INFLUENCE OF STUDENTS' DISCRIMINATION BY TEACHERS ON SCHOOL DROP-OUT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENUGU TOWNSHIP, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Secondary school dropout rates in Enugu, Nigeria are shockingly high despite the importance of education in moulding a nation's future. The widespread discrimination pupils face from lecturers in these schools contributes to this phenomenon. Ethnicity, socioeconomic position, gender, and disability discrimination in Enugu secondary schools have been shown to harm pupils' academic performance and cause them to drop out. Thus, there was a pressing need to study teacher discrimination and its impact on secondary school dropout rates in Enugu, Nigeria, to find ways to address this widespread issue and improve educational outcomes for all students. Exploration was based on the education production function theory. The study was conducted using a descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in Enugu and the target population was 10400 students of public secondary school. To determine the sample size the researcher adapted the recommendation of 10 to 30% of the universe which is seen as representative. The sample therefore comprised of 1040 students. The researcher used descriptive statistics where frequencies and Percentages of responses were obtained through the use of SPSS. Content analysis was used for qualitative data analysis and presentation was done in pros form. The study found that use of discriminative school policies lead to dropout of the discriminated students. The school management should adopt strategies to discourage student discrimination.

Keywords; *Students' Discrimination, School Drop-Out*

INTRODUCTION

The importance of education in driving a nation's economic and social progress cannot be overstated. Consequently, education occupies a prominent position on the political agendas of many countries. Moreover, education serves as a means to achieve a multitude of other societal goals (Ball, 2017). For instance, nations that have made substantial strides in education are more likely to reap additional benefits, including economic growth, improved healthcare, strengthened democratic institutions, and poverty reduction (Evans, 2018). Indeed, investing in the education of the youth is widely recognized as a potent strategy for advancing the development of a nation, often serving as a yardstick for enhancing social and economic prosperity (World Bank, 2018).

The intricate connection between health, education, and economic development is evident. Well-educated youth acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exercise their rights and access essential services. Educated mothers, for example, are more informed about available immunization services for their children and are 50% more likely to seek such services compared to their uneducated counterparts. Furthermore, for each additional year of schooling among mothers, there is a notable 5-10% reduction in infant mortality (Keats, 2018).

Numerous international organizations, such as the Education for All forums, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the recent Millennium Summit in 2018, recognize the fundamental right to education. However, despite the agreements and commitments made to educate all children and provide equitable access to quality education, the goal of universal education remains elusive (UNESCO, 2017). The alarming rate of students discontinuing their secondary education is a matter of great concern (Collins & Halverson, 2018). This challenge has prompted many countries to formulate policies, strategies, and interventions aimed at enhancing student retention and reducing dropout rates (UNESCO, 2018). While primary education often sees high enrollment rates, dropout rates tend to escalate at the secondary education level, resulting in a relatively small number of students completing their secondary education in numerous countries (World Bank, 2018). This escalating dropout phenomenon often leaves students without essential skills even at the basic education levels (Collins & Halverson, 2018).

Research conducted by Hsin and Ortega (2018) in the United States revealed that 13% of individuals aged 16 to 24 had discontinued their secondary education and were currently not enrolled in any educational institution. Such high dropout rates, even reaching 55% in some cases, underscore the systemic challenges facing educational institutions in meeting the needs of their student populations (Partelow & Johnson, 2017). Conversely, the Netherlands stands out with nearly zero dropout rates, often attributed to stable socio-economic conditions within the country (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Global education provision exhibits significant disparities (Shields, 2017), which can greatly influence a student's educational journey and the decision to stay or drop out of school. Research by Añulika, Bala and Nyap (2014) suggests that learners' participation in secondary education is profoundly influenced by socio-economic factors, including parental income and poverty.

Countries grappling with high dropout rates signal deficiencies in their education systems. Students who prematurely leave secondary school find themselves ill-equipped with the necessary skills to thrive in today's complex and competitive world. Many jobs require at least a completed secondary education, and pursuing post-secondary education without a high school certificate is often not an option (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Consequently, secondary school dropouts are more likely to face unemployment compared to those who complete their secondary education (Rumberger, 2018). As Heneveld (2016) emphasizes, education is a fundamental requirement for all individuals, transcending gender and nationality. It is universally acknowledged that education serves as the foundation for combating poverty and elevating the quality of life. Education also enhances productivity in the global marketplace. This importance is underscored by the staggering statistics: globally, one billion people cannot read or write, and 300 million school-aged children are out of school. Furthermore, two-thirds of those who cannot read or write are women, and 60% of the out-of-school children are girls (World Bank, 2018). With societies becoming increasingly complex, there is a growing demand for improved education to address the challenges of today's world, including limited job opportunities, ignorance, and difficulties in dealing with personal and social issues (UNESCO,

2017). Recognizing the need for comprehensive, quality education, UNESCO (2017) stresses that quality education is the cornerstone of societal growth, stability, and individual participation in economic development.

