Review

Girl-Pupil School Dropouts in Secondary Education in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe: Influencing Factors and Effects

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Abstract: Literacy levels in Zimbabwe are at an average of ninety two percent, which is amongst the highest in Africa. Despite significant levels of transformation in the education system, which has seen skyrocketing literacy rates, secondary education still lacks transformation of other structures that have a direct impact on the rate of girl child secondary school dropouts. Through purposive sampling and snowballing sampling technique, a qualitative descriptive study was conducted in the geographical location of Masvingo district in Zimbabwe. The study revealed that secondary education empowers the girl child and contributes to socio-development process and poverty alleviation. In view of these findings, the study concluded that education is a human right and everyone has the right to acquire education regardless of their gender. The study recommended that Non-Governmental Organisations and government should implement tailor-made programmes that adequately tackle the rate of girl child secondary school dropouts in Masvingo district.

Keywords: Education, Girl Child Education, Human Rights, Social Assistance, School Dropout, Social Protection

Introduction

Given the cultural belief that education for the girl child eventually benefits another family when she gets married, the girl child is usually the first to be involuntarily withdrawn from school in times of financial difficulties. Girls are viewed as care givers and most of them eventually dropout of school because of unwanted pregnancies and early marriages (Mawere, 2012: 3). The rate of secondary school girl child dropouts is also a result of religious and traditional beliefs of some parents that as long as a girl child is able to read and write she is adequately educated (Mawere, 2012: 9). Unfortunately, girl child school dropouts in Zimbabwe are a liability to society because they are unable to meaningfully contribute to the socio-economic development of the nation (Mawere, 2012: 10). Akensina and Adetunde (2008: 338) supports this by stating that "the education of females is paramount to the development of a nation". Zimbabwe has an average population of fourteen million and five hundred residents, with an estimated literacy rate of eighty per cent which is one of the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mawere, 2012: 11). This is corroborated by ZimAsset (2013: 64), that asserts that in 2013 the literacy levels increased to an average of between ninety two percent (92%) and ninety five per cent (95%), which are amongst the highest in Africa. However, despite these levels of great transformation in the education system, secondary education still lacks transformation in other areas such as cultural beliefs, girl child pregnancies, child labour and religious systems that have a direct causal link on female learners dropping out of Zimbabwe's secondary schools.

Objective of the Study

The study adopted a human rights based approach in examining the causes and effects of girl child school dropouts in Zimbabwe's secondary schools, particularly in Masvingo district. The study examines the impact of social assistance on the education of the girl child. The human rights based approach is helpful in examining the link between social assistance and the rate of girl child secondary school dropouts because it advocates for the dignity of the individual and equality in the attainment of education. Girl child education is a human right which needs be fully supported.

Science Publications

Dimensions of Social Protection

Globally Non-Governmental Organisations, national governments and policy makers in the field of social service delivery view social protection as a significant tool for the development of human well-being (Erudo, 2010: 1). Resultantly, social protection has become central in the initiatives of development projects aimed at eradicating extreme poverty (Erudo, 2010: 1). Social protection, particularly the social assistance aspect has come to be widely recognised due to the major challenge of increasing poverty. Social protection is categorised into three dimensions: Social assistance, social insurance and social security. Social assistance consists of benefits that are channelled to the poor people in cash or in kind and they are financed by the state (Barrientos, 2010). Social assistance also provides minimal assistance to targeted groups of people, especially those that are not able to work, the destitute and those with disabilities (Kabeer and Cook, 2009). Social insurance provides protection against life contingencies such as work related contingencies, old age, maternity unemployment or sickness (Barrientos, 2010). Under normal circumstances, social insurance is financed by workers and their employers whilst social assistance is tax financed. Social insurance can also come in the form of old age pensions that are meant to help the vulnerable groups of people. Social insurance programmes include the public sector and formal private employment including pensions, unemployment benefits, health and disability (Kabeer and Cook, 2009: 4). The other aspect of social protection is social security, whereby the poor communities are helped to sustain their livelihoods in the event of shocks or risks to minimise the likelihood of such risks. Social security is the security that is given to the labour and employment standards and it advocates for rights to organisations and voice at work (Kabeer and Cook, 2009). Among these dimensions, this study examined the link between social assistance and the rate of girl child secondary school dropouts in the Masvingo district of Zimbabwe. Studies reveal that the overall social protection framework should not only focus on the financial availability of school fees but also on addressing other barriers to education that include cultural values, girl child labour, girl child pregnancies, lack of transport to school and inadequate social assistance programmes. There is need for Non-Governmental Organisations to educate the girl child on their rights and to protect them from all forms of abuse. Malaki (2007: 39) asserts that in Tanzania, "family education must be included in education curriculum for the purpose of educating pupils on the consequences associated with teenage pregnancies". Prior to 1996 in Zimbabwe, "a girl child who fell pregnant at school attracted expulsion with no possibility of readmission into the mainstream school system after giving birth" (Sithole et al., 2013: 59). In 2010, Zimbabwe amended and granted a three month maternity leave to girls that fell pregnant in school (Sithole et al., 2013). Despite this achievement, secondary school children in Zimbabwe are still not allowed to come back to school to finish their studies after maternity leave. This is because the traditional and religious laws in Zimbabwe consider it a taboo for a teenage girl to fall pregnant in school and these "cultural values" and "norms" influence people's perceptions towards teenage pregnancies (Sithole et al., 2013: 66). In Botswana section 34 (1) of the 1967 Botswana Education Act requires a pupil who has fallen pregnant to withdraw from school. Section 34 (3) and (4) respectively state that such a pupil shall not be allowed to write exams at school whilst pregnant (Molosiwa and Moswela, 2012: 267).

