

How do Schools Push Students Out of School? A Case Study of Two Rural Secondary Schools in Masvingo District of Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT This article examines school factors that are closely related to the dropping out of students. This is a case study of two rural secondary schools in Zimbabwe. A total of sixteen students who had dropped out of school in the last two years participated in the study. These were selected through the purposive sampling technique. The study adopted the mixed methodology and used a survey research design as the operational framework for data gathering. Data were collected through a researcher constructed 12 –item Likert-type questionnaire administered to the participants. Data analysis proceeded through the compiling of frequency tables and the discussion revolved around the three research questions that formed the pillar of the study. The study established that teacher-student relationships, the nature of the high school curriculum as well as school policies and practices were critical in the dropout problem. The study, therefore, recommends that schools need to transform themselves by creating conditions that not only attract and retain students but also ensure that student survival in schools is guaranteed. For instance, a friendly school climate, where students values and beliefs are respected can go a long way in mitigating the problem of dropping out.

INTRODUCTION

Although there is much agreement among policy makers, researchers and educators that children of school going age should remain in high school until graduation, paradoxically, many young people continue to leave school prematurely (Balfanz and Legters 2004). Since opinions about the socially detrimental effect of this educational phenomenon are almost universal, there has been much interest the world over in trying to explain why students drop out of high school (Lee and Loeb 2000). Dropping out is a serious problem because it denies individual students their fundamental human right to education. Internationally, the individual right to education has been repeatedly affirmed in many treaties and conventions such as The 1948 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1990 World Conference on Education for all (UNESCO 2000).

There is general consensus that the school dropout problem has reached epidemic proportions internationally (Patrick 2008; Wotherspoon 2004). In this regard, a UNESCO REPORT (2000) on the state of the world's children, points out, that about 130 million children in the developing world are denied their right to education through dropping out. To Maton and Moore (2010), the problem of dropping out should be the concern of every member of society since it

has negative consequences at both the individual and social level. Azam (2007) believes that the major social costs of dropping out of school include reduced political participation, increased demand for social services, increased crime rates and poor levels of health. Individual costs include lower earnings, unemployment prospects, greater likelihood of health problems (Thurton et al. 2006). From the foregoing, it is clear that by dropping out of school, most students severely limit their chances of economic and social well-being in the future.

Therefore, a study of this nature is pertinent and crucial as it is meant to stimulate the enactment of social policies that will help keep students in school.

Wotherspoon (2004) succinctly points out that a student's decision to drop out of school is affected by a number of complex factors and is often the culmination of a long process of disengagement from school. The most common explanations for dropping out tend to focus on individual student-related characteristics and factors such as social and economic environment (Cooper and Jordan 2003). Research that focuses on identifying these explanatory factors is often organised around comparisons of students who do and do not drop out. In such research, risk factors and traditional explanations of dropout such as social and academic background are usually foregrounded (Townsend et al. 2007). This

effectively means that what high schools might do to push out or hold in their students has been systematically ignored. By framing explanations in this way, leaving school before graduation is thus seen as a bad or irresponsible decision that individual students make. Thus, research is scanty on explanations that focus on the causal nature of school factors. Therefore, this research seeks to explore the school side of the explanatory equation.

Research by Rumberger and Thomas (2000) has shown that the public secondary education system is increasingly becoming the focus of criticism and controversy as far as the dropout problem is concerned. In the same vein, Stewart (2008) argues strongly that much of the task of reducing dropout rates falls squarely on the schools attended by the students. In this regard, Wotherspoon (2004) underlines the influence of school-related factors that are central to the dropping out problem. In particular, they identify five characteristics of the school that can influence the dropout probability of students in the expected direction namely:

- (a) Policies and practices
- (b) Student teacher relationships
- (c) The nature of the school curriculum
- (d) Resources
- (e) Quality of learning.

Contributing to the debate on school related factors, Azzam (2007) contends that many dropouts would have attended schools that have poor facilities and inadequate resources, conditions that affect the performance of the children and ultimately their decision to leave school. This seems to suggest that the humiliation or experience of failure often leads children to dropping out of school. Bruce in Patrick (2008) adds that demeaning teacher attitudes and punishment often lead to school avoidance by children. This view links very well with Bourdieu's observation (2005: 117) that, "...the classroom is characterised by conflict between the teacher who stresses on theoretical knowledge and the pupils who use "common sense knowledge from the home".

