachelor of Education degree (7%). Furthermore, the bulk of the teachers (72%) seem to have taught for more than 16 years, followed by those who had taught for 10 years and below (14%). The remaining two had taught for 5 years (7%) and 15 years (7%) respectively.

6.1.2   Qualitative Data
On the contrary, biographic data on the 5 key informants revealed that 3 were female teachers and 2 were males. Three of these had Diplomas or Certificates in Education; one had a Bachelor of Arts degree yet the other had a recognised teaching certificate (i.e., T2 B Home Economics). All these were Senior Teachers and had taught for more than 16 years.
What these data boil down to is that 16 out of 19 participants (84%), at the level of Senior Teachers with standard qualifications had taught for more than 10 years in the school investigated. In that light, I concluded that these were information-rich and data obtained from them was valid, reliable and credible.

6.2   The Concept Of Student Dropout
Questions (5-7) sought to establish the conceptual understanding of the term 'student dropout' from the respondents' perceptions and the results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Definition of student dropout (n=14)

Q.	Student dropout is:	F	%
5.	Repeating a form.	3	21
6.	Proceeding to the next form.	0	0
7.	Leaving school forever or with the intention of rejoining at a later date.	11	79
Total		**14**	**100**

The majority of teachers investigated viewed school dropout as: 'leaving school forever or with the intention of rejoining at a later date' (79%). The other 3 (21%) viewed repeaters as dropout as well. The latter group might have been confused by the fact that these students are not part of the cohort they commenced learning with anymore. However, they are still within the system, they cannot be considered as dropouts. They are better known as repeaters.
When the same question was asked to the five key informants, their responses were varied but meant the same thing. They seemed to agree that any student who has not completed any 'educational cycle' within a given 'timescale' either for 'good' or 'not' is a dropout. In conclusion, it seems the majority of participants seem to hold the same view of what school dropout is all about.
Having established a working definition on student dropout, the researcher was compelled to establish the gravity of the phenomenon as it exists in the public school under investigation by questioning the respondents on the concept through questions (8- 10) as shown below.

Table 3: Student Dropout (SD) for 2016 (n=593)

Q.	Variable															F	%
8.	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0		10	1.7
9.	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	6	0		6	1.0
10.	40	40	46	40	42	48	45	40	47	42	45	42	42	36		593	2.7

8 = Male SD   9 = Female SD   10 = Total enrolment

Table 3 above reveals that during the 2016 the classes of the teachers investigated experienced a dropout rate of males (1.7%) and females (1.0%), thus, giving an overall of (2.7%) out of an enrolment of 593 students. The result was further triangulated with that which was gathered from the class registers of the whole school for 2016 as shown below.

Table 4: Analysis of the School Registers (n = 1689)

Forms	Males	Females	Total	Student Dropout		
				Males	**Females**	**Total**
1	186	170	356	1	6	7
2	191	195	386	4	4	8
3	208	227	435	4	6	10
4	216	217	433	13	4	17
5	9	13	22	0	0	0
6	24	33	57	0	0	0
Totals	**834**	**855**	**1689**	**22**	**20**	**42**
Student dropout rates				**1.3%**	**1.2%**	**2.5%**

Table 4 above reveals that the public secondary school under investigation has a total enrolment of 1 689 student (i.e., Forms 1-6). During 2016 the school experienced a (1.3%) and (1.2%) of male and female students dropout respectively, giving a total of (2.5%). However, of all the male (834) and female (855) students enrolled, the dropout rates were (2.6%) and (2.3%) respectively, giving a total of (4.9%).

In conclusion, Table 3 and 4 seems to reveal that the dropout rate at this school is insignificant in terms of percentages although the raw score in terms of educational wastages is something to think about. In terms of teacher/student ratio (i.e., 1:35 for Forms 1-4 and 1:20 for Forms 1-6), the dropout rate which exceeds the national ratio has a ripple effect in terms of resource utilisation. This may imply that teachers are overstaffed or infrastructure (i.e., classroom) is being under utilised, although at this level specialisation and specialist classrooms need to be factored in.

6.3   Family Level Factors

With the dropout rate viewed as insignificant although having a heavy impact on resource mobilisation, there was need to find out the family level factors which push students out of school through questions (11-21) and results are shown below

Table 5: Family level factors (n = 14)

Variable	D		N		A		TO	%
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**14**	**100**
11. Financial problems (e.g., private costs)	3	21	0	0	11	79	**14**	**100**
12. Parent's level of education	3	21	6	43	5	36	**14**	**100**
13. Sibling's level of education	6	43	3	21	5	36	**14**	**100**
14. Broken families or homes	0	0	1	7	13	93	**14**	**100**
15. Poverty	0	0	1	7	13	93	**14**	**100**
16. Edge to join commercial sex-workers	4	28*	5	36	5	36	**14**	**100**
17. Edge to join street kids	4	28*	5	36	5	36	**14**	**100**
18. Edge to join beggars in the streets	5	36	5	36	4	28*	**14**	**100**
19. Leave school in search of employment	5	36	4	29	5	36	**14**	**100**
20. Distrusting the education system	9	64	2	14	3	22	**14**	**100**
21. Migration to other provinces or countries	2	14	2	14	10	72	**14**	**100**

