



Effects of High Pupil Drop-Out Rates in Junior Secondary Schools: A Case of Selected Primary Schools in Lusaka District, Zambia

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ABSTRACT:

Education remains the major tool by which people become empowered and the economic, social and personal well-being of all citizens in a pluralistic society increases. A high dropout rate diminishes the pool of qualified people from diverse backgrounds who will enter the professional and political ranks that make important public policy decisions. Therefore, the study aimed at analyzing the effects of high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary schools in Lusaka district at some selected primary schools. The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative methods and a descriptive research design that sampled head teachers, teachers, pupils and members of the community. Data was obtained from the respondents by means of interviews and questionnaires. Frequency tables, graphs, figures and pie-charts were used to analyze the qualitative data. Quantitative data was analyzed by the use of software MS access and MS Excel. The findings showed that school-based factors influencing high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary schools in Lusaka district were excessive workload, stress on the part of the learner, lack of support for learners with special needs, inadequate teacher training, lack of resources and infrastructure, bullying and harassment, poor school culture and discipline and poor quality of education while home related factors leading to the high primary school dropout rates were poverty, lack of parental involvement lack of basic amenities, distance from school, pregnancy, disability, cultural and societal attitudes and lack of resources. The study suggested the measures to address school dropout among learners in Lusaka district which includes among others; improving access to education, increasing parental involvement, addressing poverty and other social issues, providing academic support, improving teacher training and support, providing incentives for attendance, as well as conducting regular assessments.

Keywords: *Culture, Education, Environment, School Drop-Out, Society and Pupil.*

INTRODUCTION

A dropout is a pupil who was enrolled in the beginning of the school year and has left before the end of the school year, and was not enrolled elsewhere. The National Centre for Education Statistics (2012), defined dropout rate as leaving, dropping out of school without completing a high school education or equivalent credential such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Drop-out rates particularly correlate with high poverty rates, poor school attendance, poor academic performance, grade retention such as being held back and disengagement from school. School graduation and dropout rates have long been used as a central indicator of education system productivity and effectiveness and of social and economic well-being. MoE (2019) observed that school dropout among learners in junior secondary schools has become a big problem in the over the last 30 years. Indeed, during each school year, there is a school dropout for various reasons. For some, it could be a temporary school leave, while for others it is a final break from the education system. According to World Bank Group, (2020) dropout rates have been examined from several perspectives. Event dropout rates measure the proportion of learner who drop out of school in a single year without completing a certain level of schooling. Status dropout rates measure the proportion of the entire population of a given age who have not completed a certain level of schooling and are not currently enrolled. However, Dropout rates differ by various demographic factors, including gender, race and ethnicity, immigration status, and geographic location.

In Zambia, despite the government providing free education, training, recruiting and supplying teachers, providing school infrastructure, teaching and learning materials; learners are still seen dropping out of school. In the year 2016 Zambia's basic school dropout rate stood at 2.0% (Chaponda, 2016). Zambia in 2017 had 2.22% children of school going age who were never enrolled in school, with 11.80% primary school dropouts, 26.70% of pupils in school were over age, hence at risk of dropping out. In the same year the country recorded a 61.50% primary school completion rate but this was still low in comparison to other countries that had achieved higher completion rates much earlier than 2017 like Nigeria and Ghana which in 2015 recorded primary completion rates of 83.66% and 79% respectively, (UNESCO, 2020). Several factors contributed to school dropouts in Zambia among them school related factors.

Though the dropout rates have been declining over the last two years (Chadzuka, 2020) the rate of decline is not stable. This means the problem of pupil drop out is still existing in the education system of the country. On April 3, 2018 the Zambia Daily Mail carried a story on page 5 with the sub heading "Solwezi pupil drop-out hits 2, 246". According to the official of this number who dropped out of school in 2016, 1, 396 were girls and 846 were boys. Policies to improve school progression and reduce the numbers of children dropping out of school are critical if Universal Primary Education (UPE) is

to be achieved. Children are starting primary school in greater numbers than ever before but drop-out rates are significant and lead to low levels of primary school completion in many countries (Hanushek, 2019).

