

Classroom Conditions and Principals' Perception of Factors Responsible for Students' Dropout in Public Secondary Schools in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study adopted survey research design. Through non probability sampling, the principals and their deputies in the 81 public secondary schools in the study area constituted both the population and sample. Out of 243 principals and their deputies, 192 who were accessible constituted the sample for this study. The instrument entitled "Factors Responsible for Students' Dropout Questionnaire" (FRF-SDQ) was considered valid base on the recommendation by expert reviewers in the area of Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar. Two research questions were answered using descriptive statistics and one hypothesis tested using chi-square statistical tool. Results showed that there is a significant association on perception of the principals and their deputies on class size and availability of seats and desks as factors responsible for students dropout in the schools in the study area. Findings also showed that other factors apart from classroom conditions were perceived by the principals as the contributing factors to students' dropout in the study. Conclusion was drawn. Among the recommendations made was that government should ensure that its schools have appropriate class size and enough seats and desks for the students to enhance their motivation to complete school.

Keywords: Classroom, conditions, principals, perception, causes, students, dropout.

Introduction

School life is meant to be an enjoyable activity for both the school administrators and the students. Unfortunately, the observation is that many students show dislike for school, the very activity that would secure a better future for them. The negative attitude of many students to school is a disturbing concern to teachers, parents and educational administrators and psychologists. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme by the Federal Government has been designed to guarantee free access to education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years irrespective of sex, religion, or family socioeconomic status. This is to ensure that all children are prepared for life through school and at the end of the first nine years, successful students obtain the

minimum qualification which is the Junior Secondary School Certificate (JSCE) (UBE, 2009). Dropout refers to any student who leaves school prematurely irrespective of his or her grade before completing the programme (Mutinda, 2013). Onamuga (2000) (cited in Uzor, 2014) observed that the problem of dropout has become acute in Nigerian secondary schools, noting that many children enter secondary school with the purpose of obtaining the minimum school certificate that will give them access to higher institution or enter a vocation to earn a living but, due to misguidedness and wrong subject combination, repeated failure has led to dropout from school. The author attributes the causes of dropout to lack of proper adjustment to the school environment, poor test taking among others. Cross River State has its own share of the menace of students' dropout despite the free basic education offered by government.

Many students who dropout from school for one reason or the other are found engaged in various street activities while some of them just roam the streets, scavenging from dumpsites and constituting nuisance to Calabar city dwellers (Ita, 2016). Consequences of school dropout are numerous for the society and the culprits. For the individual, unless there is a drastic change, there is a bleak future (Chee-Leong, 2006). This may be because dropout from school can lead to early marriage, single parenthood, vulnerability to antisocial vices and delinquency which are all activities that earn nobody any good. Nigerian children are to be in school for 9 years of basic education and 3 years of senior secondary education (Obioma, 2009). Unfortunately, this may not be for all who enrolled. According to the report by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2016), only one third of children who begin the basic education proceed to senior secondary school. The question is what happened to the two third? It is the zeal to provide information that could help rescue these dropout children and help them return to school while likely victims are encouraged to remain in school to completion that has necessitated this research. The researcher's focus here is on the school factors; particularly the classroom conditions such as class size, availability of seats and desks and seating arrangement that could explain the reason for students' school dropout. Iheanacho (2015) recommended that schools should be equipped to encourage learning and enhance positive attitude to school. This implies that the learning conditions particularly the classroom condition should provide the motivation necessary to keep students focus on learning activities as well as have love for schooling. Most of the learning activities take place while students are seated therefore, the availability of sufficient space, seats, desk and seating arrangements remain important for a successful classroom teaching interaction. This unfortunately is hardly the scenario in most public secondary schools.