Constitution of Zimbabwe on the Right to Education

The right to education is recognised in domestic, regional and international human rights instruments to which Zimbabwe is a State party. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Zimbabwe is also a State Party, emphasises the need for young children to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable. The Government of Zimbabwe (2013) further provides for the right to education for all citizens and permanent residents and calls for State resources to be made available in order to fulfil this right. Section 75 (a) provides that "Every citizen and permanent resident of Zimbabwe has the right to a basic State funded education, including adult basic education." Section 81(1) (f) also provides that "Every child (boy and girl) under the age of eighteen years, has the right to education." Further the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures within the limits of resources available to make the right to education progressively realized. Not only do children have the right to education but are also protected from maltreatment and abuse. Section 81(1) states that the best interests of the child are significant in every matter with regards to the child.

The Human Rights Based Approach

Human rights are interpreted in a variety of ways by various organisations in different countries. Human rights are viewed as a tool for human development,

equality, fairness, freedom of speech justice and peace. Despite these different views, on December 10 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human rights in the socio-economic and political spectrum. The main goal of the Universal Declaration of Human rights was the recognition of the dignity, equality, justice and peace of human beings in the world (United Nations, 2011). Given the different dimensions and categories of human rights discourses, this study has its focus on the human rights that are directed to secondary school female learners. The human rights based approach is appropriate to the study of social assistance and secondary education because it offers a holistic understanding of equality which may in turn facilitate the reduction of school dropouts. This study defines children as every boy and girl under the age of 18 as indicated in the UNICF (2008 Article (1) definition of a child). UNICF (2008: 4) points out that "a child is recognized as a person under 18, unless national laws recognize an earlier age of majority". The human rights based approach emphasises the importance of non-discrimination and equal opportunities between man and women. This theory applies to this study because it speaks against discrimination of the girl child on the basis of gender. This can be attributed to the different traditional beliefs in communities where some groups believe that girl child education is less significant than boy child education.

After the Second World War, the United Nations General Assembly signalled the International community's commitment to prevent human atrocities in the future (Drolet, 2004: 13). The Universal Declaration of Human rights stresses that education must be directed to the development of the human being's personality and human freedom. The Universal Declaration of Human rights Article 25 (1) states that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood and old age (United Nations, 2011). The UNGA (1948) Article 26 (1) pointed out that everyone has a right to education and that elementary education shall be free and compulsory to all people and that technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (Drolet, 2004). Article (9) of the International convention on Economic, social and cultural Rights provides that 'the state parties' to the present covenant should recognise the right of everyone to social security and social insurance (Devereux *et al.*, 2012: 25). Human rights are