The goal of the Zambian education system is to have more learners complete school and reduce wastages (Banda, 2018). The Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines (GPE) (2014), elaborated that the quantitative goals of education systems are not limited to increasing the number of children enrolled but also to ensure that children who begin a cycle complete it (do not dropout) and do so in the set number of years (do not repeat). Consequently, the pedagogical programmes of each cycle are developed in such a way as to progressively provide learners with a coherent and self-reinforcing set of knowledge and skills (Masaiti, 2016). Hence, the early abandonment of a cycle is likely to lead to the partial or total loss of the knowledge and skills acquired in the years that were effectively attended. Therefore, to understand the phenomena, various researches have been conducted in Zambia and abroad, and they list several factors that have led pupils to drop out of the education system. These include poverty and a combination of poor quality of education provision, inadequate school facilities, overcrowded classrooms, inappropriate language of instruction and teacher absenteeism. These factors are among the major reasons which have been sighted as reasons for dropping out and is more likely to occur in developing countries like Zambia (Changwe & Mulenga, 2018). Other reasons include: student burnout, health problems and lack of academic capacity.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

While Zambia had achieved near universal primary school completion levels, national statistics indicate a completion rate of 78.8% at Grade 9. (MESVT, 2016). But this masks considerable regional disparities, with the northern region recording 71.3% (72% for female students) and Lusaka a rate of 68.6% (ibid). Overall, girls continue to be at a disadvantage with a large number of them dropping out in the upper primary and secondary grades, and poorer levels of transition to junior secondary and senior secondary levels. Typically, national education plans assume that primary school progression will improve automatically as a result of interventions designed to improve initial access and educational quality such as free education policy recently introduced in the 2022 national budget. While boys and girls in Zambia are guaranteed the right to education, it is sad to note that the country has a number of them dropping out before reaching grade 7 and 9. According to the MOE (2021) drop-out rate for primary education of Zambia shot up by 24.4 % from 20.1 % in 2019 to 44.5 % in 2020. The continued high numbers of school dropouts make school retention and completion hard to maintain in the country. Despite its importance, strategies designed to improve primary school retention and progression had received relatively little attention. It was for this reason that the researcher carried out a study aimed to establish the effect of high pupil drop-out rate in junior secondary schools in Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish the effect of high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary schools at the selected primary schools in Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Identify factors influencing high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary at the selected primary schools in Lusaka district.
- Establish the effects of high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary at the selected primary schools in Lusaka district.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

Most developing countries, Zambia inclusive, have placed education at the centre of their social and economic development strategies and have invested in strengthening the ability of their education systems to enroll more children and youth (Banda, 2018). As a result, the enrolment, progression, and completion rates are much higher today than they were in the 1980s, and the number of years of schooling has increased in the past 25 years (Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines (GPE), 2014, Chadzuka, 2020). The Government in the past twenty-five years increased the number of schools through expansion of already existing schools and developing infrastructure as a means to improve enrolment and the number of secondary schools in order to meet the growing demand for the same and reduce the number of people dropping out of the school system due to limited secondary school places. However, even with the above successes recorded internal efficiency indicators show that dropout rate has continued to be a challenge in the Zambian school system. Although dropping out is generally considered a status or educational outcome that can readily be measured at a point in time, it is more appropriately viewed as a process of disengagement that occurs over time specifically.

1.6. Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study would not only derive the ability to determine the level of school drop-outs among learners but also its examination on the factors associated with the increased rate. The findings of the study would be of great importance to the schools and the communities where the learners come from. It would also provide suggested solutions for both the school and the communities to curb learner's school drop-out. Further, the study is of great value to the policy makers in promoting school completion in the country. The study findings would also add data to the

existing literature on school drop-out rates in Zambia. Findings from this study would contribute towards the design of strategies that can decrease the drop-out rates of learners.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Design

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Exploratory and descriptive designs were as well considered appropriate as they also allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions. The study was aimed at collecting information from respondents on the effects of high drop-out rates in junior secondary at the selected primary schools in Lusaka district, Zambia.

2.2. Research Site

The research was conducted in Lusaka district in Zambia at some selected primary schools from which respondents were also sampled.

2.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised of head teachers, teachers, pupils and community members at the selected schools. The target population was 2000. The sample size involved a total of 200 respondents which included five (5) head teachers, one from each selected school. Twenty (20) teachers, five from each selected school. One hundred-sixty (160) pupils, thirty-two (32) from each selected school and Fifteen (15) community members. The study employed both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants from the selected schools. Simple random sampling was used on the teachers, pupils and community members, this is because there were too many to participate, hence simple random selection was preferred. On the other hand, Purposive sampling was used on the head teachers for convenient purposes.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively as the semi-structured interview schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the semi-structured interview schedules. The data gathered was analyzed according to the themes of the study and the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the questionnaires was analyzed manually by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16) to come up with frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

