

Full Length Research Paper

Students' perspective on female dropouts in Nigeria

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Education of the female children has become a universal issue for African nations hence the need for striving to achieve a balance between the enrollment and retention rates of their male counterparts. Although there are many reasons for female children dropping out of school as given in various studies on the subject, this paper tries to explore the reasons from the students' perspective. The goal of the paper was to find out why a significant percentage of female students drop out of the Nigerian school system every year. The findings in this paper are drawn from a research study on female students' dropouts in Nigeria based on the data collected from junior secondary schools of Shinkafi local government Zamfara state. The major reasons behind drop outs were mentioned in the findings of the paper with some little explanations on each reason. In the course of discussion, the paper reviews literature on how socio-economic status, cultural traditions and practice and religious belief from the students' perspectives affects the education of female children; in addition, studies and researches from the previous works of scholars relating to the students' perspectives on female students' dropout were also analyzed and discussed throughout the paper. The study has discovered that enrolment rate of female students is still very low and still remains worrisome, where by dropouts' rate is very high. This is further worsened by traditional system and belief pattern of gender disparity, and high incidence of early marriage of very young girls based on value system.

Key Words: Students' perspective, female students' dropouts, socio-economic status, cultural traditions and practice, religious belief.

INTRODUCTION

Education is as important and very essential to man as life itself on this planet, earth. In fact it is a very important means of developing any nation. The term education has not lent itself to any strict consensual definition as it depends on the perspective from which one views it. It can be considered as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, factors, interest, abilities, competence and the cultural norms of a society by people to transmit this life to the coming generations so as to enhance perpetual development of the society (Okoro, 2011).

However, in spite of the importance attached to education both nationally and internationally, female children's education is still facing a lot of problems in Nigeria among which is the issue of dropout. This may be

due to the parental factors which include socio-economic support, cultural traditions and practice and also religious beliefs towards the education of female students. The situation of female student's non-school attendance and dropout has become a worldwide concern and a global problem confronting the education industry round the world, in both rich and poor countries. In either context, children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are the most vulnerable to dropping out of schools generally and Nigeria in particular (Nesselrodt and Alger, 2005). Researchers like; Mohsin et al., (2004); De Cos (2005); Bridgeland et al., (2006), and Oghuvbu (2008) have since buttressed this fact. In many developing countries, dropping out is most prevalent in

rural areas. Poor children are much more likely to be out of school than their wealthier contemporaries so also female children than the male children (Filmer and Pritchett, 2004; Akyeampong, 2009; Rolleston, 2009). A number of researchers have attempted to investigate the factors which lead to low educational attendance, attainment and dropping out in developing countries (Ramachandran et al., 2003; Palmer, 2005; Verspoor, 2005). Some of the factors which have been identified relate to household income which has to do with socio-economic support, parental education, cultural, religious and others reflect school conditions (Hunt, 2008). Other literature points to the fact that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in rural areas, never enroll or drop out of school mainly because of family poverty, child labor and a low value being placed on education (Filmer and Pritchett, 2004; Nessel rodt and Alger, 2005).

A review of the literature on dropout, provides detailed analysis of studies that have all cited poverty, with all its many forms and related issues including physical, social and psychological disempowerment in different contexts, as one of the reasons for parents' and guardians' inability to pay for their daughters direct and indirect educational costs, thus forcing them to terminate their education (Colclough et al., 2000; Brown and Park, 2002; Dachi and Garrett, 2003; Hunter and May, 2003, all in Hunt, 2008). Premature departures or dropping out from schools by female students is among the serious and notable obstacle to female education in Sub-Saharan Africa Nigeria inclusive. In its simplest meaning school dropout is the untimely withdrawal from school. The students who dropout and withdraw from school prematurely end up not obtaining any certificate of graduation. The issue of school dropout in Nigeria in particular has been with us for a very long time. Fafunwa (1983) noted that dropout is one of the most serious problems that have continued to bedevil our educational system since independence in 1960 from the colonial administration. Even before we got our independence, the problem of dropout has already established its grip on our educational system. This can be supported and buttressed with the remark made by Nuffied foundations in 1953 that in the West coast of Africa, a considerable proportion of student's dropout of school each year.

