

Original Article

Causes and Effects of Girl Child Dropouts in Zimbabwean Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Chadzamira Secondary School, Gutu District

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ABSTRACT

While the subject of child dropout has been heavily contested in education studies in the last few decades in developing countries like Zimbabwe, the monumental studies on the concept have emphasised child's (both boy and girl child) right to education. Insignificant attention has been devoted to examining the causes and effects of girl child dropouts in secondary schools especially in the countryside where the problem is widespread. Yet, girl child dropout is a serious problem that dramatically impact on national development of Zimbabwe, and Africa in general. In this paper, I therefore attempt to examine the causes and effects of rural girl child dropouts in Zimbabwean secondary schools, and I adopt Chadzamira secondary school of Gutu rural district as a case study. The choice of Zimbabwe and, in particular Chadzamira secondary school as a case study is not accidental. It is based on the fact that while Zimbabwe is one of the developing countries with high literacy rate in Africa, girl child dropout rate, especially in rural secondary schools remains high. To establish the causes and effects of girl child dropouts, eight classes of forms one to four were studied. Ad questionnaire comprising closed and open items was also used as a data collection tool. Data was summarised by means of frequency tables and analyzed qualitatively using evaluative descriptions. The study revealed that most of the girl child dropout cases were a result of early marriages, abject poverty, economic hardships as well as religious and traditional beliefs that work against educating girl child. From the foregoing, the paper recommends that civil education and conscientisation of rural parents, teachers and the girl child on the importance of girl child education be made as a matter of urgency if the current situation is to be amicably dealt with. This could be done by both non-governmental organisations and the national government.

Key words: Girl child, dropout, causes, consequences, Chadzamira, Zimbabwe, Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In Africa in general, the causes and effects of girl child dropouts on development is not well researched. Yet, most if not all developing countries in Africa are dramatically affected, economically or otherwise, by the ever increasing girl child dropouts. Zimbabwe, with a population of 14.5 million, has an estimated literacy rate of 80%, one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa (ipsnewsnet). However, in Zimbabwe like in other African countries, while there are some strides towards mainstreaming gender issues in development, the causes and effects of girl child dropout especially in the countryside have remained understudied and therefore under appreciated. Little strides obtained seem to be concentrated more in urban areas thereby continuing to marginalise the rural women and undercutting their effectiveness in scheme of things.

Lack of research on such an important subject has negative impact to society's socio-economic and political development that cannot be underestimated or ignored. In Zimbabwe, the education system and the society at large has over the years been affected in various ways by girl child dropout. Girl child dropouts in many schools, for example, have resulted in some teachers losing their jobs or overstaffing causing some teachers to transfer forcibly to other schools. Such situations create socio-economic and unemployment problems as those teachers who lose jobs are negatively affected. Besides, school dropouts in any society become a liability of the larger society as they are unable to contribute meaningfully and maximally to nation building. In fact, most of the dropouts engage in anti-social and criminal activities that causes disharmony and socio-economic instability. Thus the consequence of neglecting an important topic such as this to developing countries post-colonisation is that the problem remains a stumbling block towards the uplifting of women and elimination of poverty in societies concerned.

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In Africa in general and in Zimbabwe in particular, the real causes of girl child dropout has been a contested subject. The problem has been generally attributed to various factors ranging from abject poverty, economic hardships, early marriages and the mistaken religious and traditional belief that educating a girl child is a waste of resources. While these causes can be true of Africa in general, it is important to examine whether they are the same problems affecting the Zimbabwean rural secondary school girl child. This is important so as to inform educational policies and determine how the problem could be addressed.

That said, this paper examines the causes and effects of girl child dropouts in Zimbabwe's rural secondary schools. The paper adopts Chadzamira secondary school of Gutu rural district as a case study. Chadzamira secondary being a rural school dramatically affected by girl child dropouts, it represents other Zimbabwean rural schools with the same problem. As such, the causes and impacts experienced as a result of girl child dropout at Chadzamira secondary school may be more or less the same as of other rural secondary schools with the same problem.