2.5. Ethical Issues

Permission from Rockview University and the District Education Board for Lusaka district was sought in carrying out this study. Interviews were not conducted on one-to-one basis; instead, participants were grouped and identified using their titles. An informed consent was sought before collecting information from the informants and guaranteed them with security of the information they provided. Furthermore, the main objective of gathering such information was made clear to the respondents. The researcher avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this study, the researcher was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researcher for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

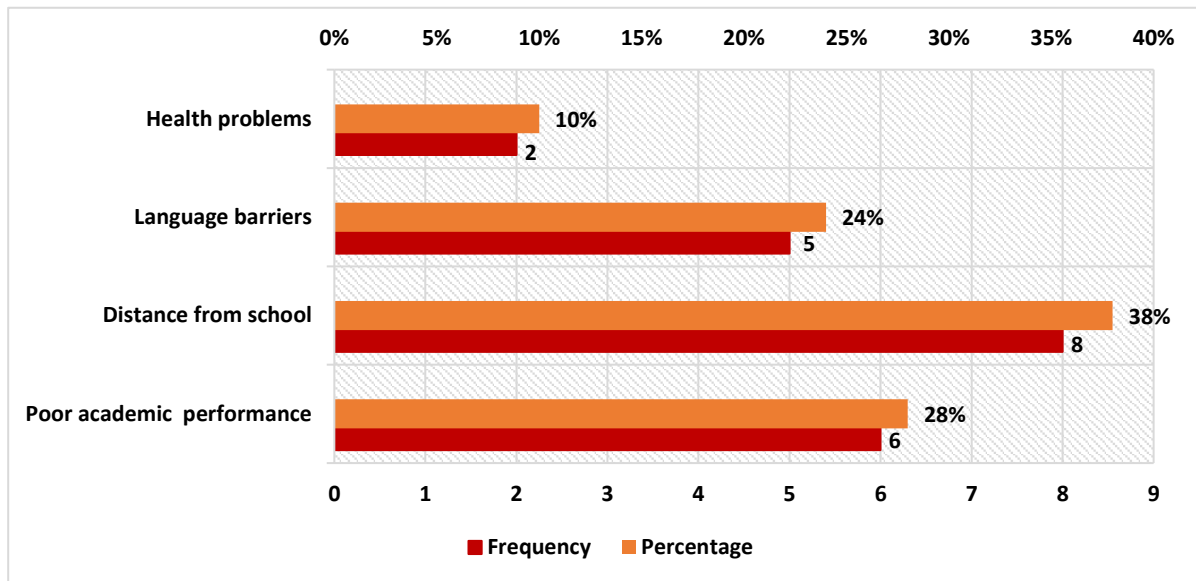
3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Factors Influencing High Drop-Out Rates

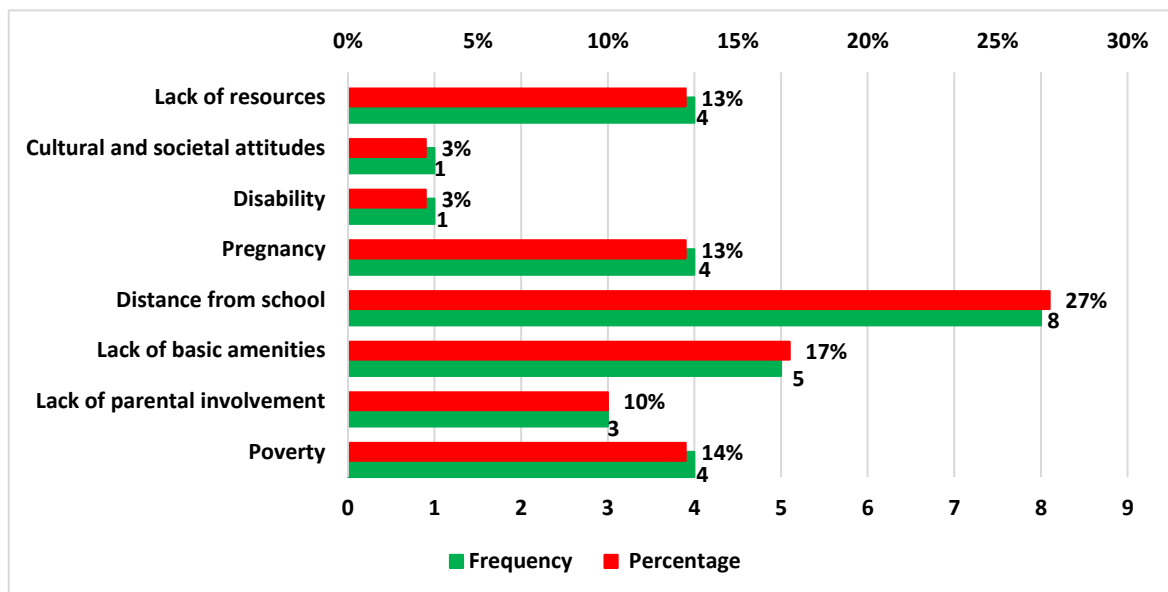
The first theme of the study was to identify factors that influence high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary schools in Lusaka district. Data was collected from pupils and parents in the communities where the schools were located. The findings are presented in the figures below;