*Adjusted to give a summation of 100%

D = Disagree   N = Neutral   A = Agree   To = Total

Table 5 above reveals that family level factors which cause students to dropout in Zimbabwean public secondary schools are: broken homes/families (93%), poverty (93%), financial problems (79%) and migration to other provinces or countries (72%) thus confirming Zaharia's (2009) study on these attributes. They all disagreed that distrusting the education system (64%) provided by the Zimbabwean government as established in MSP causes dropouts. Neither is the sibling's level of education (43%) a determinate. However, they were

undecided on the following factors: parents' level of education (43%), begging on the streets (36%), searching for employment (36%), joining street kids (36%) and the edge to join commercial sex-workers (36%).

6.4 Community Level Factors

In addition to that, there was need to try and establish which of the community level factors tabulated in Table 6 caused student dropout through questions (22-25) and results are shown below.

Table 6: Community level factors (n = 14)

	D		N		A		TO	%
Variable	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**14**	**100**
22. Early marriages	4	28*	5	36	5	36	14	100
23.Emulating siblings/peers with babies	4	28*	4	29	6	43	14	100
24.Engaging in risky behaviour due to peer pressure	1	7	1	7	12	86	14	100
25. A culture of dropping out at a certain level	1	7	5	36	8	57	14	100

*Adjusted to give a summation of 100%
D = Disagree   N = Neutral   A = Agree   To = Total

It would appear respondents saw engaging in risky behaviour due to peer pressure being on top of the agenda (86%) typical of the sex orgies and beer binges high school girls usually engage in nocturnally (Staff Reporter, 2016). The culture of dropping out of school at a certain level followed (57%). Students also emulated their siblings or peers with their own babies at home (43%). Intriguing though, is how they failed to take a position on the issue of early marriages (36%) as alluded to in the literature surveyed. However, a further scrutiny of the data reveals that the risky behaviour they engage in has ripple effects. It may cause unwanted pregnancies, or enable them to contract HIV/Aids and a coterie of STIs (cf. 3.2.5; 3.3.2; 3.3.3; Ngodu, 2010; Matutu, 2016; Masara & Tshili, 2017; Online Writer, 2017; Netsianda, 2017), besides abortion and infanticide.

6.5 School Level Factors

At this stage of the empirical investigation, there was need to find out which of the school level factors are causes of concern in the opinions of respondents through questions (26-30) and the results are portrayed below.

Table 7: School level factors (n = 14)

	D		N		A		TO	%
Variables	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**14**	**100**
26.Repeating a form	3	21	2	14	9	65	14	100
27.Bullying (physical or using social platforms)	5	36	7	50	2	14	14	100
28. Poor relationships with teachers and classmates	11	79	3	21	0	0	14	100
29.Poor induction systems in schools for newcomers	9	64	4	29	1	7	14	100
30.Distance from home to school	5	36	4	28*	5	36	14	100

*Adjusted to give a summation of 100%
D = Disagree   N = Neutral   A = Agree   To = Total

Respondents concurred that repeating of a form (65%) by the students was frustrating confirming Zaharia's (2009)[38] finding (cf. 3.4.1). On the contrary, they denied that poor relationships with teachers and classmates (79%) and poor induction systems in schools for newcomers (64%) were a cause of concern. However, they decided to remain neutral on bullying (50%) and distance from home and school (36%), more so, that most students reside in this catchment area.

What seems to be crystalline clear from this empirical investigation is that more boys compared to girls, narrowly dropped out. The causes enumerated being broken families or homes, poverty, financial problems and migration. These could be caused by the melting down of the economy which has forced students into prostitution or orphaned students who end up being heads of their families as alluded to in this study. The situation is aggravated by a culture of dropping out at a certain level in that community. In addition to that, risky behaviour pressured by their peers, being made to repeat a form and emulating siblings nursing babies at home, although with a low rating are yet other factors. On the contrary, the majority of respondents refuted that poor relationships with teachers and classmates existed neither were their induction systems for new comers unfriendly.

However, data generated using an open-ended semi-structured interview protocol revealed that students dropout due to 'pregnancies', 'non-payment of fees', 'child headed families' failing to monitor each others behaviours', 'indiscipline by the students due to drug and alcohol abuse', 'students being HIV victims', 'lack of transport money', 'early-marriages', 'peer pressure', 'absence of corporal punishment', 'bullying', 'staying with aged guardians', economic challenges', 'young girls being used as commercial sex workers in brothels by liquor traders', 'poverty', 'lack of interest in education', 'the presence of broken homes', 'the mushrooming of Pentecostal churches which have become a new attraction', the influence of the TV series', 'being irresponsible' and finally 'voluntary withdrawal'.

These findings confirm the existence of the student and family, community and school level factors which

Zahari's (2009)[38] study revealed but what may differ is the magnitude, more so, that this study was confined to one school with a different setting. The mushrooming of new factors could be geographically oriented.