Background of the Study

It is a well recognized and acclaimed statement that education is the most potent instrument for development and for mental and social emancipation. Enrolments in basic education worldwide have increased and there has been a sharp drop in the number of out-of-school and dropout children worldwide (UNESCO, 2007). The total number of school-age children not in primary or junior secondary school is said to have fallen between 2002

and 2005 compared to 1999 and 2002. Additionally in spite of these promising trends, sub-Saharan Africa accounts for about over 72 million out of school children globally in 2005 (UNESCO, 2007).

Moreover, in the case of female children, the problem of dropping out is the topic of discussion more especially in Nigeria. From students' perspectives, the problem may be related to some parental factors which are characterized by parent's socio-economic support, cultural traditions and religious beliefs of the parents with regards to female education. The analysis of access to basic education in Nigeria builds on the education policy of "free, compulsory and universal basic education policy" (F G N, 1999) and on the World Bank (2000) sector studies. While it is now acknowledged that access to education has improved, it has also been observed that female access to education is seriously slow because it has not grown fast enough to achieve the universal level of participation in primary and junior secondary schools.

In Nigeria, despite its free education policy (F G N, 2004) at all levels of schooling, access to education for all remains unattainable more so for female children and women UNICEF (2002). Indeed in some Nigerian administrative states like Sokoto and Zamfara the female literacy rate is low compared to boys (UNESCO, 2003) the statistics indicated a wider gender disparity with 65.5% of male' being literate against 39.5% literate females. The same period revealed that the nearly 7.3 million children of primary school age not in school about 62% were female. In fact only about 33% and 28% percent of female children respectively attend primary and secondary schools in sub-Saharan Africa. The low rate of female access to education is therefore not peculiar to Nigeria but applies to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This could be generally as a result of negative challenges which include ineffective and inefficient implementation of the National policy on education (F G N, 2004) and reforms in the Nigerian education system, poor economy and poor management, of scare resources (UNESCO, 2002). Poverty, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, culture and gender bias in content, teaching and learning process are some of the additional factors militating against female education in Nigeria. As a result of which achieving education for the female children remains beyond the grasp of Nigeria and many developing countries of the world (Onocha, 1985; Song and Hattie, 2004; Akyeampong, 2009, Schunk et al., 2008; Rothman, 2004; Kassim, Abisola and Kehinde, 2011)

Islam, which is the dominant religion of the north, provides its own system of education through Quran and Islamiyya schools. Formal Western-styled education was brought by Christian missionaries and was therefore treated with suspicion by Nigerians as something alien and threatening to their religion and culture. The missionaries, too, did not hide the fact that Christianizing Nigeria was one of their primary aims. Western education

was therefore strongly resisted (Fafunwa, 1974). It is only in more recent years that the realization of the benefits of formal education, which is no longer so closely associated with Christianity or foreign culture, has resulted in the expansion of schooling. With the launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program in 1976, increase in school enrolment has been phenomenal.

Despite rapid changes in the sphere of education in post-independent Nigeria and the attempt to create a unified system of education that is primarily Nigerian, there is a lingering fear, especially among the illiterate parents, that education would expose their children to alien Christian influences. Parents feel that Western-styled education is "contrary to their faith and way of life" (Sulaiman, 1978 cited in Yusuf, 2008). It is believed that women, who are the embodiment of Islamic values and custodians of Islamic morality, should be guarded against the corruption of unsuitable schooling. Further, the Islamic injunction restraining the mingling of women with men has always been an important reason for parents especially mothers, not wanting to send their daughters to school. In addition, cultural factor may be considered as another reason for low female enrolment and dropping out from school. The people of northern Nigeria in particular are largely Hausa Muslim. The culture of the Hausa people defines the woman's role as primarily that of housewife, and many women are in seclusion (*purdah*). Girls are usually given in marriage as early as 11 and 12 years of age, so education seems to have little relevance for the role women are expected to play. Further, early marriage makes it impossible for girls to receive even 6 years of schooling.