Discrimination within educational institutions can have profound negative consequences on the academic and psychological well-being of affected students. Students who experience discrimination, particularly from their teachers, are more likely to develop negative perceptions of school, harbor mistrust toward educators, and view them as ineffective and unkind (Williams, 2017). Howarth and Andreouli (2018) have observed that ongoing experiences of stereotyping can lead to "disidentification" with the educational institution, which, in turn, undermines motivation, academic performance, and ultimately results in lower grades and dropout rates.

Recent literature on school dropout identifies two distinct ways through which schools influence student attrition. One indirect approach involves general policies and practices aimed at enhancing overall school viability. These policies, along with other school characteristics, may contribute to student attrition by creating conditions that fail to engage students effectively. This perspective aligns with existing dropout theories that view student engagement as a root cause of attrition (Freeman, 2018). In contrast, another way schools influence attrition is through direct policies and decisions that lead students to discontinue their education. These policies often relate to factors such as low grades, poor attendance, behavioral issues, or average performance, which can result in suspensions, expulsions, or transfer requests.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the significance of education in shaping a nation's future, secondary school dropout rates in Enugu, Nigeria remain alarmingly high. A critical issue contributing to this phenomenon is the pervasive discrimination experienced by students at the hands of their teachers within these institutions. Discrimination, based on factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, and disability, has been observed to have a detrimental impact on students' academic experiences and their decision to prematurely leave secondary schools in Enugu. Consequently, there was an urgent need to investigate the extent and nature of discrimination by teachers and its influence on dropout rates in secondary institutions in Enugu, Nigeria, in order to identify effective strategies for addressing this pervasive problem and improving educational outcomes for all students.

Objectives of the Study

To establish the extent to which students' discrimination by teachers influence drop-out in secondary institutions in Enugu, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation for our current investigation rests on the Education Function Theory, as proposed by Mace in 1979. This theory conceptualizes education as a natural process characterized by the transformation of inputs into outputs. In essence, it likens education to an industry where learners serve as the inputs and are ultimately molded into fully developed products. This perspective of education underscores the intricate interplay among various factors, including school resources, school policies and practices, leadership styles of principals, and the occurrence of students facing discrimination from their teachers. These factors, all situated within the school environment, significantly contribute to the phenomenon of students dropping out prematurely.

The absence of supportive school policies and practices, coupled with instances of discrimination by teachers against students, can create an unfriendly and unwelcoming educational atmosphere. Consequently, this unfavorable environment increases the likelihood of students discontinuing their education. However, when the variables within this educational function interact

harmoniously with the students within the teaching and learning environment, students are more likely to successfully complete a certain level of education, having acquired the requisite knowledge and skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject of gender discrimination has been a point of concern for many global institutions. When this kind of discrimination happens in secondary schools the students are greatly affected as at their age they are starting to discover and understand themselves and the role they play in the community (Dobson, 2016). Further, the scholar points out that when the learner is discriminated based on gender, they are treated unfairly based on the students sex. If the student was a boy, he was treated less favorably than the girl and vice versa. When boys are discriminated in regard to discipline cases, there is as higher likelihood of them dropping out from school (Francis, 2018).

Blackmore and Cooksey (2016) pointed out that an admission to a secondary school is followed by some enrollment procedures. The subject is informed that they are to listen to their teachers and follow their commands. According to Fatuma and Sifuna (2016) in the African context girls were often socialized to make good wives, dependents, homemakers and secretaries. On the other hand, boys were taught to be pilots, defenders, breadwinners and proper husbands. These practices also affect the gender treatment in educational institutions. A survey conducted by Brigeon (2017) which looked at ways to make schools safe found that girls and their families may find it useless to take their girls to schools in cases where women are likely to get lowly paid occupation which are believed to be fit for women. Further, the study pointed out that many learning institutions in developing countries practice gender discrimination and discourages girls from pursuing science and educational courses. During teaching, teachers often give more opportunities to boys to ask more questions, lead groups and use the learning resources which often discourage girls in being active participants of learning. A research done by Mwandosya (2017) on girls education in Kenya and Tanzania showed that more than 2000 teachers observed had separate rows for girls and boys and boys were asked male related questions more than girls in the classes. Teacher gender discrimination was looked into by the researcher. The performance of girls in these schools was negatively affected by gender discrimination attitudes among teachers, students and parents. Some of the roles given to girls in schools that indicate gender discrimination include preparing tea and lunch for the teachers, fetching water and washing utensils for the teachers (Eshiwani, 2018).