6.6 Measures To Curb Student Dropout In Schools

With the causes of student dropout known, it was only logical to engage the respondents on how the situation would be arrested within their means through questions (31- 41) and results are portrayed below.

Table 8: Measures to curb school dropout (n = 14)

Variable	D		N		A		TO	%
	F	%	F	%	F	%	14	100
31. Introduce holistic education	0	0	3	21	11	79	14	100
32. Equip learners with entrepreneurship skills	0	0	1	7	13	93	14	100
33. Group repeaters by age	3	21	6	43	5	36	14	100
34.Capitalise on identified strengths of repeaters	1	7	4	29	9	64	14	100
35. Provide a rich, inclusive and diversified curricular	1	7	1	7	12	86	14	100
36. Facilitate exit interviews with school dropouts	1	7	2	14	11	79	14	100
37.Have a rich dosage of extra-curricular activities	1	7	2	14	11	79	14	100
38. Dialogue with parents/guardians of school dropouts	1	7	1	7	12	86	14	100
39. Keep records of migrant parents/guardians	1	7	4	29	9	64	14	100
40.Keep records of parents/guardians of dropouts	1	7	6	43	7	50	14	100
41.Awards/prizes to cater for diversified needs	0	0	0	0	14	100	14	100

D = Disagree   N = Neutral   A = Agree   To = Total

From the responses derived from Table 8, there appears to be a general consensus on the following measures meant to curb school dropouts. Awards or prizes which are usually awarded students at the end of the year must cater for the students various diversified capabilities (100%), education offered to students must equip them with self-help or entrepreneurship skills (93%) through a rich, inclusive and diversified curricular [86%] (cf. 4.0). This is congruent with what the key informants suggested when they advocated for 'inclusive education' meant for 'empowerment'. Further still, respondents suggested that school authorities must constantly engage in dialogue with parents and guardians of students who dropout (86%) and exit interviews with dropouts, must be facilitated (79%) as well (cf. 4.0). These sentiments were further corroborated by the key informants who desired for' confrontational meetings' with dropouts where the scourges and ills of 'HIV and STIs' would be discussed candidly without fear and favour in line with the national sex education programme suggested in this study(Zaharia, 2009)[38].

In addition to that, respondents believed that schools must have a rich dosage of extra-curricular activities (79%) to cater for students' diversified needs (cf. 4.0). Similarly, the education menu on offer must be holistic (79%) and when dropouts come back to school, the learning programmes on offer must capitalise on the strengths they possess (64%) and schools must keep records of parents or guardians who have a tradition of migrating or relocating [64%] (cf. 4.0). In the same vein, records of parents or guardians whose children have a tradition of dropping out of school for whatever reasons must be kept (50%) for future purposes as well (cf. 4.0). When it came to the grouping of students according to their ages (43%) the respondents were undecided.

In addition to the above,   key informants further suggested that government must 'assist learners who fail to pay fees through various intervention programmes' or 'encourage school governing bodies to enable such parents to pay through labour'. Apart from that they also intimated that the 'melting away economy should be addressed so that it may absorb unemployed graduates who are no longer role models to their siblings or peers'. Churches too were encouraged to develop the' spiritual being of the students'. In the absence of 'corporal punishment', which in the eyes of the informants has made teachers 'lose the respect they deserve in the society', elders in the community and other stakeholders were encouraged to come together so as to devise methods of dealing with 'wayward behaviour' without infringing on the liberties of students. In addition to that, informants were agreed that 'rehabilitation centres' be established where such students would receive' counselling and guidance on the importance and role of education in their life' (cf. 4.0).

6.7 Conclusion

Judging by the literature surveyed, it appears student dropout is not only a Zimbabwean problem, but a global phenomenon as it is equally present in America, Tanzania, South Africa, Kenya and Romania in different dosages. This study further corroborates the prevalence of this phenomenon in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, although not as rampant as it is in rural schools as some factors seem to be contextually bound. Conspicuous though was the dropout rate of boys which was narrowly more than that of girls. With the dropout rate at the school investigated being more than the national teacher/student ratio made the researcher deduce that its internal efficiency was compromised in as far as resource mobilisation was concerned. Generally the causes of

student dropout in Zimbabwean urban secondary schools seem to be similar to findings established in Romanian schools, namely: students and family, community and school level factors. Their magnitude is determined by the geographical location of the school. What is certain from these findings is that Zimbabwean students still have confidence in the education system on offer, the relationship between teachers and classmates are fertile ground for meaningful learning to take place and schools have adequate induction systems meant to accommodate new students.

However, where deep misgivings were raised, the researcher concluded that, such problems may not have been experienced yet in the school investigated but could be prevalent elsewhere. Little wonder that qualitative data generated causes which are germane to this school. Similarly, while the bulk of remedies suggested were similar to those discussed in this study, differences were considered to be environmentally oriented. Conclusively, holistic, relevant and inclusive education meant to cater for the diversified needs of students was proposed as a way of curbing student DR in Zimbabwean urban secondary schools. Based on these findings, the results may be generalizable to different settings but with caution.

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