Nevertheless, whatever evidence we have on this subject reflects overall negative factors among parents toward the education of their daughters. A study conducted in the 1960s by Hake (1972) shows significant percentage (45%) of a sample of 360 parents was opposed to Western education for their daughters. Several reasons were given. One was that education interfered with the practice of early marriage in Hausa society. Many parents believed that Western education was against their religion and traditions. People also seemed to hold the erroneous belief that Islam does not encourage education for females. Hake found that parents express the fear that going to school led to different sorts of misbehavior-that girls would become lazy and insolent and lose their interest in their role of house-wife. Parents also did not favor coeducational institutions and did not wish to have their girls taught by male teachers. Other smaller unpublished studies seemed to support the findings that parents believed education was against the customs and traditions of their society and that education would make girls unsuitable as wives and mothers. A very real fear was that sending girls to school led to moral laxity in behavior (Abdullahi, 2001).

Moreover, some parents as gatekeepers of behavior and influential figures tend to give priority to the schooling of boys, rather than female children, especially in large families where funds are insufficient to enroll all children. In some families, investing in female children education is regarded as investing for the benefit of the family which they will eventually marry into, unlike in the case of boys. This has socio-economic implication for the poor families or parents. Like in many situations, the economic factors are key determinants to most decisions as well as conditions with house hold set ups. The implication of poverty is a spectrum of issues ranging from lack of essentials low prioritization of education to the lure of the money to name but a few (UNESCO, 2003; Eccles, 1983).

Therefore, in determining school attendance and academic achievement and also minimizing the problem of dropouts, Parental factors which include parent's socio-economic support, cultural traditions and practice, religious beliefs towards female children education are important. Parent's attitude towards their children's education is affected adversely by low socio-economic support and since the parents in some of Nigeria communities constitute the disadvantaged population, it is expected that the attitude of parents of those communities will be unfavorable towards education and vice-versa. However, this study aims to examine the issue of female students' dropout from students' perspective. It is also imperative to examine the significant differences of parent's socio-economic support, cultural traditions and practice and religious beliefs on female students' dropout from student's perspectives.

Problem Statement

The problems facing Nigeria educational system cannot, however, be over generalized because of the diversity characterizing its history which makes some problems peculiar to certain regions. In Nigeria, variations in female educational participation between geographical regions and within the socio- economic strata is quite significant and the similarity of problems in most rural parts of the country nevertheless, makes concern over female education pertinent and deserving of special attention.

Thus, the problem of female students' dropout in Nigeria seems worth stressing. The 2005 National school census (NSC) revealed that there are large geographical and gender disparities between Southern and Northern Nigeria partly due to parental socio-economic support, cultural, religious and educational factors. Female net enrolment Ratio (NER) in some states in the South are as high as 70% while some in the North are as low as 10%. In rural schools, the percentage of dropout was as high as 35.39%. The female dropouts in rural schools were higher than males, 42.10% as against 28.67% (Ajaja,

2011). But in urban communities and communities where the International organizations are working the situation is entirely different. The percentage of dropout in urban schools was lower when compared with rural schools, 22.92% as against 35.39%. Percentage of dropout was still higher among female students in urban schools, 24.28% for females as against 21.47% for males (Ajaja, 2011). In another studies it has shown that the participation of the female children in these Communities is far greater than in other rural communities of Northern Nigeria with an increase of over 60% in female children enrolment, while attendance has risen over 25% in the supported schools (DFID, 2006). It has also been discovered that more female students drop out from school due to poverty and early marriage culture. According to "This day" Newspaper (2005), a case in a village, Gamji in Zamfara state, where in its history, no female students had gone beyond the fifth year in the elementary school before being withdrawn for marriage due to parental factors. To the best of the knowledge of the researcher, it appears much has not been done to investigate the probable causes to the problem at hand. It is in the light of this that the researcher was initiated to undertake this study in the aforementioned area. However, it is an indisputable fact that without positive parental support, any efforts to improve female participation in education will be greatly hampered (UNESCO, 2010; Ajaja, 2011).

