

Relationship between Parental Cultural and Religious Beliefs and Students' Dropout from Government Secondary Schools of Zamfara, Nigeria

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Abstract: This conceptual paper studies the relationship between parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropout from government secondary schools of Zamfara, Nigeria. The paper reviews the studies on relationship between parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropouts. In addition, the paper also examines literature related to parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropout from government secondary schools in both Nigeria and other countries. The discussion in the paper is based on the theoretical framework of ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979). This theory is appropriate for the study because it allows the reader to understand how children's education is significantly affected by the parental cultural and religious beliefs. Finally, the paper provides and presents some suggestions and recommendations on how to improve student's retention and minimize the problem of dropout. Conclusions from the literature were drawn, and the paper concludes that parental cultural and religious beliefs are related to students' dropout.

Keywords: Relationship, Parental Cultural and Religious Beliefs, Students' Dropouts, Zamfara, Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

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. This means for example, that while the education of female children and women is characterized by lower enrolment than that of boys, females enroll in larger numbers at the lower primary levels than males, which numbers begin reducing midway in the cycle and drop drastically by the end of the cycle. In Nigeria, variations in educational participation between genders are quite significant and the similarity of problems in most parts of the country nevertheless, makes concern over secondary education pertinent and deserving of special attention Atayi (2008). Cultural and religious beliefs of the parents such as early marriage, parental services, employment in domestic markets expectation of immorality of female children, expectation of harassment and abduction of female children at school by the parents, female students' abduction, parent's fear of mixing of female children with boys at school and the highest status accorded to marriage and motherhood in many communities impact negatively on female participation in secondary education (Commish and Brak as cited in Chege and Sifuna, (2006). Save the children (2005) indicates that cultural norms also inhibit girls access to education in many parts of developing world. Social traditions and deep rooted religions and cultural beliefs may make it unacceptable for a girl to express her opinions, make decisions for herself or participating in activities with boys of her age.

Background to The Study

Despite international and national efforts to ensure a successful migration from gender disparity to gender parity of secondary school students, huge success has not been recorded. Evidence has noted that in Nigeria, governmental, non-governmental and private initiatives within and outside the frontiers of the nation for the northern states to embrace education has proved abortive (Mohammed, 2004). The number of secondary school students more especially girls attending schools in some northern states of Nigeria such as Niger, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi and Sokoto is still abysmally low while the male child has a choice to attend; his female counterpart is strictly discouraged from obtaining the basic western education (UNGEI-Nigeria, 2012, www.ungei.org). UNGEI-Nigeria (2012) further stated that there are still millions of boys and girls without access to primary needless secondary education across the continent and many millions that have started dropout. According to United Nation (2013), progression to the next education level is also a challenge. In fact,

among class 6 students who are between 13 to 14 years, only 53 percent transitioned to secondary school. The secondary completion rate is even lower. A high percentage of students never finish secondary school and only 29 percent of those who started school graduated secondary school at the official graduating age of 17 years old. Even if there is a delay up to age 24, only 75 percent finish secondary school and the remaining 25 percent never finish secondary school (UN, 2013). The variables or indicators linked to secondary school dropout that were used for this study include parental cultural and religious beliefs (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 2001). Parental cultural and religious beliefs include encouraging children to attend school, early marriage female-child immorality, premarital pregnancy, avoidance of sexual harassment, female students' abduction, mixing of female children with boys at school and so on and so forth.

II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The study is based on ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979). Unlike various development theories that place emphasis on the nature and nurture interaction in the development of children, Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory looks at the child's environment in terms of its quality and context. According to Bronfenbrenner, the interaction within these environments becomes more complex for a child when he develops. The arising of this complexity depends on the growing and maturation of child's physical and cognitive structures. So, given that nature continues on a given path, how does the world that surrounds the child help or hinder continued development?" The ecological model of Bronfenbrenner's theory attempts to explain the differences in individual's knowledge, development and competencies through the support, guidance and structure of the society in which they live. In this regard therefore, children's education depends largely on the support, guidance and structure of the society which has to do with cultural Traditions and practice of their parents. In many cases the education of children is linked with the cultural Tradition and practice of their parents who are said to be the microsystem according to ecological theory. Many a times cultural traditions and practice of the parents used to contradict the Western system of education as a result they may serve as barriers to its effectiveness.

III. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is:

1. To review literature on relationship between parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropout
2. To review literature on dropout related to parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropout from government secondary schools in other countries
3. To review literature on dropout related to parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropout from government secondary schools in Nigeria
4. To provide and present some suggestions and recommendations on how to improve student's retention and minimize the problem of dropout.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section comprises of explanations on literature on relationship between parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropouts, literature on dropout related to parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropout from government secondary schools in both Nigeria and other countries, provide and present some suggestions and recommendations on how to improve student's retention and minimize the problem of dropout.