Eight classes of forms one to four were studied in order to determine the causes and impacts of girl child dropouts at Chadzamira secondary school. Data collected were tabulated to show frequencies before subjected to critical analysis and determining the causes and impacts of girl child dropout.

Against the increasing girl child dropouts in Zimbabwean rural secondary schools, the researcher strongly argue that contemporary Zimbabweans, and by extension Africans, must strive to rescue and advance positive intellectual thinking, or to positively challenge the internally and externally manipulated forces of mental and cultural values that are potentially dangerous for our collective intellectual and socio-economic life.

In buttressing arguments against girl child dropouts, the researcher suggests some recommendations to the problem. In particular, the researcher recommends that civil education and awareness of parents, teachers and the girl child on the importance of girl child education be made as a matter of urgency if the current situation is to be amicably dealt with. This could be done by both non-governmental organizations and the national government.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF DROPOUT

Dropout is an issue in education system that has aroused interest of many professional academicians and the public in general. Though oftenly used in public schools to refer to those students that leave school without the school's consent either to another school or to 'sit' at home, a number of interpretations to the term have been conjured. Loxley in Hussien & Postlewhite (1985: 12), for instance, defines dropouts as "those pupils who leave school before the final year of the educational cycle in which they are enrolled, which could be primary, ordinary or advanced level, or even college or university levels". In more or less the same way, Chivore (1986:11) defines dropout as "a pupil who ceases to attend school either temporarily or permanently, before completing the given educational cycle". As can be seen, the definitions given by Loxley and Chivore are more or less the same in so far as both stress the fact that a pupil leaves school before completing a given educational cycle, for example, ordinary level or advanced level. What needs to be emphasized in both definitions, perhaps, is the fact that the pupils do not only leave school before completing a given educational cycle, but leave without the school's consent. This latter point is important since it is the consent element which makes it difficult for schools to account for the dropout or to help the pupil intending to dropout be s/he does so. In this light, I shall use the term dropout to refer to a pupil who leaves school before completing a given educational cycle and without the school's consent.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

According to Chivore (1986: 11) "dropouts has a negative impact on the schools, communities and the country at large". The negative impact may take different forms, for example, a wastage in education resources. Following this observation, it is imperative to carry out research on this subject in order to establish the main causes and effects of dropouts in rural secondary schools.

The present study seeks to address the question: Could results from a critical examination of girl child dropouts be used to impact a positive change of behavior on rural populations and improve the future of Zimbabwe's educational policies and socio-economic situation? As a researcher on educational issues on Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, I have come to the realization

that most researchers on Zimbabwean education (Chivore 1986, Chanakira 1986, Manyuchi 1990) are guilty of trying to tackle educational problems that generally affect all students of both the rural and urban schools, without tackling some specific important issues that affect the rural pupil, particularly the girl child. The history of education in Zimbabwe thus makes a sorry reading with its failure to document, by default or otherwise, the causes and consequences of girl child dropouts in Zimbabwe's rural secondary schools. The consequence is that the rural dwellers remain at the tail-end on issues to do with education policy making and development as the problems that directly affect them are undocumented. Such a mistake if uncorrected would tantamount to perpetuating the suffering of the rural girl child and would therefore impact negatively on socio-economic development of the country.

As part of my research design, I relied on archival studies (school registers), questionnaires and in-depth interviews. I carried out my study at Chadzamira secondary school in Gutu district, Masvingo province in Zimbabwe between January and July 2011, and I sampled students, parents and teachers in the study area. Besides school registers for forms one to four, the study involved a selected sample of 30 people (12 students, 9 teachers and 9 parents/guardians). I locate my study within Gutu communal area, in particular Chadzamira secondary school as representative of other rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe with similar educational problems.