Chugh (2011) reported in a study in India that because schools fail to respond appropriately to some special educational needs of students, they usually are forced to

dropout. The case may not be different in schools in Calabar Education Zone. In some schools in Calabar Education Zone, classrooms are too overcrowded, students seating behind the class climb on top of desks to reach the front of the class. The learning condition is so dehumanizing and pathetic. The present study therefore was interested in identifying the classroom conditions that could lead to a dropout problem among students based on the principal's perception and also to identify what other factors outside the classroom can be responsible. However, Isangedighi (2003) averred that teachers are to be held accountable for the tone of affairs in their classrooms while principals are held responsible for state of affairs in their respective schools.

This study was anchored on the theory of Agnew's (1985) General Strain Theory which held that when people are treated badly, they may get upset and engage in deviant behaviours. Freud (1920), in his pleasure principles, holds that individuals are attracted to pleasurable environment and abstain from unpleasant conditions. This dropping out behaviour is a consequence of the quality of an individual experiences in the immediate social environment. In this study, the classroom is the students' immediate environment where they receive lessons and socialize most of the hours in school. Therefore if the classroom is not supportive in terms of class size, available seats and desks and free movement, it is possible for the students to lose interest in school and a build-up of heightened loss of interest which may lead to irregular class attendance, school absenteeism and ultimately complete dropout from school.

This study was also hinged on Murray (1938) Need-Press-Model. This model conceptualizes two types of environment, namely the "beta press" and the "alpha press". According to him, "beta press" represents the phenomenological world of the individual, that is the unique and private perspective each person has of the events in which he or she is a part. On the other hand, "alpha press" represents the actual environment events as could be observed by one who is not a participant in the events. This is to mean that the events of the environment could be determined through scientific research endeavour as it was set out by the present study.

Also, the factors responsible for students dropout is seen as the events of the environment as perceived by individual members of that environment; it means that the principals will differ in their perception of what particular school condition is responsible for student dropout and their suggestions will likely differ as well. This is because perception is conspicuously a personal opinion and interpretation of a prevailing event. Hence, this study assumes that the principals may perceive other conditions, other than the ones identified by the study, as factors responsible for students' dropout in their schools, hence the reason for the question: what other factors outside classroom conditions do you perceive to be responsible for students dropout in your school?

Classroom is the most important area within the school hence effective teaching is not possible where the number of students exceed the acceptable limit (Khan & Iqbal, 2012). James cited in Iheanacho (2015) explains that classrooms are instructional spaces conceived in terms of size or volume, usually considered adequate in terms of number of square feet for every child or number of children for every square feet. Class size or student/teacher ratio describes the number of learners in the classroom. Class size maybe small, medium or large, however, some are just overcrowded. In small class sizes, there is an increased teacher-learner contact time and learners benefit from individualized attention (Maliki & Ekpiken-Ekanem, 2011). On the other hand an overcrowded classroom contains number of students exceeding the optimum level such that it causes hindrance in the teaching and learning process (Khan & Iqbal, 2012).

Ijeoma cited in Ukpoh (2014) in a study on class size and student academic performance discovered that some schools in the Southern Cross River State, Nigeria had a ratio of 1:80 and 1:100 which was considered unnecessary large and undesirable. Arre (2011) in a study found that overcrowded classes could have a direct impact on students leaning and increased dropout. Students experience so much discomfort and most of the time disillusioned. This disillusionment has been found to be a contributory factor to student dropout (Wells, 2007). In the same vein, Ikoya and Onoyase (2008) found a significant relationship between school environment and students' attitude to schooling and noted that conducive physical environment could enhance student school attendance, involvement in academic activities and academic performance positively. To contain the problem of overcrowded classes, Gillis (2007) suggested that stringent admission process be put in place in schools. However, Iyaya (1999) suggested differently. The author contended that additional buildings and furniture should be given priority in educational planning at all levels.