Relationship between Parental Cultural and Religious Beliefs and Students' Dropout

Withdrawal and dropping out of secondary school students from school is attributed to many parental factors towards the education of their children, prominent among these factors are: parental cultural and religious beliefs which include socio-cultural beliefs, customs, early marriage, pregnancy, insecurity, harassment, employment in domestic markets, personal engagement, parental services and other traditions practiced by the parents; and also the students' own decisions to drop-out of schools (UNESCO, 2002). Early Marriage happens to be another reason for student's dropout more especially for female students (Field & Ambrus, 2008; Constable, 2011). Studies have found that in many developing countries, girls are likely to drop out from school due to various reasons such as "early marriage, pregnancy, religious factors, socio-economic factors, school related factors and ill health" (Alika & Egbochuku, 2009). School dropout among young children and adolescent is an international phenomenon. Aggarwal and Chugh (2003) in their article titled Learning Achievement of Slum Children in Delhi observed that marriage at an early age is alarming, especially among the girls. Even though statistics are elusive, estimates show that 40 to 50 percent of marriages in India involve a girl under 18 or a boy under 21, the legal ages for marriage. In fact, as per National Family Health Survey (NFHS) Survey-3 (2005-06), 45 percent of women of 20-24 years were married before the legal age of marriage of 18 years, compared with 50 percent, as reported in NFHS-2 (1998-99). Further, in

urban slums 40.5 percent of males get married before the age of 21 and 55.5 percent of girls before the age of 18 years (Chugh, 2011, Aggarwal & ChughSunita, 2003). Thus, early marriage is one of the important reasons for children dropping out from the school, especially in the states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, etc. Slums represent the culture and customs of different states as the residents are migrants from different parts of India. These migrants follow their state specific rituals in marrying off girls at an early age. After marriage these students do not return to school and school policy also does not encourage their return to school either. Most of the time, these students also do not possess any information regarding future educational possibilities due to which most of the girls do not attend school or any other course or training after marriage. It was found that 17 children had got married and dropped out, of which 15 were girls of less than 17 years of age. Around 20 percent of girls reported that they would get married in the next year. Sichinga (2005) as in Anastasia & Teklemariam (2011) conducted a research on Yao girls' schools in Malawi and came up with his findings indicating early marriages, domestic chores, poverty, negative parental attitude towards girl education and lack of educated women serving as role models in society as the major causes of low enrolment and school dropout. Female children were thus seen as nurturers and mainly as providing support for men who worked to provide for the family. Schoolgirl pregnancy and the incidence of female dropout are closely related throughout Africa (Grant, & Hallman, 2008). Usually unwanted, these pregnancies end the schooling of girls both through self-withdrawal and national pregnancy policies that ensures the expulsion of girls from the education system with little or no chance of re-entry. Grant and Hallman (2008) argue that it is the societal responses to pregnancy rather than pregnancy per se that push girls out of school and hamper their opportunities for educational and career development. They note that in most African countries, school policies and practices are based on the mistaken assumption that the problem of premarital schoolgirl pregnancy is caused by the pregnant schoolgirls themselves, and to a lesser extent, by their parents. The tendency has been to portray the pregnant girls as easily susceptible to becoming pregnant while still in school and eventually dropping out.

Culturally, western education for girls is an abuse in some families and some parents hold many assumptions about western education, such assumptions include Western education teaches Christian ethics, female enrolment to western education is against Islamic religion, Western education time is conflicting with religious education time and female children should be at home (Kainuwa, 2014). Other assumptions hold by this category of parents are female children should not mix with boys at school because it is against the religion, teaching of female students by the male teachers is against religion, mix education is against the teaching of Islam, some western education theories contradict the teaching of Islam and female children lose the interest of their roles as mothers and house-wives in western schools. Chugh (2011) conducted a study on dropout in secondary Education in India and found the dropout problem to be pervasive in the Indian education system. Many children, who enter school, are unable to complete secondary education and multiple factors are responsible for children dropping out of school. According to Chugh (2011), socio-economic and cultural background of the families was found to be the most significant contributors to the continuation or discontinuation of the child in school. According to Chugh (2011), about seven percent of girls reported that they discontinued studies for fear of sexual assault as the school was far away from their residence and about 40 percent of girls did mention that they were scared of going alone though it was not cited as the main reason. Some parents were of the habit of being reluctant to send their female children to school because of the belief that education and school could be a corrupting influence (Hari 2010). To some parents there was the view that in co-educational schools, as most junior secondary schools are, female children morals would be corrupted because of the amount of time they would spend with boys in the school (Atayi, 2008). Due to the problem of physical and sexual harassment and abuse from peers and teachers, there was also fear for the physical and sexual safety of female children in school Hari (2010). There seem to be, however, other more important explanations peculiar to northern Nigeria Zamfara inclusive (Rufa'i, 2006), one of which may be religion. 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" (Yusuf, 2008). Chege and Sifuna (2006) observe that parents tend to discourage their daughters to acquire too much education for fear that they would have difficulties in finding educated husbands or being good wives. In such cases, the cultural beliefs of the households influence their attitudes and practices in relation to girl child education. The parental attitudes determine the child's chance of education as the parents control initial decision of a child to attend school often influence the nature of a child participation in education. Chege and Sifuna have shown that culture favors education for the boys as opposed to that of the girls; therefore boys received more parental support than girls did.