As highlighted above, unstructured interviews were also used in this study. Interviews entail presenting questions to the informant orally and recording the responses either in written notes in pocket books or on an audio-recording for later transcription and analysis. According to Wray and Bloomer (2006), any subjects can be used provided they are able to understand the questions and provide responses. In framing questions for the in-depth interviews, I was guided by the works of Erik Hofstee. According to Hofstee (2006: 135), "background type questions are important when carrying out in-depth interviews and it is also important to keep the interviewee to the topic being discussed, but it can also pay not to be too rigid". One of the advantages of in-depth interviews is that the interviewee may even give you more than what you will have bargained for. But "if not carefully administered, interviews can produce misleading responses, thereby affecting results" (Ibid: 136). Interviews where the researcher asked the participants simple questions which required one word answers were used. The aim of interviews was to complement and substantiate data collected from school records. It must be noted that an elaborate explanation of respondents' views and opinions on educational problems affecting girl child can best be acquired through interviews.

There was one format adopted in interviewing the voluntary participants: individual interviews. The use of both archival studies and interview process was suitable for the gathering of comprehensible information on causes and effects girl child dropouts in rural secondary schools. An archival study was used to ascertain the project location and what is really happening at Chadzamira secondary school. To supplement the archival study, interviews were conducted to get more information on the possible causes and effects of girl child dropouts, and on how the problem could be addressed.

The people participated in the study were from different societal classes, ranging from students, educators and parents. The participants were drawn from different societal classes with the hope for obtaining a balanced research result that could be representative of the whole society (rural area). They were ranging from the ages of 13 to 65 years. This age group was considered appropriate for the study given that most of the people involved in educational issues in Zimbabwe are between the aforesaid ranges. More women than men were sampled for the mere reason that the issue being studied directly affects women. More so, it is generally believed women are normally less represented or misrepresented in social science researches.

The researcher administered questionnaires to the participants in the different areas they were found. A "questionnaire is an instrument with open or closed questions or statements to which a respondent must react" (White 2005:126). The questionnaires in this study consisted of limited open-ended (free response) questions and closed-ended (fixed alternative) questions. This was in agreement with the CACC Module s.d: 103) which states that "practically a good questionnaire should contain both open-ended and closed-ended questions so that the responses from the two forms can be checked and compared". The open questionnaire was used as it enables the respondent to reply as s/he likes and does not confine the latter to a single alternative (Behr,

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1988). This is to say the advantages of open-ended or free response questions are that they give a respondent an opportunity to answer sufficiently, giving all the details to clarify the answers. They are more suitable for more complex questions or issues that cannot be elaborated in closed-ended questions. This was also in agreement with White’s (2005:131) view that “open-ended questions probe deeper than the closed question and evoke fuller and deeper responses”. They evoke a fuller and richer response as they go beyond statistical data into hidden motivations that lie behind attitudes, interests, preferences and decisions. However, it was not possible to mention all the responses as White (ibid) is of the opinion that open-ended questions may lead to collection of worthless and irrelevant information. With this view in mind, the researcher only selected what he thought were relevant responses.

On the other hand, the closed form of questionnaire was used because it facilitates answering and makes it easier for the researcher to code and classify responses especially in this case where a large number of questionnaires were to be dealt with. In fact “closed form of questionnaire is suitable for large number of questions and they do not allow any chances for irrelevant answers” (ibid: 130). However, closed-ended questions may have the effect of forcing the respondent to think along certain lines which he might not have done had he been left to make up his own responses. In view of this, both questionnaires were used because in practice, a good questionnaire should contain both open and closed forms of questions so that responses from the two forms can be checked and compared (Behr, 1988).

The participants responded to questionnaire items individually and participation was voluntary. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were asked not to identify themselves by names. Collected data from school registers, questionnaires and in-depth interviews were tabulated to show frequencies before being subjected to evaluative analysis. The Tables 1, 2 and 3 respectively contain details of the people participated in the study and the data that was gathered during the study:

Table 1: Details of the people who participated in the Study

Occupation	Gender	
	Male	Female
Teachers	3	6
Parents/guardians	4	5
Students	4	8

Source: Survey 2011

Table 2: Responses to closed questionnaire items on causes and impacts of girl child dropouts