Stewart (2008) argues that the excessive demand of expensive school uniforms by school heads tends to magnify the gap between children of different socio-economic status. This is believed to cause a feeling of shame and uneasiness on certain children with the concomitant effect that they may evade schooling. Bowles

and Gintis, in Balfaz and Legters (2004) illuminate on this view by postulating that, "schooling was once thought to have an enlightening and equalising mission, but it is now increasingly seen to have inegalitarian and repressive features". To Bowles and Gintis (1976), it is this repression that partly gives rise to school dropouts. In the same vein, Stewart (2008) adds that in a society where there is a rigid pattern of dominance and subordinancy schooling can never be an expression of an intrinsically motivated behaviour.

Toldson (2008) concludes on the basis of his study of American high school education, that schools are expected to make students do things that they might not otherwise choose to do. The author goes on to elaborate that in essence this means that many schools make demands that run counter to students' natural inclinations. This view is reinforced by Beinstein in Christie and Martin (2007) who argues that in class, students are expected to remain silent unless called upon by the teacher, sit relatively motionless in their seats for extended periods and listen to tedious lessons. In Bowles and Gintis' (1976) view, the education system is basically a method of disciplining children in the interest of producing a subordinate adult population. Implied in the above argument is the view that children drop out of school because the learning environment is not conducive for their needs.

Commenting on the situation in capitalist societies, Hess (2000) remarks that schools tend to reject the individual student who thinks for himself and behaves in an independent manner. In a way, this seems to suggest that schools suppress students' natural creativity with the concomitant effect that students are predisposed into dropping out. On the basis of his research studies in British schools, Christie and Martin (2007) observe that about 50% of teachers' time and energy is spent in managing student attention, in getting students organised to work and in disciplining disruptive behaviour. This is what Bowles and Gintis cited in Maton and Moore (2010) regard as alienating and repressive characteristics of the school. Zins et al. (2004) argue that the quality of contemporary school environment tends to deny meaning to human action, foster disillusionment and produce a sense of rootlessness.

Contributing to the debate on the effect of school related factors on dropping out, Petrie (2001) remarks that education system by grad-

ing students also degrades them. Thus, those students who fail to qualify in the examination at different levels in the educational system become frustrated and demotivated thereby predisposing them into dropping out. To Bourdieu (2005), examinations are merely a mechanism by which the dominant groups in society measure and select those students who are deemed to have inherited an appropriate level of cultural capital from their families. By cultural capital refers to the inherited or acquired linguistic and cultural competence that facilitates achievement in school (Bitzer 2010). A study carried out by Rumberger and Thomas (2000) on high school dropouts in Mauritius have confirmed a relationship between poor academic achievement as measured by grades and test scores and the dropping out problem. This finding links very well with observations made by Bowles and Gintis (1976) that schools everywhere have in egalitarian and repressive features which serve to convince people that success and failure are deserved.

A study by Burgett (2001) in New York indicates that one of the principal reasons for school dropouts is that school programmes fail to meet pupils' needs. The UNESCO report (2000) also comments in respect of developing countries that many schools act as alien worlds which effectively try to offer knowledge of very little relevance to the pupil, his/her social environment or the society he/she will meet as an adult in the labour market. The report further notes that as a direct consequence, many children opt for child labour than be subject to a school regime that is irrelevant to their needs. Elaborating further on the learning situation in developing countries, Petrie (2001: 114) argues that "children are herded into schools, trained to sit still over long periods of time and are forced to accept what the teacher says, no matter how tedious or unreal it is. A child who refuses is thus thrown out of the classroom".

A qualitative study by Worrel and Hale (2001), conducted in Japan, has shown that positive social relationships in school can create powerful incentives for students to come to school. This seems particularly so for those students who experience difficulties with their work and those who find it hard to meet school expectations. This study is critical as it provides evidence on the importance of social contract for students to stay in school. In a similar study, Maton and Moore

(2010) demonstrates how social capital (measured as relationships between students and teachers both in and out of class) was strongly related to dropping out.