According to Appleton and others, (1990) 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. Cammsih and Brock (1994), 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. Regarding the influence of religion, Robertson's study (1986) which mainly focuses on African countries found similarities in the female enrollment growth in primary education after national independence, irrespective of whether the countries were predominantly Muslim, Christian, or animist. But when a more refined measurement was taken, namely the correlation between the percentages of the population that is Muslim, and the 1980 percentage of girls in school, a coefficient of -0.41 was found, which suggests that some religions constrain the education of girls more than others (Stromquist, 1989).

Studies on Dropout Related to Parental Cultural and Religious Beliefs and Students' Dropout from Government Secondary Schools in other Countries

In the united state of America, Tyler and Lustrum (2009) conducted a study titled *Finishing secondary school: Alternative pathways and dropout recovery, the future of children*. The researchers mentioned that overall national dropout rate appears to be between 22 and 25 percent, a student's decision to drop out of school, say the authors, is affected by a number of complex factors and is often the culmination of a long process of disengagement from school. That decision, not surprisingly, carries great cost to both the student and society. Individual costs include lower earnings. 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; Filmer, 2005; Akyeampong 2009; Rolleston 2009). A study conducted by Chugh, (2011) found that India's patriarchal society gives less importance to girls' education due to the socio-cultural and economic barriers prevailing in the society. If poor households cannot send all the children to school, then they will most likely give boys precedence over girls. Girls are especially discouraged to attend schools from the onset of puberty and early marriage. Added to this are factors like the presence of exclusively male teachers, distance and not-so-safe road to school, and separate toilet for girls, etc. These are considered as potential factors for high dropout rate for girls. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have succeeded in universalizing primary education, a number still find it a challenge to provide meaningful access to education for their population (UNESCO, EFA Report, 2010; Oladele M & Ayinde; 2010; Lewin, 2007). According to Lewin and Akyeampong (2009) sub-Saharan Africa is still below par in terms of achieving access to education compared to other regions in the world. A large proportion (53.5%) of out of school children are found in this region. Of these, 32.2 million are at the primary and 21.3 million at the secondary levels of schooling respectively (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2009). Not only is access to education a challenge in Africa at large and sub-Saharan Africa in particular, but also retention once children are in school. The EFA Global Monitoring Summary Report (2010) indicates that 38 million children dropped out from both primary and secondary school in sub-Saharan Africa; an issue that goes beyond access to that of retention. Though getting children into school is a vital first step, the larger challenge in many countries in Africa centers on keeping them in school. To receive the full benefits of access to education, questions have been raised about the more serious problems of retention and the experiences of children in school that contribute to them either dropping out or staying in school (Oladele M & Ayinde; 2010). A survey of parents of dropouts in India indicates that they withdraw daughters from school when they see education as conflicting with marriage, their dropout rates ranged widely among 26 states by as much as 40.6% in 2008/2009 (USAID, 2009). Similar practices have been reported in Papua New Guinea: In the province of West Sepik, some girls as young as 9 or 10 are promised in marriage and then taken out of school to "ensure their protection and to prepare for the event; others leave their families to live with the family of their betrothed, until they are of marriageable age" (International Labour Organization' 2011) Mookodi, Ntshebe, and Taylor (2004) found that out-of-wedlock pregnancy is a major reason for the high dropout rate among female students in Botswana, and is exacerbated by Botswana laws that are not sufficiently gender-sensitive (Mookodi, Ntshebe, and Taylor 2004). In another research, all of the respondents agreed that most students dropped out of school due to pregnancy (Dunne & Leach 2005). They explained that social pressure encourages girls to become sexually active at a young age, some as early as twelve. A study in Kenya showed that many cases of pre-marital pregnancy were mentioned as reasons of female dropouts by teachers and school administrators during interviews with the researcher (Sichinga, 2005). Due to the problem of physical and sexual harassment and abuse from peers and teachers, there was also fear for the physical and sexual safety of female children in school (Hari (2010).