ITEM	RESPONSES		
	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Uncertain
1. Child dropouts in rural secondary schools are more rampant among girls than boys.	30	0	0
2. Girl child dropouts are a result of early marriages.	24	5	1
3. Girl child dropouts are a result of pregnancy.	21	7	1
4. Girl child dropouts are a result of traditional beliefs that it’s a waste of resources to educate a girl child.	24	5	1
5. Girl child dropouts are a result of economic hardships.	24	5	1
6. Girl child dropouts are a result of illness and death.	2	27	1
7. Girl child dropouts are a result of abject poverty among the rural population.	24	5	1
8. Girl child dropouts are a result of expulsion	2	28	0
9. Should measures be put in place to curb girl child drop outs	27	2	1

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10. Girl child dropout results in high unemployment rates	27	3	0
11. Girl child dropout is likely to result in high HIV/Aids rates.	24	4	2
12. Girl child dropout results in uneducated mothers yet educated mothers have more socio-economic value to their husbands and society.	27	2	1

Source: Survey 2011

Table 3: Details of the records for dropouts between January and July 2011 at Chadzamira secondary school

Forms	Initial number of girls	Initial number of boys	Total number of boys and girls	Number of girl drop outs	Number of boy drop outs	Causes		
						Poverty/Economic hardship	Preg /marriage	Trad. beliefs
1A	20	16	36	1	0	0	0	1
1B	22	22	44	2	0	1	1	0
2A	19	24	43	2	0	1	0	1
2B	26	13	39	2	2	1	2	1
3A	27	10	37	2	0	0	2	
3B	15	19	44	0	2	0	1	1
4A	25	19	44	2	1	1	2	0
4B	17	32	49	3	1	1	2	1

Source: Survey 2011

DISCUSSION BASED ON RESULTS FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS, SCHOOL RECORDS, CLOSED AND OPEN QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

The findings that are presented in this research are based on the data that were collected from the natives of Gutu rural district over a period of six month, that is, from January to July 2011. Besides data obtained from school records, questionnaires and interviews were used to gather information. The objective was to obtain comprehensive information about the causes and effects of girl child dropouts in rural secondary schools. An additional objective was to explore possible solutions to girl child dropout problem from the directly affected people.

The research results in Table 2 above show different perceptions on girl child dropouts in rural secondary schools. The main reasons for girl child dropout at Chadzamira secondary school were poverty and economic hardships which accounted for 80% of the dropouts. Due to poverty and economic hardships, parents cannot raise the required money for school fees, uniforms and stationery. Worse still, with the economic crisis that Zimbabwe has been experiencing, money to buy food is still a serious problem yet food is a basic need. According to Maslow's hierarchical needs theory, food is the basic need for all humankind (Gibson, 1980). Thus poverty stricken children find it difficult to cope with school work because of hunger and lack of money to pay fees, buy uniforms and stationery.

Similar results (80%) were obtained on whether girl child dropouts in rural secondary schools are a result of religious and traditional beliefs by some rural parents. It was revealed that some rural parents still believe that educating a girl child is a waste of resources as she will ultimately leave home for marriage. Similar views were said to be shared with the Johane Marange Apostolic religious sect in the area. There was consensus (100%) that dropouts in rural areas are more rampant among girls than they are among boys. Reasons given were varied, but pregnancy, early marriages, religious and traditional beliefs that educating a girl child is a waste of resources were given as major causes of rural girl child dropouts.