In a study on the relevance of school education to employment in Zimbabwe, Mandebvu (1996) observes that there is a mismatch between what traditional school education develops in learners and the needs of the world of work. The research established that most employees particularly in Harare criticised the Zimbabwean education system for being too academic and lacking in the inculcation of a proper work ethic. The argument here is that if schools do not necessarily develop job-related competencies, then students tend to lose motivation to pursue it. It is this demotivation and lack of confidence in education that negatively affects school-life expectancy and thus giving rise to dropouts. Similar findings were also made in America by Lauer (1992), who observed a contradiction between education and the economy. In this study, Lauer revealed that although there is still a weak relationship between education, occupation and income, a large number of college graduates have difficulties in finding jobs. The study also established that the few graduates who do find jobs tend to work at tasks that do not require the kind or amount of education they have, leading to frustration and dissatisfaction. That is to say, education does not always pay off in terms of income and upward mobility. This view implies that it is this diminished economic payoff of the education system that causes students to lose confidence in education and thereby preferring to drop out. In support of this, Lorrell and Hell (2000) point out that the lack of economic alternatives in the labour market, even when they complete schooling, is a strong factor that influences children to drop out of school in developing countries.

According to a UNESCO report (2000) on the state of the world's children, many schools in developing countries have little in the way of resources or incentives that make themselves more relevant and appealing to students. The report indicates that classrooms in most rural areas are roughly constructed and overcrowding is common. The report goes on to remark that, "...massed together, children struggle for space, for a modicum of attention from an overtaxed teacher, for a glimpse at a tattered text. With little to engage the students, teachers resort to rigid

discipline and corporal punishment" (UNESCO 2000:85). At the same time, Machingambi (2003) has demonstrated through a study on dropouts in Zimbabwe that lack of diversity in the school curriculum can predispose students into dropping out. It seems apparently clear from the above that the poor quality of education and the schools themselves act as depressant on the demand for education by children. In the light of the above, it can be argued that if survival of children in schools is to be guaranteed, it is not enough simply to ensure that children attend school without paying more attention to the quality of education that the children get from such schools.

Statement of the Problem

The major focus of mainstream research about students dropping out of high schools focuses on students' social and academic risk factors. Very little attention has been directed at researching into how schools influence these behaviours. Specifically, less research has sought to examine how schools are organised in terms of social relations among school members and how these influence students engagement with school and also the ultimate act of disengagement: dropping out. This research is meant to build on, and expand, the small but growing body of research that focuses on how the organisation and structure of high schools links to students' decision to drop out.

Research Questions

This research revolved around the following research questions:

- 1 How do teacher-student relationships influence students' decision to drop out of school?
- 2 What factors of high school curriculum are associated with dropping out?
- 3 How do school policies and practices lead to dropping out?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a quantitative methodology to enable the researcher to collect more precise and quantifiable data on school factors that predispose students into dropping out. Since the thrust of the study was to establish a variety of school factors that were closely related to the

dropout problem, the quantitative methodology was found most suitable for this purpose. The study, therefore, used the survey method since the aim was on breath of findings as opposed to depth.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The study is a case study of two rural day secondary schools in the Masvingo province of Zimbabwe. It sought to examine school factors that are associated with the dropping out problem. Sixteen students (50% male and female each) were selected through purposive or judgmental sample of eight students per school to participate in the study. These were sampled from a list of 48 form three students who had dropped out of school during the past two years. Information about students who had dropped out was provided by class teachers using past class registers. Form three pupils were used instead of form ones and twos because it was assumed that by the time students reach this level they would have acquired valuable experiences concerning school related factors that predispose students into dropping out. It was, therefore, assumed that they will be in a better position to provide fairly credible and valid data about the phenomenon under study.

The instrument for data collection was a Likert-type of questionnaire made up of 12 items. Items 1 -4 sought to address research question 1 by soliciting data on student-teacher relationships. Items 5-8 were on the nature of high school curriculum and it sought to address research question 2. Items 9-12 were on school policies and practices associated with dropping out. These items sought to respond to research question 3.

In this study, the issue of validity and reliability was ensured by piloting the questionnaire instrument to a group of ten students who had dropped out of school the previous two years but who were not part of the sample. The pilot study enabled the researcher to improve the reliability of the research instruments in terms of content, wording and bias. Items that appeared vague or double barreled were modified or discarded.