Makwinja-Morara (2009) found that a serious problem in Botswana is the large number of girls and young women who drop out of school. Just over half of the female population attends secondary schools, and the percentage of school-enrolled females has fallen in recent years. Female children in Botswana, as in other African nations, face challenges that militate against their education more especially in secondary school.

Despite attempts by African governments to change the laws on gender equity, women still make very few contributions to political and economic decision making. Makwinja-Morara (2009) also said throughout Botswana and all of Africa, female children have a lower status than male children; most are expected to gather wood, care for their siblings, cook, fetch water, and mind the house in general. These chores burden them so much that many do not find adequate time to do their schoolwork which usually leads to their dropping out of school. Other constraints on the education of children, especially girls, are a shortage of schools, poor facilities, lack of appropriate programs, and the poor quality of teachers, particularly in rural areas. The religious and value differences also have a bearing on the attitudes of various groups towards female children's education. In this regard, the World Bank (2006) suggests that some tenets of the Islamic religion could easily be misinterpreted and used to prevent female participation in education such as the restriction of girls from appearing in public places or to mix up with the opposite sex for religious reasons which make sending girls to school a problem. Consequently, rural girls drop out at a much higher rate, which drop out is more for social and family than for education-related reasons (World Bank 2006). A number of researchers have attempted to investigate the factors which lead to low educational attendance and attainment in developing countries (Palmer 2005; Verspoor 2005). Some of the factors which have been identified relate to household income and parental education and others reflect school conditions (Hunt 2008). A research has been conducted on Yao girls' schools in Malawi; this findings indicated that early marriages, domestic chores, poverty, negative parental attitude towards girls education and lack of educated women serving as role models in society are the major causes of low enrolment and school dropout (Anastasia & Teklemariam 2011, Sichinga, 2005). Some parents were of the habit of being reluctant to send their female children to school because of the belief that education and school could be a corrupting influence (Hari 2010). To some parents there was the view that in co-educational schools, as most junior secondary schools are, female children morals would be corrupted because of the amount of time they would spend with boys in the school (Atayi, 2008).

Studies on Dropout Related to Parental Cultural and Religious Beliefs and Students' Dropout from Government Secondary Schools in Nigeria

Educating the population is perceived as crucial to a nation's future prospects and formal education has throughout the last decades become accessible to, and close to necessary for, the broader part of society (Borgen & Borgen, 2014 Bailey, 2007). Unfortunately, the share of birth cohorts completing secondary school remains undesirably low in Nigeria, many Western countries and the world at large (Borgen & Borgen, 2014). Pupils who drop out of upper secondary school create a low-skilled labor force. A low-skilled labor force is related to negative economic consequences like limited economic growth (Bailey, 2007), limited tax income (Rouse, 2007), increased welfare expenditure (Waldfoegel, Garfinkel, & Brendan, 2007), and even increased crime rates and drug abuse (Moretti, 2007). Hence, the society will benefit from enhancing the completion rate of upper secondary education. In the case of Nigeria poverty also seems to be one of the strongest contributing factors of student's dropout. This had been confirmed by the research conducted by Ahmad Sanda and Tukur Garba (2007) based on data collected from 600 rural households of Sokoto State, Nigeria which provided empirical evidence on the extent to which parental financial support, poverty and household demographic characteristics may affect educational attainment, school attendance, dropout and non-dropout of children.

Onyeike and Angela (2011) analyzed the challenges of the girl-child in Ebonyi State of Nigeria in terms of school enrolment and dropping out of school. Descriptive survey involving secondary data was used for analysis covered the period 2001-2007. The study has discovered that the school enrolment rate of girls is still very low and still remains worrisome due economic, cultural and social capital of parents. 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. The researchers suggested that, there is an immediate need for government attention in rural development, motivation of female interest in education, policy reform in content, and pedagogy with a singular target of making UNESCO Educational objectives achievable by 2015 in the State and Nigeria, as a whole David Oladejia (2010) examined the influence of socio-cultural factors on girl-child education in the context of marriage. Two hundred female adolescents from Queen School in Ilorin environs constituted the sample for the study. Their ages ranged from 13 years to 17 years with a mean age of 14.2 years and standard deviation of 2.0. The data obtained were analyzed using chi-square statistics. The results revealed that the social and cultural factors contributed significantly to influence girl-child education in the context of marriage. Based on the results of the findings, it was recommended that those in the helping professions should recognize those variables that have been found to influence girl-child education in the context of marriage. The study found that investigation of parental factors such as economic, cultural and social factors of parents is lacking in Nigeria. Nathaniel (2011) conducted a study titled: School dropout among Nigerian children: some proactive strategies and solutions in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The study suggests that Nigeria should adopt 'proactive' rather than 'damage control' strategies (increased capacity building, recruitment and appropriate deployment of teachers, provision of necessary infrastructures including library and laboratory facilities, as well