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On whether immediate measures should be taken against girl child dropout, an overwhelming majority (90%) of respondents agreed, thus showing support for the need to educate girl child. This finding is in agreement with results from a recent study on Mozambique's education by Rambe and Mawere. In Rambe and Mawere's (2011) view, impoverished students coming from deprived backgrounds need support to enhance their capacity to grasp the fundamental assumptions underpinning discourses. This is to say that for the girl children to realize the negative effects of dropping out from school they need both material and intellectual empowerment. It should be noted, however, that the present study shows that the minority (7%) is against the idea that measures be put in place to curb girl child dropouts. This minority still hold the belief that educating a girl child is a waste of resources (time and money). This is a belief still pervasive in many parts of Zimbabwean society, especially the countryside. For such people, as long as the girl-child is able to read and write, she is educated enough. The children most affected by religious and traditional beliefs are children of uneducated parents and the Johane Marange's Apostolic religious sect members who still consider the sell of the girl-child to a husband desired by the parents. Unwillingly, the girl-child has to conform to the parent's obligations and join the husband before even completing school (Ministry of Education, 1986). As long as such beliefs go unchallenged, women will remain enslaved in the shackles of subservience and on the periphery of development. Though there are efforts by government to educate the girl child, the efforts seem to be just theoretical than they are practical. In fact, the efforts have little merit as they seem to be more visible in urban areas where there are active women human right groups and girl child networks. This is worrisome as the rural girl child and therefore rural woman is always left behind in issues to do with policy making and socio-economic development yet there are more women in rural areas than men. It therefore goes without saying that failure to put some stringent measures in place against girl child dropout has serious dramatic effects to nation building than those one can imagine.

Now that study results on possible causes of girl child dropouts have been discussed, girl child dropouts, in terms of their effects are examined.

THE EFFECT(S) OF GIRL CHILD DROPOUTS

The effects of girl child dropouts are many. They however vary depending on who is directly affected by the problem. Those affected directly or otherwise include the girl child herself, parents/guardians, teachers, immediate society and the nation as a whole. I will discuss what I think are the major effects of girl child dropout to the girl child, immediate society and the nation.

Increase in illiteracy

Zimbabwe, with a population of 14.5 million, has an estimated literacy rate of 80 percent, one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa (ipsnewsnet). Surprisingly girl child dropout rate remains high. High dropout rate poses a threat to the development of the country as this reduces the educational level of the people in the country. Also dropouts increase illiteracy levels in the country. Yet it is not only the question of percentage that should be checked, but the fact that mothers are the first teachers of children in any society.

While it is true that mothers are the first teachers for our children and that in today's society a woman is valued because of her education and not beauty, little has been done in Zimbabwe to curb girl child dropout. Results from open ended questionnaires revealed that majority (90%) of the respondents believe that a woman for whom higher education has not been attained has no full dignity and socio-economic value to his husband and the society at large. As one of the respondents aptly commented: "It is has become a norm in today's society that a woman who has attained higher education has more socio-economic value and is more respected than the uneducated counterparts". Majority of the respondents thus cited education and not beauty as a value that the society cherishes and believes help stabilizing today's matrimonial systems. This means that the saying that "educating a woman is educating a nation" should no longer be valued only in principle, but in practice in Zimbabwe. Since the girl child has the potency of motherhood, she bears potential to become a good teacher of her own children if she is educated. More interestingly was the remark by one of the participant who happened to be a female teacher: "one of the mothers of the girl child dropout in form two is my former classmate who was also a dropout". A number of respondents echoed similar sentiments that most uneducated parents have the tendency of not encouraging or

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sending their own children to school. This is because uneducated parents normally do not see the value of education. However, while a majority of respondents showed support for the above mentioned view, they were quick to point out that not all uneducated parents see no value in educating their own children. They however concurred that most of such parents require enlightenment on the importance of educating children, especially the girl child.

Unemployment problems and underdevelopment of the country

From an economic perspective, dropouts cause under-utilisation of resources and faulty government planning. Besides, child trafficking and child labour (which are against international laws) to neighbouring countries like South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique are on the rise for reasons among which is school child dropout. On the other hand, most of the street kids in the country are a consequence of school dropouts. All these problems constitute a socio-economic burden to the country thereby making dropouts a prejudice to the development of the community in which the school is found and the nation at large.

Also, people are nowadays employed on the basis of their qualifications. Those with higher qualifications, academic or otherwise, have higher chances of getting employment. This means that the least educated like dropouts risk being unemployed. Consequently, their potential to contribute to the national economy is compromised. This results in the perpetuation of the vicious circle of poverty where the poor and uneducated together with their families remain the same or even worse. In fact, many rural women remain disadvantaged in the Zimbabwean societies due to illiteracy and economic dependency that prevent them from combating societal discrimination. Despite legal prohibitions, rural women and in particular the rural girl child is still vulnerable to entrenched tradition of dropouts which in turn limit her potential to contribute to socio-economic development of the nation. Most of Zimbabwe's women population lives in the rural areas, urban women being the better educated and most of them employed. This entails that a lot is desired to help the rural girl child or rural women in general. The government's failure to do so is not only a crime against women, but a failure to honour the United Nations led Convention on Women issues such as the 1980 Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1993 Declaration of violence against women, both of which Zimbabwe is signatory.