RESULTS

On each of the three research questions, participants were asked to indicate the extent to

Table 1: The influence of teacher-student relationships on students' decision to drop out (No. = 16)

Item	Statement	A	SA	D	SDA	TL
1	Student having problems with teachers at school	637.5%	318.8%	425%	318.8%	16100%
2	Teachers passing ridiculous comments to students	531%	637.5%	212.5%	318%	16100%
3	Dull and boring lessons	637.5%	425%	425%	212.5%	16100%
4	Teachers don't care whether students succeed or fail in school	850%	425%	212.5%	012.5%	16100%

which they felt each of the above factors could have influenced their decision to drop out of school. In analysing the data, the researcher merged the agree (A) and the strongly agree (SA) responses and treated them as agree responses. Similarly, the disagree (D) and the strongly disagree (SDA) responses were merged and reported as disagree responses. Table 1 reveals participants' perceptions on how the teacher-student relationship is related to dropping out.

The data from Table 1 shows that 56.5 percent of the students believed that having problems with teachers predispose students into dropping out of school. On the other hand, 43.8 percent thought otherwise. The majority of students (68.5%) agreed that students drop out due to ridiculous remarks from teachers. However, 30.5 percent refuted the view. Dull and boring lessons were cited by 62.5 percent of the respondents as central to the dropping out while 37.5 percent took an exception to this view. An overwhelming majority (75%) cited teachers' lack of care and concern about whether they will pass or not as closely related to dropping out. Only 25 percent of the respondents disagreed with this position. It is thus important that teachers should not merely be subject-matter specialists but should also take a more personal responsibility for their students. Bourdieu and Wacquant (2005) remark that high schools need to improve school culture so as to build trust and increase

interpersonal contact between staff and students.

With regards to how the school curriculum relates to the drop out problem, 56 percent of the respondents believe that a curriculum perceived as irrelevant to the job market can lead to dropping out; 62 percent and 68.5 percent respectively believe that a narrow curriculum that does not cater for pupils interest; a rigid curriculum with limited choices and options for students are directly conducive for dropping out of students (Table 2). On the other hand, 43 percent do not think the relevance of the curriculum to the job market is a factor in the dropping out problem; 37.6 percent and 31.3 percent respectively did not find any link between the narrowness of the curriculum and its rigidity and/or lack of choices for students as causal factors in the drop out problem. Similarly, 68.5 percent of the respondents did not regard lack of participation in extra-curricular activities a credible factor in the dropping out of students although 31.5 percent did.

Research question 3 sought to isolate school policies and practices that are associated with the dropping out problem. On this issue 68.5 percent of the respondents cited exclusion, suspension and expulsion policies as directly related to the drop out problem. On the contrary, 31.5 percent did not agree with this view. While 62.5 percent of the respondents agreed that severe disciplinary rules were closely related to the drop-

Table 2: Features of high school curriculum that are associated with the problem of dropping out (N =16)

Item	Statement	A	SA	D	SDA	TL
5	The curriculum the student perceives as irrelevant to the job market	425%	531%	318.8%	425%	16100%
6	Narrow curriculum that does not cater for the interests of all pupils	531%	531%	318.8%	318.8%	16100%
7	Rigid curriculum with ltd students choices and options	531%	637.5%	212.5%	318.8%	16100%
8	Lack of participation in co-curricular activities	212.5%	318.8%	637.5%	531%	16100%

Table 3: School policies and practices that are associated with dropping out (N =16)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SDA</i>	<i>TL</i>
9	School policies that allow students to be excluded, suspended and expelled	531%	637.5%	318.8%	212.5%	16100%
10	Severe disciplinary rules	637.5%	425%	318.8%	212.5%	16100%
11	Policy on school uniforms and other school requirements	212.5%	318.8%	637.5%	531%	16100%
12	Schools not giving extra help to students experiencing difficulties	531%	531%	212.5%	425%	16100%

ping out problem, 37.5 percent thought otherwise.

Similarly, 68.5 percent of the respondents did not regard the policy on school uniforms and other requirements, factors in the dropping out of students although 31.5 percent did. The majority of the students (62%) attribute dropping out to failure by schools to give extra help to students experiencing difficulties. On the other hand, 38% did not rate this factor as a valid one (Table 3).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have shown that there are a number of school factors that are closely associated with the dropping out problem. In particular, it has become clear that contrary to popular thinking, schools themselves engage in practices or create conditions that push certain types of students out of schools (Muller et al. 2004). An understanding of school-related factors is, therefore, the key to a deeper grasp of the phenomenon of student dropout. In research question one, it emerged that students are less likely to drop out of high schools if the average relationships between teachers and students (as perceived by the students) are more positive. This revelation concurs with findings made by Wotherspoon (2004) in a study of high school drop outs in Japan. The study established that positive social relationships in school can create powerful incentives for students to come to school, even if they had difficulties with their work. Exit interviews with dropouts conducted by Worrell and Hale (2001) in Latin American high schools have indicated that half of the interviewees decided to leave schools because they did not get along with teachers and other students.