Sax(2017) also pointed out that girls waste a lot of time away from learning when they are sent to take books to their teachers offices which is a factor that contributes to sexual harassment. Such roles require the girls to sacrifice some time from learning which negatively affects the performance of the girls in their exams. This also contributes to the dropping out of school by the girls. Mudulia and Kipsoi, (2017) pointed out that the performance of girls in the education system was not satisfactorily. The performance among girls gets worse as they continue with their education. Fatuma and Sifuna (2016) agreed with these sentiments. It was noted that the school curriculum fails to address the plight of girls who are mothers who need some time away from school to look after their children. This contributes to the girls feeling tired, poor concentration and poor performance leading to forced repetition in their classes. Further, due to their poor performance, their self-esteemed is negatively affected which can lead to them drooping out early from school (UNESCO, 2018). The study therefore confirmed whether the drop out of students is related to discrimination by teachers.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design helped conduct the study. This design was used for this research due to the large population under study and because it was difficult to observe each respondent individually. The design allows for the use of questionnaires or interview questions to draw reliable data from the population under study (Orodho, 2017). The exploration was executed in Enugu Township, Nigeria. The target population consisted of 10400 learners of public secondary institutions. To determine the sample size the researcher adapted the recommendation of 10 to 30% of the universe which is seen as representative and can be generalized to the population Mugenda & Mugenda (2012). The researcher used the lower limit of 10% of the population. The sample therefore comprise of 1040 students. Stratified sampling identified the sample institutions since it was best suited to ensure inclusion of all population subgroups. The study used questionnaires that had open ended, closed-ended, and dichotomous questions for the students. The quantitative data was coded and later keyed in into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). The data was later analyzed using descriptive statistics and the results obtained in form of percentages and frequencies. Mean and standard deviation were used to quantify dispersion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objective was to assess the influence of students' discrimination by teachers on the leaners withdrawal from the institutors. Questionnaire helped collect related data for this objective from the students and the interview was used to gather statistics from the teachers and principals on the influence of students' discrimination by teachers on students' drop-out.

The researcher requested the students to rate the following statements on the influence of students' discrimination by teachers on students' drop-out. Outcomes are described in table 1.

Table 1: Influence of students' discrimination by teachers on students' drop-out

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev
Teachers favour some students over others	3.69	0.134
If a student is discriminated on the basis of disciplinary policies, there is a higher likelihood that the student will feel alienated from the learning institution	4.28	0.262
Student who are discriminated and are given other roles which waste a lot of learning time may have a poor academic performance which fuels a higher dropout rate	4.29	0.253
Students who are discriminated by the teachers are likely to drop out of school to be away from the teacher	4.16	0.226
Teachers discriminate and hate those who perform poorly and in most cases such students feel stigmatized and end up dropping out of school	4.23	0.237

Founded on the exploration outcomes, most of the respondents agreed that; Student who are discriminated and are given other roles which waste a lot of learning time may perform poorly in their academics which can result to them dropping out from the learning institutions as shown by a mean of 4.29, if a student is discriminated in relation to the disciplinary practices, it is possible that they will feel alienated from the learning institution as shown by a mean of 4.28 and that teachers discriminate and hate those who perform poorly and in most cases such students feel stigmatized and end up dropping out of school as shown by a mean of 4.23. The students further agreed that students who are discriminated by the teachers are likely to drop out of school to be

away from the teacher as shown by a mean of 4.16 and that teachers favour some students over others as shown by a mean of 3.69. Similarly Francis (2018) found that some disciplinary practices increase the likelihood of their becoming alienated from school.

From the interviews, the teachers and the principals stated that they don't discriminate the students in the schools. They further stated that students' discrimination by teachers does not influence withdrawal of leaners in secondary institutions in the location. Outcomes were however inconsistent to that of Mwandosya (2017) who found that extent of gender discrimination by teachers hampered the performance of girls which led to drop out.

The study sought to find out other reasons that lead to school drop-outs. The Principals and teachers stated several other reasons for school drop-out including; indiscipline, the quality of the teacher-student relationship, poor academic performance, pregnancy and parenthood and poverty that's leads to student dropping out in search of jobs.

Conclusion

Teachers discrimination on students influence students' drop out. In case teachers discriminate and hate those who perform poorly such students feel stigmatized and may opt to stop schooling. The student who are discriminated and are given other roles which waste a lot of learning time may end up having poor performance in their academics which can result to them dropping out from school. More so, if a student is discriminated in in relation to disciplinary practices, it may make the learner feel alienated from the institution. Teachers discriminate and hate those who perform poorly and in most cases such students feel stigmatized and end up dropping out of school. The students who are discriminated by the teachers are likely to stop schooling to be away from the teacher.

Recommendations

The school management should adopt strategies to discourage student's discrimination. Such strategies may include having a platform where students can report such discriminative teachers for scrutiny.

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