

DETERMINANTS OF RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL DROP-OUT IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE OF RUSHINGA DISTRICT, MASHONALAND CENTRAL PROVINCE

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2023.0472>

ABSTRACT

The study explored determinants for school dropouts as a basis for management strategies to reduce it in rural schools. Study was motivated by the prevalence of pupils dropping out of rural secondary schools in Rushinga District, Mashonaland Central Province. School dropouts are a direct attack on the education for all policy in Zimbabwe. This study was guided by pragmatism research philosophy poised at understanding appropriate rural school human related variables which can be analyzed using mixed methods to facilitate triangulation of survey, document analysis and focus group discussions. School dropout problem required data collection from purposive samples of schools, parents and learners. The inclusion criterion was their being rich sources, being available and willing to participate in the study. Data was gathered through focus group discussions contributed by 193 parents who attended school development meetings in nine (9) secondary schools. Seventy-two (72) learners from these schools responded to a self-administered questionnaire. The study found a (2%) learner dropout prevalence rate in Rushinga. There is an association between gender and inclination to drop out. Girls were more inclined to drop out of school than boys. Factors motivating learner drop out included; low ability to handle academic curriculum, perceived low economic utility value of Zimbabwe's education, perceived happiness in marriages and readily available cash for gold panning. The study recommends a decentralized curriculum developing skills for the utilization of local economic resources. For example, in rushing, a curriculum focused on mining and environmental conservation would be appropriate. Learners need parental support discouraging them from early marriages. Awareness campaigns against early marriages can be done in schools, churches and any social gatherings to educate both children and adults. Teachers are called upon to apply a variety of teaching methods to motivate pupils and raise their performance. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education facilitate low cost boarding facilities.

Key Words: School dropout, Rushinga district, Education management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rushinga district is one of the remote districts in Zimbabwe. It is at the borders of Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The British government had not taken keen interest in Rushinga's development. Mining Zimbabwe (2020) lists the following ten, verified mineral deposits in Rushinga: gold, tin, tantalum, mica, lithium, kainite, garnet, dolomite, cordierite and bery 1. One can speculate that, the British wanted Rushinga to be their natural resources reserve. The population then of Rushinga was composed of locals of the Mbire cline and a lot of foreign workers who migrated to Rushinga

for employment in the farms and mines. Those economic activities suggest there being more man for labor than woman.

During the liberation war leading to Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, Rushing was an active battle field of the gorilla war fare. After independence, different people moved and settled in Rushinga. Its current population then, is a mixture of tribes and people of different cultural, religious and economic activities. The 2022 Zimbabwe national census recorded the population of Rushinga to be 34 935 males (48%) and 38 185 (52%) females. There being more females than males implies that, Rushinga can have a male shortage which school girls capitalizing on their youths may exploit through early marriages. Tapfumaneyi (2021:1) claims that Rushinga has a poverty prevalence of 81.9%. People have agro-based livelihoods with the main crops being maize and cotton. Economic activities include sale of fish from Mozambique and illegal gold panning. The government of Zimbabwe declared an Education for All policy in 1980. To that end, it assisted in the construction of nine (9) secondary schools in Rushinga district. Unfortunately, Tapfumaneyi (2021: 1) has reported 179 learners having dropped out of school in 2020 in Rushinga district alone. Chenge and Maunganidze (2017) explored the problem and found that, the absence of parents pushed the economic strains on the learners who will drop out of school to work for survival.

According to UNESCO (2009) high school dropout is the major challenge facing the education system worldwide. Similarly Patrick (2008) in Mandina (2013: p51) states "There is general consensus that the school dropout problem has reached epidemic proportions internationally and has become a global problem confronting education industry right round." Rather than generalizing, the researchers sought contextualized solutions for Rushinga and related rural schools.

UNESCO (2000) observed that at least 130 million children developing countries are being denied their right to education through dropping out. That they are being denied is not justified. It points at external factors. There is need to investigate learner internal motivators for dropping out of school for a full understanding of the problem. Yes, it is a global problem. Rumberger and Ah Lim (2008) also said, "United states is facing drop out crisis." De Witter etal (2013:2) posits "Despite increasing attention on school dropout it is still a serious crisis."

In Zimbabwe according to 2018 EMIS Report, secondary school dropout stands at (3,41%) with lower secondary school completion at (63.12%) whilst that of upper secondary was at (14, 9%) with gender parity in favor of males. Newsday of June 8, 2021 reports that the national average of school dropout in Zimbabwe is at (15%). What is more worrying is that in Zimbabwe school dropout is militating against the government initiative of achieving its goal of offering equitable inclusive education.