This finding has been reported elsewhere by Bennett and LeComte (1990) who observe that demeaning teacher attitudes and punishment of-

ten lead to school avoidance by students in many schools. Arguing from a Marxist stance, Bourdieu (2005: 117) alludes to this view and elaborates on it when he remarks that "... the classroom is characterised by conflict between the teacher who stresses on theoretical knowledge and the students who use common sense knowledge from the home".

In this study most students indicated that teachers did not care whether students succeed or failed in school and in the eyes of the students, this acts as a push out factor to many of them. Caring teachers have been shown by Croninger and Lee (2001) in a study in America to be an important source of social capital for students. The essence of social capital in this case refers to relationships between students and teachers both in and out of class. The two authors go on to argue that these teacher-based forms of social capital reduce the probability of dropping out by nearly half. It should be pointed out that such social capital is of utmost importance particularly to students who are at high risk of dropping out such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those experiencing academic difficulties. In this regard I concur with Petrie (2001) who cogently observes in a study in Europe that the decision to drop out of school is a culmination of a long process of frustration, lack of motivation, support or encouragement in the school.

Rumberger and Thomas (2000) examine the importance of care by teachers from a pedagogical perspective. The two authors postulate that teachers need to foster authentic, caring classroom climates and caring pedagogy that promote academic success and student retention. This remark is pertinent for this study given the fact that a significant number of students cited the issue of boring and dull lessons as being at the core of their decisions to drop out of school. There is, therefore, need for teachers to be up-to date with various theories of learning and how to motivate

students so as to generate their learning interest. A strong drive to learn will thus propel the students to learn and thus acting as a strong counteracting force against push out factors exerted by the school (Lee and Loeb 2000).

Commenting on the situation in most rural schools in developing countries, the UNESCO report (2000: 86) remarks that

“...students are herded into schools, trained to sit still over long periods of time and are forced to accept whatever the teacher says, no matter how tedious or unreal it is. A student who refuses is thus thrown out of the classroom. With little to engage the students, teachers resort to rigid discipline and corporal punishment”.

From the foregoing, it can be partially concluded that caring and well informed teachers, who engage students in learning are among the greatest assets that young people need to succeed in education and thereby overcoming the pressure to drop out of school. This among other things implies a paradigm shift on the part of teachers in terms of how they conceptualise the learning process and the role of students in that process.

Research question two sought to isolate and examine those features of high school curriculum closely associated with the problem of dropping out. Opinions were rather divided but most students cited an irrelevant curriculum as a cause for dropping out by many participants. Research conducted in Zimbabwe by Mandebvu (1996) did find that the relevance of the curriculum pursued by the students had an influence on their decisions on dropping out or not. In his study, Mandebvu (1996) demonstrated that there was a mismatch between the curriculum taught in schools and the needs of the world of work. The research criticised the Zimbabwe education system for failing to instil job-related competencies in students leading to student demotivation. Thus, dropping out can then be understood as an outcome of student demotivation, lack of confidence and interest in an education system deemed irrelevant.

Similar findings were also made in America by Lauer (1992) who demonstrated that the relationship between education, occupation and income was very weak as evidenced by the large number of graduates who had difficulties in finding jobs. Interestingly, the study further showed

that the few graduates who managed to find jobs worked at tasks that did not require the kind or amount of education they had, leading to more frustration and disillusionment among those students still in school. This view implies that it is this diminished economic payoff of the education system that fuels the drop out problem as more and more students get frustrated, lose confidence in the education system and prefer to quit. Literature is abound with evidence that points out that the lack of economic alternatives in the labour market, even when they complete schooling, is a strong factor that influences children to drop out of school in developing countries (Cooper and Jordan 2003).