as increased financial) in systematically dealing with this rising out-of-school syndrome. Based on what have been discussed in the previous literature, with regard to the problem of dropout more especially secondary school student's dropout and the possible causes and factors that led to dropping out of students from school both within and outside Nigeria one can say with a degree of certainty that there is strong relationship between parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropouts. The current study is therefore very important and useful to the study area.

Suggestions And Recommendations On How To Improve Student's Retention And Minimize The Problem Of Dropout

Taking into account the extent to which parental cultural and religious beliefs are affecting secondary school student's education, the following recommendations might be helpful to authorities and the whole community to tackle adequately the issue of secondary school student's education. Education is the weapon that breaks the bond of ignorance and poverty, if this is understood by the parents and guardian, and then it will encourage them to do all within their powers to send their children to school despite all odds. Providing suggestions to lessen the problem of students' dropout, the paper suggested that parents should be educated. Community development programs like adult education programs need to be encouraged in order to systematically reduce the prevalence of female dropouts. There should be public awareness campaign to parents so that they can give their children the best they can in terms of education including the promotion of other co-curricular activities. Community based childcare services may help children to get time to continue attending schools. labor saving technologies and water close to homes may free children from spending long hours in domestic work. More female teachers and administrators should be employed in government junior secondary schools. This brings successful role models very close to female students particularly in rural areas. The paper also suggested that parents' should be introduced to certain occupations to improve their standard of living in order to lessen the problem of dropout. The paper also add that the institutional and administrative actions are required to minimize the prevalence of female dropouts: The existence of this problem on a considerable scale implies that more has to be done to minimize the situation in Zamfara state. Experience from Zamfara state tells that institutional and legal actions are required to reduce the incidence of dropouts both in Shinkafi and elsewhere. It is also needed to strictly follow the policy of automatic promotion so that those who come to school are encouraged. Considering education in any country is a matter of national interest and sovereignty, the cost and the financing of the school as written in National policy on Education (2004) is to be shared between the government and the community. A compulsory education tax fund must be instituted for all national and foreign private companies operating in Nigeria. Also, wealthy Nigerian people should be sensitized to contribute in the educating their children for the benefit of the nation as whole. Community development programs like adult education programs need to be encouraged in order to systematically reduce the prevalence of female dropouts. Community based childcare services may help female children to get time to continue attending schools. Labor saving technologies and water close to homes may free female children from spending long hours in domestic work. More female teachers and administrators should be employed in government junior secondary schools. This brings successful role models very close to female students particularly in rural areas. As suggested by the paper, there is need to form a joint consultative committee as for the development of female education programme and engage all stakeholders and providers of universal basic education at all levels through advocacy meetings and dialogue for the smooth implementation of the best and appropriate practices identified and replicate them to various states in the Northern part of Nigeria. This can be achieved through parent teachers association (PTA) meeting and school base management committee (SBMC) currently taking place in most Nigeria school. This will increase the possibility of effective implementation of the adopted national policy on female education where sensitization of communities on pertinent issues in female education should be considered as an important component of the policy implementation.

V. CONCLUSION

The dropping out of secondary school students in this study has generally been related to the parental cultural and religious beliefs. This is particularly true for rural areas such as villages and less so in urban areas such as towns and cities. Overall, domestic work represents the single most important area for which parents need the labor of their children. Dropout from school is particularly high during harvest time and on market days. In Zamfara State the contribution of domestic work to secondary school student's 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 secondary education. Cultural practices and institutions including early marriage, home parental services, pregnancy, harassment, religious beliefs and employment in domestic market, significantly contribute to dropouts in both Zamfara State and Northern Nigeria in general. The paper attempted to examine the issues surrounding secondary school education in Zamfara state Nigeria, more

especially parental cultural and religious beliefs in the area, reviews the studies on relationship between parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropouts. The paper also went on to examine literature related to parental cultural and religious beliefs and students' dropout from government secondary schools in both Nigeria and other countries. The paper provided and presented some suggestions and recommendations on how to improve student's retention and minimize the problem of dropout. Finally, the paper concludes that parental cultural and religious beliefs are related to students' dropout.

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