It is therefore against this back ground that researchers made effort to establish factors leading to school dropout in rural day secondary schools were it is more pronounced. Although Blandul and Bradea (2016), claimed that, "Thus in the last years the school dropout rate issue has become a usual topic of analysis and debate" there is no solution at the end of the tunnel yet. In fact, child dropping out from school negatively affect everyone in quite a number of ways. Jamail etal (2010) confirms the ripple effect of dropout by suggesting that, it is not an individual problem affecting a

particular individual but a major problem that affects the entire community since certain drop outs get themselves involved in serious community crimes. The mere fact that a child of 15 years drops out to be a parent, calls for support from others in the community.

According to Ngwenya (2017), school dropout is a cause of concern to education planners considering that most 12 year olds are supposed to complete their primary and secondary cycles including proceeding to tertiary institutions. In the final analysis the development of the much needed human capital in any nation is anchored on its education system. To this end, most of the countries are investing heavily in their education system considering the amount of money they are channeling towards education. This view is further supported by Ngwenya (2017: 1075) who laments that “The latter group affects the development of the much needed human capital as desired by every developing country considering the massive educational expenditure (ie public expenditure) invested in the system”

According to Hunt (2008), drop out is often a process rather than a result of a single event and therefore has more than one proximate cause. Rumberger and Ah Lim (2008: 1) argued “To address the drop out crisis requires a better understating of why students drop out”. National Research Council, Committee on increasing High School Students Engagement and Motivation to Learners (2004), drop out in schools is influenced by an array of factors related to both the individual, students and to their family school, and the community settings in which the learner lives. The multidimensional perspective of factors leading to school dropout is also supported by Bridgeland , Dilulio and Morison (2006) who also established that dropout in schools is as a result of variety of internal, within the child and external environment. Ngenya (2017: 1076) summarized it in these words, “School dropout is a multifaceted discipline so are its causes”.

Learner dropout Theories

Dropout in schools can be easily explained by Academic Mediation Theory propounded by Battin–Pearson et al (2000). According to Denavska (2018), the Academic Mediation Theory explains the connection between achievement and drop out from any educational facility. According to Battin–Pearson (2000) the strongest predictor for a student drop out of school is a poor academic presentation usually in form of standardized test scores and grade point average.

Cataslana and Miller in Battin – Pearson (2000: 23), also observed that school children who have motivation to succeed in education and doing better are less likely to leave school as dropouts. The real fact on ground is that school children who are academically poor will see no reason for continuing going to school. This is an internal factor. That feeling is within the child. Poor performance at school when enhanced by reports and child ability groupings triggers stigmatization which is an external force on its own that can drive one to leave school. According to Battin– Pearson et al (2000), learners with a low academic mediation level probably also lack bonding to the school and are more likely to drop from school. On the same vain Dorman et al (1997) observed that students who drop out of school show little motivation in the school and lack interest. Accordingly those who are none academic performers are demotivated to continue coming to school resulting in them dropping out.

The issue of drop out in Rushinga may be explained by The Family Socialization Theory propounded by Rumberger and Ah Lim (2008). The theory of Family Socialization looks at family

practices and expectations. The family is the earliest and the most important agent of Socialization for every child which is responsible for triggering and supporting the child's interest in education. The family therefore, forms the basis for one's achievement not only at school but how well they will behave and do which is also their future foundation. Rumberger (1993) submits that family backgrounds have important effect on children's attendance and their tendency to drop from school. Chenge and Maunganidze (2017) found children with absentee or deceased parents among the dropouts in Rushinga. To that end, the probability of children from poor families dropping from school is high. Spardy (1971), also argues that there is high probability of drop out when the various sources of support are in the negative.

Chenge and Maunganidze (2017) concurs with Ngwenya (2010) who observed that children from low income earners whose parents struggle to provide food are strong candidates for dropping out from school. School dropout can be triggered by poor financial status of the family. De Witte et al, (2013) also observed that family is a great determinant of school dropout. Shahidul Karim (2015: 6) explained that, "Direct and indirect schooling costs carried by the child are important factors to consider for the education of the children. For example failure to pay examination and school fees by parents diminishes the child's purpose for going to school when there is no certificate at the end.