Moreover, parents' socio-economic support, cultural tradition and practice, and also religious beliefs of the parent are some of the parental factors affecting the system. Most of the inhabitants of the rural areas are farmers who have a very low socio-economic support to the extent that they are always struggling for their survival talk less of the education of their daughters. Traditionally, they attached less important to the education of female children therefore any attempt to contribute to its development is rendered useless. In a study conducted on school dropout pattern among senior secondary schools in Delta state Nigeria, Ajaja Patrick (2011), was quoted to have said that "Globally, reasons why students dropout from school can be categorized into four clusters. These include; School related, Job related, family related, and community related." His finding was supported by Freudenberg and Ruglls (2007) who identified parental occupation, parent's socio-economic support and parent's educational background among twenty four factors under family cluster that leads to student's dropout. Misperception of the real teaching of Islam about female education also leads them to show negative attitudes to the education of their daughters.

Although a great deal of literature point at the low level of education among female children in Nigeria, most of these studies attributed to low level of female children education to economy, religious and cultural beliefs, (Deiningner, 2003; Sperling, 2005; FGN and UNICEF, 2001; UNESCO, 2002;

ACTIONAID Nigeria, 2003), but little if not none examine the female students' dropout from students' perspective and various strategies to be integrated and adopted in solving the problem, the findings of this paper attempts to address this research gap. This study is therefore very timely and significant.

Interaction with female children in Nigeria shows that these female children want to go to school; these female children are likely to succeed but the opportunity is not given to them to explore their potentials possibly due to some parental factors which need to be seriously examine. Others are being forced to drop out of school and later on be married without seeking for even their personal views by the parents or guardians. As such the researcher felt the need to undertake research to investigate the reasons from the students' perspective in order to minimize the problem and improve educational quality and consequently educational attainment.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design was adopted for this study. The study sought to determine the reasons for dropping out from school among female students in Nigeria from students' perspective. The main population of this study consisted of all female students' dropouts in junior secondary schools, whereby non dropouts, were also used in supporting the collected data from the actual population. The findings in this paper are drawn from a research study on dropouts in Nigeria based on data collected from junior secondary schools of Shinkafi Local government Zamfara state. Data were collected from the female students' dropouts through questionnaires. A stratified random sampling procedure was adopted in selecting the junior secondary schools, on the basis of their status that is all girls' schools and all co-educational schools. The estimated number of the main population stands at 1,112 female students. The sample size for this study was 278 for each category of the respondents (female dropouts and non-dropouts). The choice of 278 samples, out of the estimated population is based on the table of Israel, (1992), Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) cited in Yusuf A, (2008), which stated that the best sample for a total of 1000 should be 278. Table 1 gives the breakdown.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the significant differences of parent's socio-economic support on female students' dropout from students' perspective, in Nigeria
2. To examine the significant differences between parent's cultural traditions and practice on female students' dropout from students' perspective, in Nigeria.
3. To examine the significant differences of parent's

Table1. Selected Sample Size.

S/N	Research area	Female students' dropout age Range	Number of female students' dropout	Selected sample size for female students' dropout
1.	Shinkafi local government Zamfara Nigeria	13-14	1,112	278
	Shinkafi local government Zamfara Nigeria	female students' Non-dropouts age range	Number of female student's non-dropout	Selected sample Size for female student's non-dropout
		13-14	2,358	278

Source: Table of Israel, (1992), Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) cited in Yusuf A, (2008).

Table 2. Causes of Dropout: Female students' Response.

No.	Causes of Dropout	Views (In Percent)
1	Poor economic conditions of families	52.1%
2	Involvement in household chores,	47.8%
3	lack of school facilities	46.1%
4	early marriage	44.5%
5	Absence of proper security	41.1%
6	Lack of child Interest	39.9%
7	Parents' illness and death	39.1%
8	Engagement in street hawking	38.6%
9	Disrespect and stubbornness	10.5%
10	Western education is against Islamic Religion	10.0%

religious belief on female students' dropout from students' perspective in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. Is there any significant difference between parent's socio-economic supports on female students' dropout from students' perspective, in Nigeria?
2. Is there any significant difference between parent's cultural traditions and practice on female students' dropout from students' perspective, in Nigeria?
3. Is there any significant difference of parent's religious belief on female students' dropout from students' perspective, in Nigeria?

FINDINGS

Causes of drop out as perceived by female students

The female students are the recipients of education and therefore the focal point for any study on these issues. They are the ones who are directly and indirectly impacted. Their views are therefore pivotal for the purposes of this study or any study on this topic. The explanation in Table 2 below shows the responses of

female students' dropout.