Anti-social behavior and increase in crime rates and HIV/Aids

From data obtained from open-ended questionnaire, it was revealed that dropouts also invoke anti-social behaviour and increase crime rates of the society in which the dropouts live. The most serious problems cited were drug abuse, robbery/pick pocketing, alcohol drinking and prostitution among both boy and girl dropouts. Dropouts thus set a bad example to the young people in the community as they engage in beer drinking, prostitution, drug abuse and theft.

As revealed by school records tabled in table 2, most (10 out of 20 cases) of the girl dropouts are a result of pregnancies and early marriages. This is possibly a result of customary marriages such as *kuzvarira* which are still common with most of the religious sects in the area. *Kuzvarira* involves marrying off, without her consent, an underage girl (sometimes as young as eight or even before birth) to a rich man who already has another wife or wives in exchange for money, food and other material possessions that guarantee the girl's family not to suffer acute economic deprivation ever again (Financial Gazette, 2/12/2004). Customary marriage is potentially polygamous and permits some negative practices that have the effect of discriminating against women (Sardc, 2008). They also expose the girl child to HIV pandemic. Because the rural girl child leaves school for early marriage or due to pregnancy, mostly by "sugar daddys" she is exposed to the deadly HIV/Aids pandemic. A "Sugar daddy" is a rich man who already has another wife or wives. Since the men have many sexual partners the risk of the young girl(s) getting infected with HIV/Aids is very high as the husband can get it from any one of his other partners and then pass it to her. A man who has so many partners is not very different from a man who sleeps around with prostitutes because the many wives can never be trusted to be faithful as they will often be sexually starved. The young girl's life thus is put to risk by dropping out from school.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Zimbabwean government is obliged to make gender equality a central part of national education and AIDS programs if it is to succeed in fighting both dropout problem and the pandemic.

Wastage in education

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It is factual that the cost of providing educational services to any country is very high; it is a big investment. This being the case, the Ministry of Education should always fully account for all educational expenditure. According to Chanakira (1986:13), "it is imperative that the government eliminates all forms of resource wastage, financial, material and human" if it is to avoid wastage in education. From an educational perspective, educational wastage is a term that can be used to describe the total number of years spent by repeaters and dropouts in the education system, that is, before they repeat or dropout respectively. It implies the loss of resources by the government through the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture as a result of dropouts and repeaters. In some quarters, "the promotion of good classroom teachers to positions outside the classroom promotes educational wastage" (Chanakira, 1986:13). Also, the under-utilisation and misuse of educational facilities (like school library) by the school is an indication of wastage and may promote dropouts (Manyuchi, 1990). The time and money spent on dropouts at any grade level means a great loss to the government investment. As given by Chivore (1986: 11), the implications for dropouts are that they cause educational wastage in following ways:

- The money which is invested by the state is under-utilised.
- Materials and resources are not put into use, which is uneconomic
- the dropout cannot attain a full educational capacity.
- Consequently, the dropout cannot maximally contribute to the country's economy building.
- as a result, the dropout becomes a liability to the country instead of being an asset.
- The dropout reduces opportunities for other children who could have better utilized those resources to the benefit of the country.

The above points by Chivore buttress Hussen and Postlewhite's (1985: 12) sentiments that "the money invested and lost through someone who does not complete an educational cycle, cannot be recovered and means a loss of resources by government".

Confronting the problem: Some recommendations

Girl child dropouts though a common problem in rural secondary schools, insignificant attention has been devoted to examining its causes and effects. The problem has not only become a threat to the girl child's life, but a fundamental national concern. It is increasingly recognised as a socio-cultural and economic issue. In fact Zimbabwe like other developing countries has shaky education and economic systems due to a number of threatening problems, girl child dropouts being one of the most serious one.