A general factor by Hunt (2008:52) points at poverty interactions with other points of social disadvantages pressurizing on vulnerable and marginalized children to drop out. Thus the status of the family is an indicator of its ability to meet school costs such as school fees. In a nut shell school dropout can be linked with the economic family status. A study carried out by Hong (2021) established that some families even if they get communal support such as food handouts, child rearing duties and even small amounts of cash from relatives they will not be able to pay educational costs. UNESCO (2010) observed that poor indigenous girls in Guatemala are far more likely to drop out than non-poor and non-indigenous girls. Therefore it can be safely concluded that poverty is a driver for school dropout in rural day secondary schools.

Distance travelled from home to school should not be underestimated when looking at factors leading to school dropout. Juneje (2001) confirms that if the school distance is too far from home, girls tend to drop out because of vulnerability to sexual harassment. Admittedly all things being equal parents are more cautious about the safety of their children especially girls when they walk long distance to school. Ainswork et al (2005) in Shahidul and Karim (2015: 29) found out that the likelihood of attending secondary school decreases with the great distance compared to the nearer secondary school. In addition, large distance discourages learners from going to school since the duration or time taken to travel to school with empty stomach at most might be too much. In Zimbabwe, Gatawa's (1998) study reveals that some dropouts are associated with long distances traveled by learners to their respective schools. Dorsey et al (1991: 23) claims that, long distance to school resulting in illegal boarding facilities harbors students who appear in school statistics but may be de-facto dropouts living in school proximity until they are let loose in the society. Conclusively travelling long distance from home to school can motivate school dropouts. Rushinga is a rural school district where children walk long distances to school on foot. That aspect renders it a rich source for studies on school drop outs.

Cultural and religious beliefs motivating early marriages can be considered determinant for school dropouts being experienced in some marginalized rural schools. A study carried out by Zaharia (2009) established that early marriage custom is prevalent in rural areas. Holcomp in Shahidul and Zihadul Karim (2015: 30) also found out that most of the girls in rural areas drop out because they get pregnant while at school. Their study, Shahidul and Zihadul Karim (2015: 30) found an association between early marriages and school dropping out. Zimbabwe's culture does not permit sexual engagements before customary marriage and parental approval. One can point at the neglect of customary laws as a factor loosening girls to sexual acceptance. Of course, parents in marginalized rural areas who may not value schooling may encourage their girl child to be married for material gains. In fact, Zimbabwe's cultural practices allow a man to offer his daughter in marriage to get food. This study does not exonerate culture as a factor promoting early marriage whose ripple effect is dropping out of school. According to Save the Children (2005), cultural norms and beliefs are affecting girl education in many developing countries.

Drop out in schools can also be attributed to academic performance of an individual. According to Doll et al (2013), academic achievement or ability is associated so well with drop outs in schools. In this regard learners struggling to do well in all the learning being taught at the school will fail to develop self-esteem hence they see no reason for remain in the school. According to Rumberger (1983), early school leaving is linked to academic and professional expectations.

1.2 Research Problem

There is high school dropout in both primary and secondary schools Rushinga district. The study is motivated by the observation that to date 2022 one of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's mandates of improved access to education is being hampered by high dropout. School heads have submitted reports to the province with limited suggested solutions for the problem. One may infer that, school heads consider dropout as out of their jurisdiction. Natarajan (1993) sees dropout rate as one of the indicators of education's failure in the development of any country. It is therefore against this background that researchers sought to investigate determinants of learner dropout as a basis for strategies to reduce the problem in day rural secondary schools in Rushinga District, Mashonaland Central Province.

1.3. Research questions

The study sought answers to the following pertinent questions:

1. What is the prevalence of learner dropout in rushing district?
2. What factors influence learner dropout in Rushinga district?
3. What management strategies can reduce learner drop out in Rushinga district?

1.4. Study Objectives

1. Establish the prevalence of learner drop out in Rushinga district.
2. Deduce determinants of learner dropout in Rushing district.
3. Suggest school management strategies which may reduce learner drop out in schools.

1.5. Significance for the study

This study deserves recognition when the following are considered. First, it provides possible management strategies for the solution of the problem. There is limited comprehensive documented literature on drop out in Rushinga. Chenge and Maunganidze (2017) identified

parents' contribution to school dropout, by their absence, poverty and low educational level. Their study did not include learners, teachers and an examination of the school environment. Second, this study provides management insights for school heads in Rushinga. Third, policy makers in education benefit from the empirical evidence on which to base their policies on school dropouts. Forth, knowledge of school dropout factors from parents, learners and educators provide the comprehensive base for collective action to reduce school dropout. Findings from this study provide rich sources of School Heads workshops by Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Rushinga.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research design

School dropout problem is based on a multitude of qualitative and quantitative factors. Findings provide sources of interventions hence the study is guided by the pragmatism research philosophy. A descriptive projection calls for use of in depth qualitative –driven scientific approaches (research methods). The study applied a sequence of document analysis for bench marks and problem prevalence. This was followed by surveys in which data was collected through a questionnaire and focus group discussions. Much of the data collected is qualitative.