Iyaya's (1999) suggestion supports Beynon (1997) opinion that school grounds, buildings and furniture (such as seats and desks) which provide the physical environment for learning provide the motivation for pupils and students to learn, while also facilitating the work of the teachers. Some schools do not have enough seats and desks; hence hold classes under tree shade. Beynon (1997) noted that these schools have poor attendance and those who do attend are inclined to have a poor academic performance. Classroom furniture, especially seats are designed to ensure maximum comfort (James cited in Iheanacho, 2015). Ukoha, Olumba, Omu et al cited in Ukpoh (2014) in a study discovered that schools without adequate instructional facilities tended to distract pupils academically. The findings also revealed that old and dilapidated structures and poor planning of new structures have restricted academic achievement as poor facilities tended to make pupils develop a high degree of apathy for school thereby dropping out. Okeke cited in Ihekwoaba, Ekeada and Otty (2015)

found that the push for universal primary education in many countries has led to the increasing deterioration of quality primary education right from the provision of physical facilities, teaching and learning materials among others. Okeke averred that these factors are responsible for the internal inefficiency in schools evidenced in high rate of repetition and dropout rate among learners.

Manitoba Education Advance Learning reports that if absenteeism becomes greater, academic achievement is lower and these increase the likelihood of school dropout. The physical make up of a classroom, such as furniture, room dimension and space provisions can influence student's behaviour (Gifford, 2002). The best classroom arrangement should be one that ensures that every child sees the teacher's face as he or she talks and where children can work without disturbing each other (Stainthor cited in Iheanacho, 2015). If the seating arrangement is so tight, movement is restricted and learners may feel disturbed and this affects their interest in leaning.

Bonus and Riordan (1998) found that attrition increased among students when seating arrangement was not appropriate for teaching. In a classroom, seating arrangement could be in cluster, horseshoe or row from hence seating arrangement can position a student either in front, middle or at the back. However, research findings are mixed as to whether students in the front row or back row learn better. The study by Michael, Meeks, James, Williams and Wren (2013) examined the impact of student's performance by seating location and seating type and found that student performance is not significantly altered by seating location or seating type.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What other factors outside classroom conditions do you perceive to be responsible for students dropout in your school?
2. What are the likely suggestions that can help curb this problem in your school?

Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant association, on the perception of principals and their deputies, on classroom conditions and students' dropout.

Methodology

The study adopted survey design. Survey design is appropriate for this study as it is directed to ascertain the present status of a particular phenomenon under investigation, which this study was interested in determining the class conditions responsible for students' dropout. Survey design according to Newman (2003) is appropriate for research questions about self-report behaviours, attitudes, self-classification, knowledge, expectations and characteristics and are strongest when the answers people

give to questions measure variables. This design was considered suitable for this study as the present research also sought to find out, from the respondents, other factors responsible for students' dropout other than the classroom conditions.

The study area was Calabar Educational Zone of Cross River State, Nigeria. The zone is one of the three educational zones in the state. The Calabar education zone is made up of seven Local Government Areas namely Akampka, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Biase, Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, and Odukpani Local Government Areas. The study area was selected due to the researcher's feeling that it is one of the busiest education zones with more schools and economic activities as well as young street hawkers and scavengers. It was also the feeling of the researcher that those scavengers are probably dropout from various schools in the area of study. There are eighty-one (81) public secondary schools in the study area with 243 principals and their deputies as at 2017 information from Department of Planning, Research and Statistics, Cross River State Secondary Education Board; this constituted the population of the study. A non-probability procedure was adopted where accidental sampling technique was utilized. This enabled the researcher to make use of the number of principals and their deputies that were accessible. Therefore, the number of respondents (principals and deputies) also referred in this study as principals which constituted the sample for the study was 192.

The instrument entitled: Factors Responsible for Students' Dropout Questionnaire (FRF-SDQ) was validated through peer review. The instrument having considered valid based on the recommendation of the reviewers was used for data collection for this study. FRF-SDQ had four sections, A, B, C and D. Section A was on demographic data; section B was on classroom conditions responsible for students' dropout, with a yes and no answer response options. Section C asked the respondents to mention factors other than classroom conditions perceived to be responsible for students' dropout in their school. Section D asked respondents to provide likely ways that the problem of students' dropout can be curbed. Completed copies of the FRF-SDQ were retrieved from the respondents a week after. This was to ensure that they had a good understanding of the purpose of the study and so able to respond appropriately. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics. Information provided on sections C and D was thematically analysed, by aggregating similar opinions provided by the respondents into themes while the hypothesis (one variable) was tested using Chi-square statistical tool.