In view of the causes and effects of girl child dropout elaborated above, there is need to seek permanent and lasting solutions to reduce girl child dropouts. The research established that of all responses given by respondents, the best solution ranked in their order of effectiveness could be to educate parents/guardians, teachers and the girl child on the importance of girl child education to society. The enforcement of compulsory free primary and secondary education policy with a resource back up for all poor girl children and an increase in education budget allocation by government was also cited as a lasting and effective solution to the problem. Such a measure however calls for the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture to widen the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) through the Ministry of Social Welfare to underprivileged and vulnerable groups. This could be augmented by sourcing donor funding in stationery, school fees and uniforms for the poor pupils, and putting in place more punitive measures that deter parents who willingly deny girl children their rights to education. Organisations such as Girl Child Network Worldwide could also be approached to offer their hand in cash or kind. Girl Child Network Worldwide is an organization that supports and promotes girls' rights, empowerment and education by reaching out to girls wherever they are economically deprived, at risk of abuse, subject to harmful cultural practices, or are living in areas of instability.

All these important measures should be complemented by the provision of guidance and counseling programmes to pupils to help them overcome different kinds of problems they experience (Chivore, 1985:91-92) and on the importance of education. Such programmes would help greatly in reducing educational wastage by the government if they target all students, especially those that are potential dropouts like the following:

- They are usually two years older than their age group.
- They have poor attendance at school.

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- They read below their mental age.
- They resist tensely the teacher's and headmaster's authority.
- They have little or no interest in school work.
- They do not afford to do what other pupils do.
- They benefit from automatic promotion.
- They resort to seek pleasure by drinking alcohol and taking drugs (The Ministry of Education 1986).

To undertake such a mammoth task, school teachers and parents should be kept abreast of all necessary and new pedagogical skills to reduce dropouts and instill motivation in learners. More workshops thus should be undertaken to educate both parents and teachers on how they can help the girl child to curb dropout.

Thus in view of the problem singled out above -girl child dropout- the study advocates empowerment of the rural girl child, teacher and guardians. Empowerment "is not a means to an end but is the objective of development. It entails more than having the mandate to make decisions as it demands the knowledge to make right decisions by those that are directly affected" (Mawere 2011: 881). This is to say that the girl child cannot make wise decisions if she lacks knowledge and enlightenment. It is important therefore for Zimbabwe's Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture to realize that the problem of girl child dropouts can never be solved at national level if it is not dealt with from the grassroots levels, mainly at the rural secondary school level where the problem is more rampant. People centered approach, that is, the direct involvement of the affected population- the rural girl child, the rural school teacher and parent/guardian- should be adopted. The three parties-rural girl child, teacher and parent/guardian- should be conscientised on the importance of girl child education. This is because some of the causes of dropouts surface at home and others at school level. Such awareness programmes could be initiated by both the government and non-governmental organizations through civic education and workshops with the three parties mentioned above. If such an initiative is carefully executed in rural communities (rural secondary schools) with the aforementioned parties, it is most likely to bring positive results on combating girl child dropouts in Zimbabwe and by extension Africa and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that though girl child dropout is understudied, it is not a new and unique problem to Zimbabwe, but is resonant of most developing countries in Africa and beyond. It has been argued that in Zimbabwe, the problem of girl child dropout is more severe in rural secondary schools than in the urban schools. Traditional beliefs, economic hardships, abject poverty of rural population, pregnancy, early marriage, illness/death and expulsion were among the causes noted during the study. These remain a stumbling block towards the elimination of girl child dropouts and uplifting of rural women in general.

More importantly, the study has recommended that the problem of girl child dropout can only be tackled if swift and immediate measures are put in place. The measures suggested are the active involvement of the group/people directly affected with the problem such as the rural girl child and participation of important education stakeholders such as secondary school teachers and parents/guardians. Overall, this study is a bold step towards cultural and educational reforms in Zimbabwe's education system.

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