Creswell (1997), advocates for qualitative research design to facilitate data collection from study participants in their natural school setting. It does not affect the day to day operations of the school. Natural school settings allow the environment to contribute to the interpretation of the findings. Finally qualitative methodology allowed the researchers to document the opinions and experiences of school heads and learners on issues surrounding school dropouts from participants' perceptions. An empathetics stand point was critical for interpretation of the school girl dropout statistic. Creswell (1997: 14), further allows researchers using qualitative research design to involve the collection of variety of empirical evidence, through: case study, personnel experience, life story interviews, interactional and visual texts that describes routine and meaning in individual's lives.

2.2. Data Collection instruments

Researchers were the main instruments of data collection due to their flexibility to the different variables to be captured by the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985), acknowledge that, in qualitative research, researchers are key instruments for collecting information. They decide what data to capture, critical incidents and responses to record. Barrett (2007: 417) adds that, in the field researchers conduct observations and interviews they validate and gather documents and art facts that illuminate the phenomenon under study.

Three open ended questions for Focus group discussion were designed by researchers for the purpose of this study. Three questions composed the focus group discussion guide were:

- (1) How many children have dropped out of school for your school?
- (2) What motivates children to drop out of school in this community?
- (3) How can parents, teachers and learners themselves reduce school dropouts?

Focus group discussions capture public group perceptions. In addition, Pederson et al (2016: 3) proposes that, focus group discussions provide data that arises in a relatively natural or indigenous form as participants are only slightly influenced by the structure imposed by researchers and

research setting. In this case researchers used the school settings which are familiar to all participants. Their schools create an environment for natural conversation with both learners and school heads to provide information on factors leading to drop outs in their respective schools. Furthermore, focus group discussions permitted researchers to collect both qualitative and quantitative data through observation of physical conditions on site. Observations of nine school environments provided an opportunity to appreciate learners’ challenges in context. Schools were coded named: M, K, P, X, Y, Q, T, H and E for ethics.

Questionnaires were ideal for the collection of private and confidential data from learners and teachers. This population is literate enough to be able to read interpret and record their individual answers. Interview guides were designed to follow up explanations. According to McNamara (2009), the strength of the interview guide is to ensure that data interpretation is enhanced by nonverbal gestures revealing the inner emotional self. Nonverbal selves from parents whose children dropped out were critical sources for empathetic interpretation.

2.3. Population and Sampling

The population of this study was composed of the main actors in school dropouts. The human population was categorised as teachers, parents and learners. These people interact to encourage or discourage learners to attend school. The nonhuman population was composed of the school environment. The activities and facilities made up the environment which can attract or repel the school dropout. Sampling inclusion criterion was being a rich source available and willing to participate in the study.

2.4. Data Collection Methods

Data collection was initiated by seeking permission from school authorities. Focus group discussions were organised by school heads and their parents’ associations. Researchers visited schools and attended the focus group discussions and reporting by group leaders. Researchers recorded common points as group perceptions and did follow ups to outlier cases for explanations. During the school visits in Rushing, researchers administered the questionnaires to learners and teachers. Interviews were done after data analysis for each school and cases identified. These were cases of dropouts back in school and dropout within reach by researchers.

3.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.