It emerged from study that the odds of dropping out are higher in schools with narrow and restricted curriculums that did not cater for the interests of all students. What is critical in this case is that if the school curriculum is perceived not inclusive by the students, it runs the risk of being labelled elitist and exclusive with the concomitant effect that many students may feel alienated. It is this experience of alienation that would then act as a strong predictor of dropping out. In this regard, Azzam (2007) cautions that schools should constantly reflect on whether the course content and work given to students relate to their ideals and career aspects as well as invoking a sense of what it means to be a member of his/her society. There is therefore need for schools to diversify their curriculums so that every student finds a home in school. The imperative to diversify the school curriculum has been confirmed in a study on school drop outs in Zimbabwe by Machingambi (2003). In this study Machingambi quotes remarks from a school head who responded as follows on the issue at hand:

“Certain subjects like Music, Woodwork, Physical Education and Art are not offered in our school due to limited staff, funds and resources”.

This response is very critical to the present study because it suggests that the present school curriculum is largely theoretical as it is dominated by purely academic subjects at the expense of practical ones. Consequently, students have very limited choices and options in such type of curriculum. To this end Ogbu (2000) remarks on the basis of observations made in the South African high school system that schools have to actively promote wider and more flexible range of learning pathways if at all the student attrition rate in schools is to be curbed. In the same ve-

in, Worrell and Hale (2001) reinforce this idea when they assert that schools should have flexible curriculums aimed at a closer cultural and contextual match between home and school.

This research has shown that school policies and practices exert a strong effect on the incidence of dropping out. The existence of explicit policies and decisions which force students to drop out was found to be at the core of the dropping out problem in the schools under study. These range from attendance, exclusion, suspension and expulsion policies. Notable in this regard was the school fees policy whereby students who were financially indebted to their schools were either barred from classes or expelled from school until the debts were settled. Related to this was the policy on school uniforms whereby students who could not afford the prescribed school uniforms were either excluded from classes or even expelled. Stewart (2008) refers to suspension and expulsion policies as having "push effects" that move kids closer to the school door.

It is critically important to note that mostly students from low socio-economic status feel the brunt of such policies on account of their inability to raise the requisite fees. This brings the dimension of class in the dropout phenomenon thereby evoking the heated debate on the issue of whether the education system is meritocratic or egalitarian. In terms of Bowles and Gintis Marxist analysis (Zins et al. 2004), schools everywhere have inequalitarian and repressive features which serve to convince people that success and failure are deserved. This way the education system gets handicapped in its capacity to improve the social betterment of all the members of society.

From the findings of this study, there does appear to be a consistent effect of severe disciplinary rules on students' decisions to drop out or to stay in school. According to a UNESCO report (2000) on the state of the world's children, many schools in developing countries resort to rigid discipline and corporal punishment as the principal mechanism of controlling students and maintaining order. In terms of the Marxist school of thinking, corporal punishment and rigid disciplinary school practices constitute the repressive features of the school system. Accordingly, it is this repression that partly gives rise to school dropouts. This way schools render

themselves not good enough to attract or retain students on the scale needed by most societies.

CONCLUSION

Although student and family characteristics have been shown to account for most of the variability in dropout rates, a growing body of evidence shows that there are a number of factors within schools that predict dropping out and graduating. I agree with Azzam (2007) who argue that most schools are not culturally and contextually sensitive to the diverse needs of the diverse populations they serve. This tends to fuel the dropout problem. This research has examined the paradoxical role played by schools in the controversy around the student dropout problem. In particular, it has looked at how social relations within the school, school policies and the nature and relevance (perceived or real) of the school curriculum can increase the chances of students' dropping out. The underlying perspective adopted in the study has reinforced the view that students drop out mainly due to reasons well beyond their control. Consequently, efforts to stamp out the dropout problem need to be directed at all the factors within the wider school environment rather than concentrating at the student *per se*.

While most contemporary research about students dropping out of high schools focus on students' social and academic risk factors, there is growing interest in examining how schools themselves influence these behaviours.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings of this research, this study recommends that:

- 1 Schools should foster positive learning climates, and should constantly engage parents, families and communities on matters that relate to the learning of the students.
- 2 School systems should devise and implement special programmes of assisting students experiencing who are at risk of dropping out. Students would benefit with more counsellors and teachers who hold high expectations, understanding and acceptance of their culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- 3 Schools should not only pay attention to academic issues. Instead, schools should

focus more attention on students' social and emotional learning as well as continuously monitoring student attendance and general academic progress. This is important as student progress and attendance are strongly believed to be early predictors of dropping out.

- 4 The Zimbabwe government should diversify the school curricula so that it will motivate students as well as sustaining the interest of students from a diverse background.

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