According to the female students the most compelling reason for not completing schooling was poor economic conditions of their families. This was mentioned by 52.1% of the respondents. There were numerous other reasons given which were held responsible for drop outs in female students. Prominent among these were lack of school facilities as and involvement in household chores as agreed by 46.1% and 47.8% of the respondents respectively. 38.6% of female students also wanted to stop education because they wanted to engage in street hawking. Parents' illness and death also contributed towards female students' dropping out of school as manifested in the table with 39.1%. Interestingly, nearly 4 percent of female students admitted that their parents wanted them to become Hafiz-e-Quran. According to some female students, majority of the parents also wanted to involve them in household chores. Others mentioned lack of school facilities and early marriage as other important factors hindering female educational participation with 46.1% and 44.5% of the respondents agreed respectively. Absence of proper security 41.1%, Lack of child Interest 39.9%, and female students' disrespect and stubbornness 10.5% are some of the other reasons agreed by the respondents at the said percentage. 10.0% of the respondents also were of the opinion that Western education is against Islamic

Religion.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study revealed that poverty is indeed a barrier to female children's, particularly female students' educational participation. In Nigeria the situation is worsened by the societal norms, values, beliefs, practices and patterns which maintain a gendered household division of labour, decision-making and resource allocation. For instance children from poor households have to increasingly help their families with tasks such as working on the family farm or business and domestic chores. Some female students said that girls in particular have to work every day before going to school by taking part in various household chores like fetching water and cleaning the homestead. This explains why girls usually arrive at school later than boys and/or participate less in classroom activities because they are extremely tired and later result to withdrawal and dropping out. The study further revealed that, Most of the female students when asked about the reason of dropping out used to mention that poverty and lack of socio-economic support prevent parents from sending their female children to school. Some of the female students also mentioned that their parents are interested in sending their female children to school, but they were discouraged by economic problems. In fact, the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is very high, which affects children's education in general, and in particular that of female children.

The findings of this study is like that of Atayi (2008), where he mentioned in his work titled "Disabling Barriers to Girls' Primary Education in Arua District" that "Poverty lessens the possibility and opportunities of children from affected house-holds to acquire/progress in education....." His research, however, revealed that girls' school attendance and their access to learning materials were greatly influenced by their socio-economic status. Many female students complain about the high demands of education (text books, school uniform, pocket money, transportation, financial contributions for schools etc.) especially when it concern female children. Consequently, this trend leads to female students' dropout more especially those from low income families. And this sometimes resulted to discrimination on the part of female children by parents in when a choice has to be made as to who would go to school. Most of female students agreed with the fact that lack of socio economic support of the parents hinders their full participation in education. The findings agree with the World Bank Review Report (2000) which indicates that developing nations have the largest number of children who don't have access to primary education. This report reviews that 72 million out of the 113 million primary schools age children are estimated to be out of school by 2015.

Some female students mentioned the negative social attitudes and cultural practices like the belief of some parents that it is of no use sending their female-child to school because another person will marry her and she becomes that person's family member; that sending a female-child to school makes her more exposed and civilized and can't be under 2a man any longer; and that a woman's job is in the home and she doesn't need to go to school to learn it. These beliefs are more common in rural areas where most parents are less or not educated. Consequently, female children typically have to assume a multitude of household chores including cooking, cleaning and even serving as a principal caregiver for younger siblings—responsibilities that boys are virtually never expected to assume. This study found that these competing demands on female students' time had translated into relatively poorer academic performance than their male counterparts, often leading to high repetition and, ultimately, higher dropout rates.

The above mentioned findings is similar to that of Abena (1991), cited by Atayi (2008) where he writes: in African traditional societies, cultural norms and values dictate that the major role of the woman is centered on maintaining the home-front, whereby she was expected to marry soon after puberty. In this role, she does not need formal education to fit in. Traditionally, patriarchal attitudes lead to preference by parents for boy's education. In Nigeria, many girls are married off at young ages to husbands who are often much older than themselves. It is also a very common practice that earlier daughters are often kept at home to care for younger siblings.