Distribution of School dropout per School

n = 9

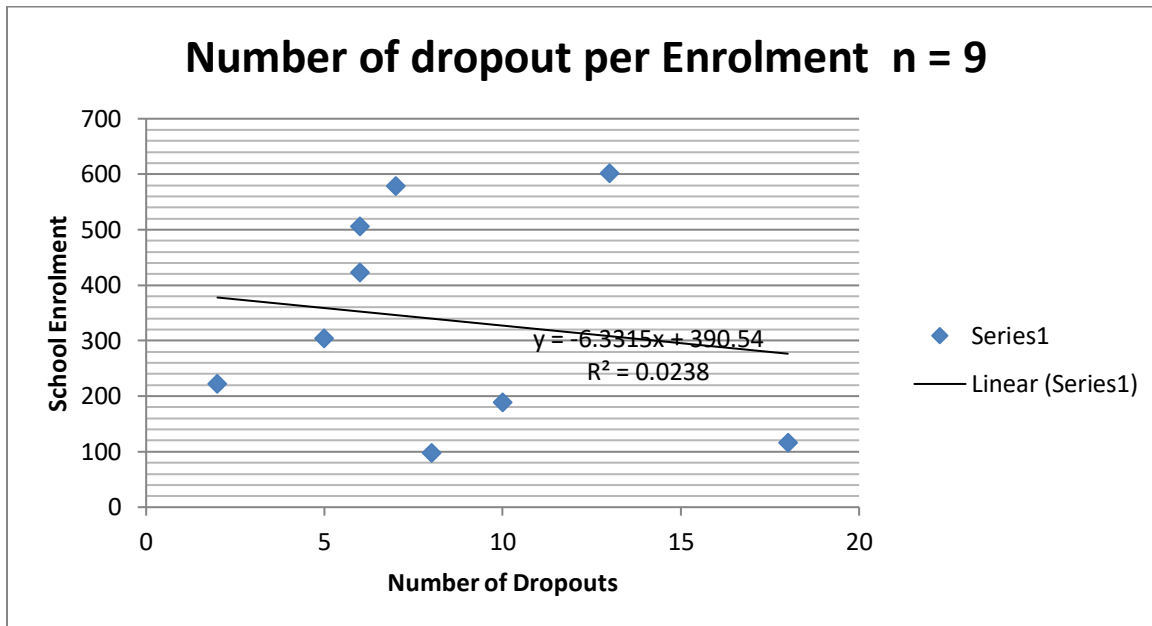
School Name	Code	Enrolment	Number of Dropout		Total Dropouts per School
			Male	Female	
M		98	3	5	8
K		423	3	3	6
P		304	2	3	5
X		223	1	1	2
Y		506	2	4	6
Q		116	7	11	18
T		189	4	6	10
H		579	3	4	7

E	602	5	8	13
Totals	3040	30	45	75
Mean	337.8	3.3	5	8.3

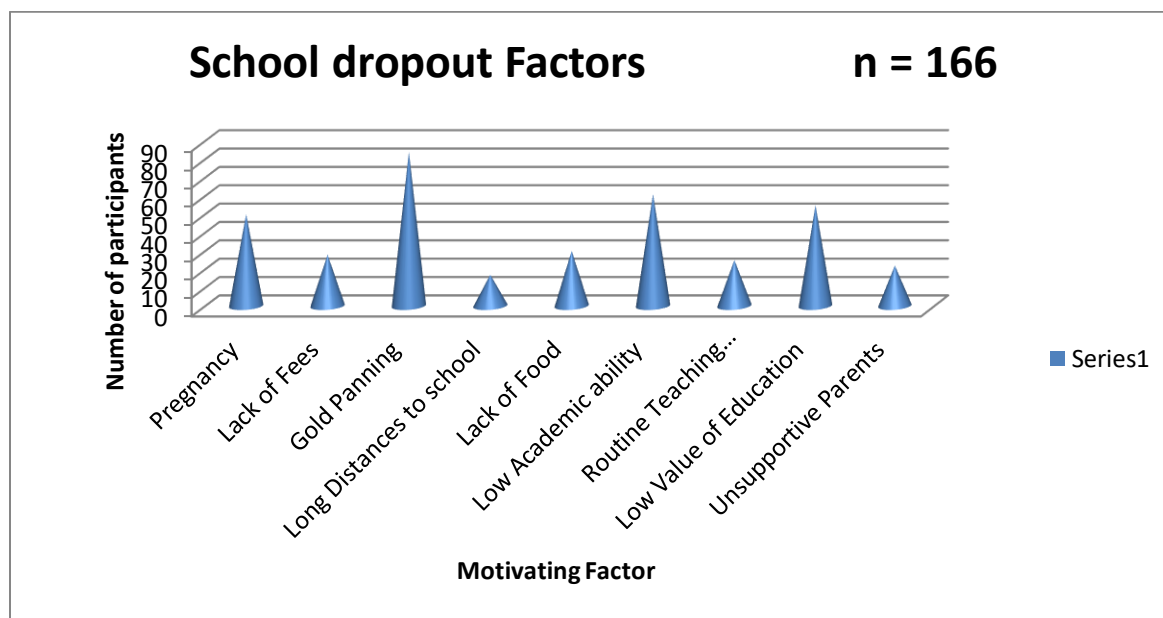
The school dropout prevalence = $\frac{\text{Number of Dropouts}}{\text{Total Enrolment}} \times 100$

The school dropout prevalence = $\frac{75}{3040} \times 100$

The school dropout prevalence in Rushinga district in 2021 is 2%. The quantitative figure (2%) looks small, but is not desired in a developing country whose Education for All policy implementation has a zero tolerance for any school dropout. The average school dropout in the district is 8.3 students per school with more girls (45) than boys (30) dropping out of school.