Presentation of Findings

Ho1: There is no significant association, on the perception of principals and their deputies, on classroom conditions and students' dropout.

Table 1: Chi-square analysis on principals' opinion on classroom conditions and students' dropout

S/N	variables	Opinions			Calculated χ^2	Critical χ^2
		Yes	No	N		
1.	Class size	118	74	192	10.083*	3.841
2.	Availability of seats and desks	116	76	192	8.3333*	3.841
3.	Seating arrangement	28	164	192	0.0963	3.841

* $P < .05$

Table 1 shows the summary of chi-square analysis for the principals' opinion on classroom conditions responsible for students' dropout. For class size, the calculated χ^2 of 10.083 is greater than the critical χ^2 of 3.841 at .05 level of significance with one degree of freedom. This means that there is a significant association of class size and students' dropout. On availability of seats and desks, the calculated χ^2 value of 8.3333 is greater than the critical χ^2 value of 3.841 at .05 level of significance with one degree of freedom. This means that there is a significant association of availability of seats and desk and students' dropout in their schools. On seating arrangements, the calculated χ^2 value of 0.0963 is less than the critical χ^2 value of 3.841 at .05 level of significance with one degree of freedom. This means that there is no significant association of seating arrangement and students' dropout in their schools.

Research question 1: What other factors outside classroom conditions do you perceive to be responsible for students dropout in your school?

Several reasons were mentioned as factors other than classroom related conditions responsible for students dropout in the school surveyed. Themes are arranged in decreasing order of strength in the table as follows with corresponding frequency and percentage:

Table 2: Perceived conditions responsible for students' dropout

S/N	Other factors responsible for student dropout	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Parents failure to pay fees	81	42.18%
2.	Parents literacy level	30	15.65%
3.	Student fear of punishment	21	10.94%
4.	Student low interest in school	11	5.73%
5.	Repeated absenteeism	9	4.68%
6.	Misuse of school fees by student	9	4.68%
7.	Fee drive	8	4.16%
8.	Suspension	6	3.12%
9.	Corporal punishment	6	3.12%
10.	Class repeat	4	2.08%
11.	Fear of participating in test	4	2.08%
12.	Poor continuous assessment	3	1.56%
Total		192	100%

Among the factors identified as presented in table 2, parent's failure to pay fees was the highest contributory factor to students dropout as perceived by the principals. However, the least perceived contributory factor is poor continuous assessment.

Research question 2: What are the likely suggestions that can help curb students' dropout in your school?

The principals of the various schools have made suggestions on the perceived ways to curb problem of dropout among students' in the study area. These ways were captured under eight (8) themes as presented in the table 3. The most significant are government should plan to expand school infrastructure regularly (38.54%), fee charges should be much reduced for students under the free basic education (14.58%), and parents should monitor their children's school attendance and behaviour (14.06%) respectively. The less significant are building more classrooms and communities should contribute to school development.

Table 3: Suggested ways to curb students' dropout in schools

S/N	Suggested ways to curb students' dropout	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Government should plan to expand school infrastructure regularly	74	38.54%
2.	Fee charges should be much reduced for students under the free basic education	28	14.58%
3.	Parents should monitor their children's school attendance and behaviour	27	14.06%
4.	Politicians should award scholarship to brilliant student who cannot pay fees	19	9.89%
5.	Parent-teachers association should contribute to classroom building project	16	8.33%
6.	Politicians should adopt school to provide more school buildings, teaching and learning facilities	12	6.25%
7.	Communities should contribute to school development	9	4.68%
8.	Building more classrooms	7	3.64%
Total		192	100%