Figure 1: Home Related Factors Influencing High Pupil Drop Out-Rates



From the figure above, participants indicated four major home related factors that influence high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary. The factors include; poor academic performance 6 (28%), distance from school 8 (38%), language barriers 5 (24%) and health problems 2 (10%).

Figure 2: Members of the Community's Responses on Home Related Factors Influencing High Pupil Drop- Out Rates



According to the findings in the figure above, respondents indicated the following as home related factors that influence high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary; poverty (13%), lack of parental involvement (10%), lack of basic amenities (17%), distance from school (27%), pregnancy (13%), disability (3%), cultural and societal attitudes (3%) and lack of resources (14%).

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on School-based Factors Influencing High Pupil Drop-Out Rates

SN	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Excessive workload and stress on the part of the learner	2	7%
2.	Lack or inadequate support for learners with special needs	4	13%
3.	Inadequate teacher training	5	17%
4.	Lack of resources and infrastructure	10	33%
5.	Bullying and harassment	5	17%

6.	Poor school culture and discipline	3	10%
7.	Quality of education	1	3%

The data collected from teachers indicated the following factors that influence high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary; excessive workload and stress on the part of the learner (7%), lack or inadequate support for learners with special needs (13%), Inadequate teacher training (17%), Lack of resources and infrastructure (33%), Bullying and harassment (17%), Poor school culture and discipline (10%) and Quality of education (3%).

Table 2: Learners' Responses on School-based Factors Influencing High Pupil Drop-Out Rates

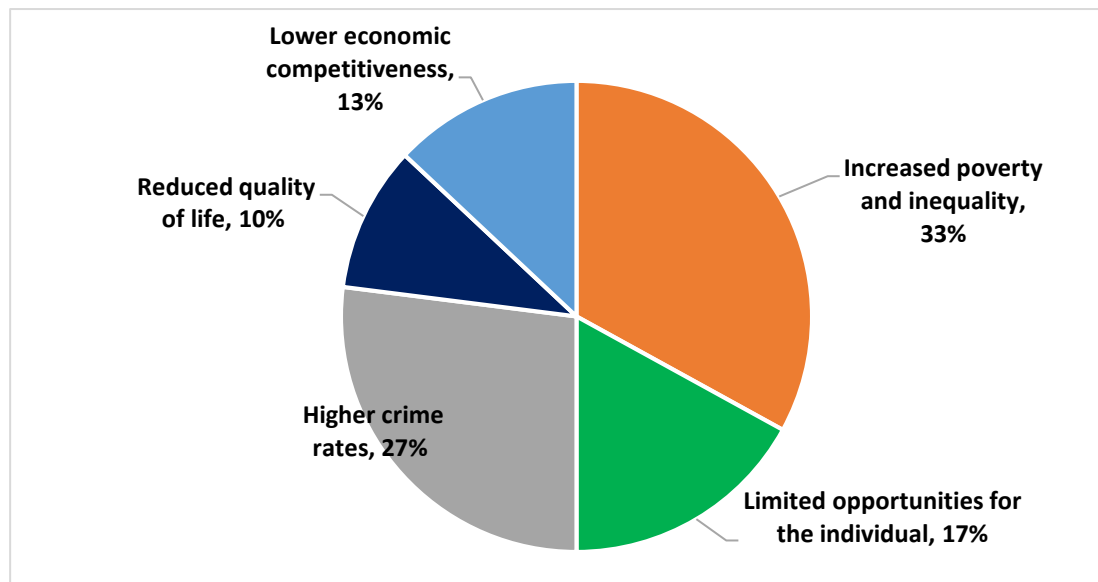
SN	Response	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Distance to school	4	19%
2.	Bullying	3	14%
3.	Ineffective teaching methods:	1	6%
4.	Teachers' lack of understanding and empathy	6	29%
5.	Inappropriate behavior and conduct	2	9%
6.	Inadequate teacher training	3	14%
7.	Lack of transportation	2	9%

Data collected from the learners indicated the following as factors that influence high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary; distance to school (19%), bullying (14%), ineffective teaching methods (6%), teachers' lack of understanding and empathy (29%), inappropriate behavior and conduct (9%), inadequate teacher training (14%) and lack of transportation (9%).