The Scatter plot below, shows a weak negative correlation $r = (-0.15)$ between the school size and number of dropouts. The school determinant ($r^2 = 2\%$), implies that, the school size contributes only (2%) to the learner’s motive to dropout of the school. The mathematical model $y = -6.33x + 390.5$ and line of best fit in the Scatter diagram confirms the weak negative correlation between school size and number of school dropouts. The implication is that, management strategies are not peculiar to school size. A one size fit all is appropriate for schools in Rushinga district.



The bar graph below reports that, the majority (48%) dropout of school to participate in gold panning. Gold panning in rushing is a lucrative business with readily accessible cash paid in United States dollars

It has turned out to be an economic activity requiring physical ability to dig, identification of the mineral, weighing and selling. Such skills require limited application of Pythagoras theorem or knowledge of quadratic formula.

One male school dropout summarised the link between Gold panning and low value for education in these sentences, “*Making money in Rushinga needs no education. You spend six years in a secondary school plus five more years at university being looked after by parents while others make money. Buy houses, cars and marry. When you finish school, there is no employment. So you seek employment from the grade seven school dropout.*”

We concluded that, there is a perceived negative association between economic survival activities and education. The findings projected in the table suggest that, when a learner observes that, he/she has low academic ability, the learner perceives low value in education. If the student is a male, he and she can go gold panning. Girls can then accept to have sex to get the money from gold panners, which leads to pregnancy and dropping out of school to be married. It is important to note that, the decision to be pregnant as a route to marriage and escape from poverty is individual. The decision to leave school because an individual has accepted low academic ability is also an individual motivator.

External factors motivating school dropout can include walking long distances to school, unsupportive parents and routine teaching lecture methods at the school. It is interesting to observe that, these external factors received less recognition as motivators for school dropout than internal factors. Teachers justified their use of routine lecture methods in these words:

Teacher T: *Parents their clients (learners) want to pass examinations which are based on call. Schools can achieve that through the lecture method. There are limited resources like computers to promote investigative methods, so we resort to the lecture method. Learners are not used to working on their own, when a teacher assigns them work more regularly, learners complain of that teacher as not teaching them. So teachers sing no other tune rather than the lecture method.*

We researchers concluded that, the value given to examination results is dictating teachers' activities. A centralised curriculum not catering for local economic activities' skills development, devalues the school education. In fact, we recommend the application of a decentralised curriculum in which learners in Rushinga concentrate on content such as safe gold panning methods, identification of gold alluvial and fair gold pricing methods. Formation of gold panning cooperatives and their management may attract both young and adult learners to school.

Ruth's (suidonyme) story

I am a third born in a family of eight (8) children. When I was in grade six at P, primary school, my friends used to buy lunch for themselves when I had nothing. These friends inducted me to gold panners. These man wanted sex for their money. One of them lied to me that, he would marry me if I got pregnant. I accepted and there it was, pregnant. The man disappeared, I think he is in Plumtree because he used to talk about Plumtree. When dropped out of school I had the challenge of looking after the child. That drove me into prostitution.

We depicted that, girls are motivated into early indulgence in amoral relationships with older males by their peers (external factor). They accept (consent) to sexual activities to extract money from the males (internal). Unfortunately the situation throws them into deeper financial doldrums. We encourage guidance and counselling masters in schools in Rushinga to invite these repentant school dropouts to present speeches to girls as a warning awareness.

3.1. Recommendations

In the face of the above findings researchers are recommending the following management strategies for reducing dropout in rural secondary schools:

- Awareness campaigns on the dangers of early pregnancies. These can be done by parents in different churches, in clubs and at schools.
- Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education can introduce and implement a decentralised curriculum. The curriculum can include guidance and counselling where school dropouts can be invited to share their experiences of problems of dropping out of schools.
- Campaigns by church elders, teachers and peer educators can be carried out to encourage reporting all early marriages and any form of abuse to Child Protection Committees and criminalization of those who marry and marry – off young persons below 18 years of age
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should expedite construction of more schools in marginalised areas and register schools so that they become examination centres to reduce long distances from home to school the 'mother' school phenomenon

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