Discussion of findings

The result revealed that there is a significant association on perception of principals and their deputies on classroom conditions (class size and availability of seats and desks) as factors responsible for students' dropout in the study area. The result also shows that there is no significant association on perception of the principals and their deputies on seating arrangement as a classroom condition responsible for students' dropout. The result on class size is consistent with the findings of Arre (2011), that overcrowded classes could increase dropout among students. The finding also corroborates Wells' (2007) observation that students' discomforting experience with some classroom conditions was a contributory factor to their dropout. The finding is also consistent with the postulate of Sigmund Freud (1920) in his pleasure principle

that individuals are attracted to pleasurable environment and abstain from unpleasant conditions.

Availability of seats and desks was also perceived as contributory factor to students dropout. This result is consistent with the findings of Okeke cited in Ihekwoaba, Ekeada and Otty (2015) that the push for universal primary education in many countries has come to be identified with increasing deterioration of the quality of primary education right from the provision of physical facilities, teaching and learning materials which invariably have led to internal inefficiency of the school system evidence in high rate of repetition and dropout rate among learners. The finding finds support in Ukoha, Olumba and Omu et al, cited in Ukpoh (2014) that poor facility tended to make pupils develop a high degree of apathy for school thereby dropping out.

Seating arrangement was perceived as insignificant contributory factor to students' dropout. This is consistent with the finding of Michael, Meeks, James, Williams, Vassar and Wren (2013) that students' performance and behaviour is not significantly altered by seating location or seating type. However, this result is contradicted by the findings of Bonus and Riordan (1998) that attrition increases among students when seating arrangement was not appropriate for teaching. In the same vein, Stainthor cited in Iheanacho (2015) averred that the best classroom seating arrangement is one that ensures that every child sees the teacher's face as the lesson is delivered, by so doing, attention, engagement and classroom participation are enhanced.

On ways to curb dropout among students, principals suggestion that government should plan to expand school infrastructure regularly was more prominent implying that it is the sole responsibility of government to provide the necessary classroom and school condition to prevent students dropout. In support of this finding, Chugh (2011) reported in a study in India that because schools fail to respond appropriately to some special educational needs of students, they usually are forced to dropout. Similarly, classroom furniture like seats and desks are needful for effective teaching and learning activity because students would probably feel more comfortable when adequately seated to take their lessons. However, this is contrary to the view of Isangedighi (2003) that teachers are to be held accountable for the tone of affairs in their classroom as much as school principals are to be held accountable for the state of affairs in their respective schools.

Conclusion

Based on the result of this study, class size and availability of seats and desks were perceived as the major factors responsible for students' dropout than do seating arrangement. Among other factors perceived by the principals and their deputies to be

responsible for student dropout, parent's failure to pay school fee was the most significant. Among the ways to curb student dropout as suggested by the principals and their deputies, government should plan to expand school infrastructure regularly was the majority opinion; they believed this could help promote retention of students in the schools and thereby improving quality basic education in Nigeria. This opinion of the principals and their deputies support Ikoya and Onoyase's (2008) study who found a significant relationship between school environment and students' attitude to schooling and noted that conducive physical environment could enhance student school attendance, involvement in academic activities and academic performance positively.

The result further confirmed the verbal interactions with some of the principals and their deputies that if there is expansion in school infrastructure like having desirable class size, with adequate seats and desks that students will be comfortably accommodated. Some of them opined that if seats and desks alone could be provided, teachers and students could have their lessons in the football pitch insinuating that after all, some of the teachers use the veranda as their office space sometimes giving up their staff room as improvised classroom space.

Recommendation

In view of the finding of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Government should plan regular expansion of school infrastructure to ensure students are comfortably accommodated at any point in time to curb students' dropout.
2. Government should ensure that schools in the area of study maintain conducive classroom size, enough comfortable seats and desks for the students to enhance their stay in school to completion.

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