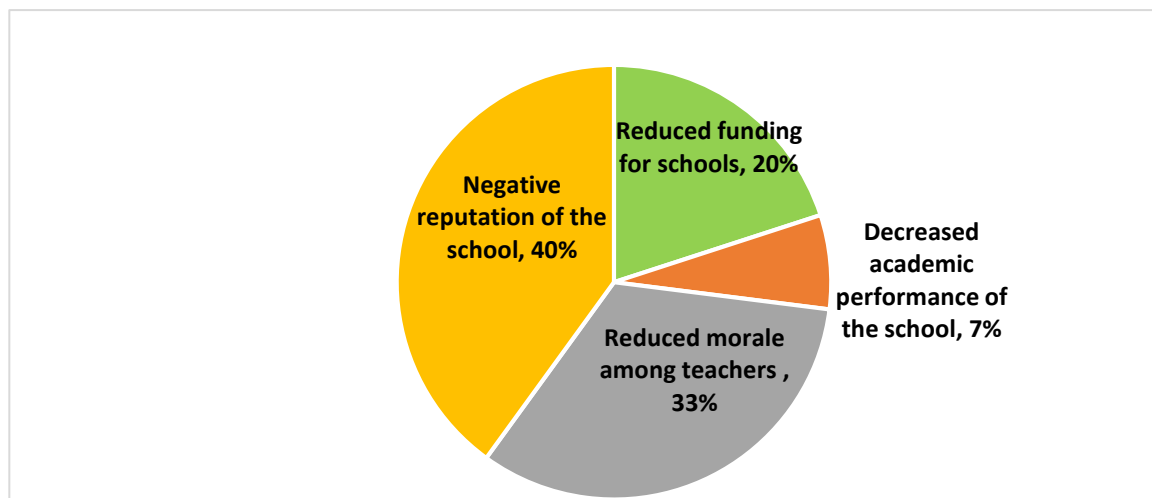
3.2. Effects of High Pupil Drop-Out Rates in Junior Secondary Schools

The study established the effects of high pupil drop-out rate in junior secondary schools Lusaka district. Data was collected from teachers and members of the community as they were the part of the research participants to provide this information in this study. The findings are shown in the figure below:

Chart 1: Members of the Community's Responses on the Effects of High Pupil Drop-Out Rates in Junior Secondary



According to the findings above, participants indicated the following as the effects of high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary schools; increased poverty and inequality (33%), limited opportunities for the individual (17%), higher crime rates 27%, reduced quality of life (10%) and lower economic competitiveness (13%).

Chart 2: Teachers' Responses on the Effects of High Pupil Drop-Out Rates in Junior Secondary

From the data above chart, the respondents gave the following responses with regards to the effects of high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary schools; reduced funding for schools (20%), decreased academic performance of the school (7%), reduced morale among teachers (33%) and negative reputation of the school (40%).

4. CONCLUSION

The study identified home and school related factors influencing high pupil drop-out rates in junior secondary in Lusaka district. From the findings, the study concluded that there are several factors that can influence high pupil dropout rates in junior secondary schools. Parents play a critical role in their child's education and lack of involvement can contribute to a higher drop-out rates. Additionally, children living in poverty may not have access to resources such as textbooks, school supplies, or transportation to school and this may lead them to dropping out of school. Further, the study findings concluded that there are several school-based factors that influence high pupil dropout rates in junior secondary schools in Lusaka district. A negative school environment, such as a school with a high level of violence or a lack of safety measures, can contribute to a higher likelihood of pupils dropping out of school. If a school does not have adequate resources, such as textbooks, technology, or extracurricular activities, pupils may feel less engaged in their education. This can lead to a higher likelihood of dropping out as well. High dropout rates can also lead to reduced educational attainment for the community as a whole. When a large number of pupils drop out of school, it can be difficult for the remaining pupils to receive quality education, which can have long-term effects on their future success. This in return can lead to a cycle of poverty that can be difficult to break.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- The government should provide enough funding and resources to junior secondary schools to ensure that the schools have the resources they need to support their pupils.
- Schools should provide additional support for the struggling pupils, this will motivate most pupils not to drop-out of school.
- Schools should offer serious counseling and mental health services to help pupils overcome any emotional or behavioral challenges they may be facing either at home or school.
- Parents should be encouraged to be involved in their children's education because they play a critical role in supporting their children's education.

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