The finding of this study has revealed a very slow progress in female children participation over the years. The enrollment, retention and completion have been in favor of the boys, which is a clear expression of male dominance in academic activities and a rift in the gender issue. UNESCO study (1980) aligns with this study proving that 64% of women in Africa are illiterate and can neither read nor write. UNESCO also noted that in the mid 1980s, fewer than half of school-age girls were enrolled into primary schools. Ejembi (1994) also discovered that 77.8% of women in Africa got married before 15years of age. This trend should be checked, particularly, Nigeria in order not to keep reducing the productive base of the society at large and Nigeria in particular.

In fact, many studies have shown that religious factors largely determine female children participation to education. The study also revealed that many female students like their parents, prefer to attend Quranic schools. Some female students believed that western education breeds immoralities through the inculcation of western culture to children in Nigeria. According to Odaga and Henveld (1995), Religion is frequently associated with low female participation in schools and the reasons have to do with

the fear of parents based on the assumption that western education promotes values and Behavior for girls that is contrary to cultural norms. Brock and Cammsih (1991), imply that religion is a proxy for cultural views about appropriate female roles as there are examples among entrepreneurial Muslim communities which invest their wealth in the education of their daughters. Christian communities also withdraw their daughters because they fear that formal schooling brings about non-traditional customs to female children. The possibility of pregnancy in particular, among teenage girls and the economic responsibility for their adult daughters and grandchildren induces Christian parents to marry off girls rather than keep them in schools.

The research result further indicated that one of the impediments to the female students' full participation in formal schools is the rigid formal school calendar and time schedules. This according to some female students is conflicting with Islamiyyah schools time. This calendar is established to suit to the modern western schools in the country, but not consider the Islamic education lessons conducted by other segment of the society at those hours, which could not enable them to attend schooling.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the previous studies which either took the prevalence of female dropouts for granted or generalized evidences from enrolment data on the basis of questionable assumptions, this study confirms that there is a problem of female dropouts in Nigeria. There is no doubt that the existence of this problem significantly reflects not only the wastage in the educational systems but also the benefits missed from educating females. When compared to the international statistics, this wastage seems more significant in Nigeria than in other parts of the world. In the latter, experiences indicate that stronger mechanisms of controlling the problem of dropouts have been employed at the community level than in the former.

One of the personal characteristics of female dropouts is that they enter school late in life, above the official starting age defined in the National Policy of Education. The problem of over age enrolment is that female children reach puberty while still at school. This in turn increases the risk of sexual abuse that may influence female children to drop out of schooling. The marital status of dropouts may provide an important explanation for drop outs in Nigeria, but appears to be much less relevant in other countries. The fact that the absolute majority of female dropouts come from Muslim families shows that religion in general, and Islam in this particular case, could play a role in influencing female

education.

The majority of female dropouts come from households headed by females, uneducated and low income families. Findings about parental occupation and income also ascertain the above truth since most parents of female dropouts are engaged in low income generating occupations in the informal sector and earn or possess an insignificant amount of property. In other words, the school in Nigeria is for those who can afford it, in contrast to the aims of the national education policy, which envisages serving the underprivileged parts of society by introducing Universal Free Basic Education (UBE). The dropping out of female students in this study has generally been related to the low education of parents. This is particularly true for villages and less so in towns. Although direct school costs are highly related to female dropouts, the single most influential factor for female dropouts in Nigeria are the costs of instructional materials. The reasons why other factors were less influential may partially be explained in terms of the reforms already instituted by UBE.

Overall, domestic work represents the single most important area for which parents need the labor of their daughters. Dropout from school is particularly high during harvest time and on market days. In Nigeria the contribution of domestic work to female dropouts has been rated as low. This seems so only because there is an abundance of labor on the labor market. Otherwise, this demand affects female education. Cultural practices and institutions including early marriage, , home parental services, pregnancy, harassment, religious beliefs and employment in domestic market, significantly contribute to female dropouts in both Nigeria and some other countries in the world. Immediate action is needed on many of these issues. Schools also play their own part in the drop out of female students. In Nigeria, the shortage of instructional materials and textbooks were found to be the crucial ones. This implies that any innovation, which promotes female children education, require meeting these needs for success.

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