a new development that can "lend moral legitimacy and principle of social justice" (UNDP, 2000: 3). It is often argued that social assistance development in secondary education cannot be achieved without a full cover of needs in secondary education that includes uniforms, transport and food. This argument emanates from the idea that girl child school dropouts in secondary schools are not only caused by school fees shortages but by other factors as argued above. This is supported by Freeman (2000: 278) who argues that, "children starve or lack adequate nutrition and many are deprived of even basic education". Hence it is of paramount substance to regard full cover of social assistance as a right to minimise the rate of girl child school drop outs. Akensina and Atendude (2008: 338) notes that "inequality in female access to education has continued despite commitments by various governments into the goal of formal education". Social assistance should be a holistic approach if it is to succeed and the state should be responsible for upholding human rights to education for every child. Learners must also be protected against household child labour because it deprives them from attending school and it affects their school attendance. The government should give children a voice so that they will be able to hold their parents and guardians accountable if they discourage them to go to school. It is also the responsibility of the state to provide secondary school learners with adequate resources for them to finish their studies in time. The necessary resources include the provision of complete school uniforms, transport, adequate food and adequate school fees (United Nations, 2011). Ultimately, every relevant stakeholder, including the Non-Governmental Organisations, governmental organisations, policy makers and communities can help to uphold human rights for the girl child in secondary education.

Research Methodology

A Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out before the major study. Participants in the pilot study were not part of the final sample. The pilot study was done to evaluate time, cost and feasibility in order to predict a proper sample of the study before carrying out the major research. The pilot study was also used to correct the data collection instrument. This helped in finding out the real time each respondent spend on each interview which was between eight to ten (8-10) minutes. The researcher was able to make adjustments before doing the major research to find out whether the research instruments were too complicated or inappropriate.

Table 1. The total number of respondents, their gender and age

Categories	Age	No. of males	No. of females	Beneficiaries	Non-Beneficiaries	Total number of respondents
Parents and guardians	-	6	10	-	-	16
Leaners	15-18	8	8	9	7	16
Government officials	-	2	2	-	-	4
Non-governmental organizations officials	-	2	2	-	-	4
School heads	-	-	2	-	-	2
Teachers	-	2	1	-	-	3
Bursars	-	1	-	-	-	1
Community leaders	-	2	2	-	-	4
Total		23	27	9	7	50

The pilot study was made up of fourteen (14) respondents that included four (4) parents, three (3) learners, four (4) government officials and three (3) Non-Governmental Organizations officials. Respondents in the pilot study were not part of the major study. The total number of respondents included in the study is presented and explained below.

Population and Sampling

Table 1 above shows the total sample of the study in terms of gender and age of participants. The table shows the number of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of social assistance as presented above. Table 2 shows the total number of parents, learners, government officials, Non-Governmental Organisations officials, school authorities and community leaders interviewed. A sample of the populations is only a representation of the entire population, that is, it is only a subset of the population. The selection of the sample of the population is an important stage in that the results are hoped to be a representation of the entire population.

Again the research population helps to set boundaries on the research units and it refers to individuals or organisations who possess specific characteristics under the study. According to de Vos *et al*. (2005) a research population simply refers to the total set from which individuals or units of the study are chosen. Table 1 shows that the interview schedules were in four (4) categories, that is, interviews with parents and guardians, learners, government officials and Non-Governmental Organisations officials and lastly school authorities. To conclude Table 1 shows that each interview schedule had an average of about eight to ten (8-10) questions. A small sample was chosen because including all people in the study proved to be time consuming (Table 1).

Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected through field work that involved face to face interviews. The study collected data using questions that were constructed in English and translated into the local language. Shona is the local language in Masvingo district. The interview guide was carefully translated in the local language before carrying out the major study. Babbie (1986) postulates that, interviews are seen as an interactive process between the researcher and the subjects and they consist of a general plan of inquiry but not specific questions. This created trust between the interviewer and the interviewee. It facilitated easy participation of illiterate respondents. The researcher, with the help of two research assistants, also took notes during the interviews.

Face to face interviews were appropriate in that they helped save time and costs. Interviews comprised of open ended questions. Using open ended questions was an advantage since it allowed the respondents to express themselves freely more. This was appropriate to the study since it seeks to go deep into people's feelings, attitudes, perceptions and views about the social assistance programmes for secondary education. The questionnaire was used as an interview schedule and it therefore helped to probe into why the school dropout phenomenon was continuing despite the assistance in cash transfers provided by Non-Governmental Organisations and the government in Masvingo district. The field research was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, the interviewer used face to face interviews that consisted of unstructured set of predetermined questions which guided the interviews as explained above. This helped to bring out important information about schools, the community and the respondents. The researcher made use of an interpreter who helped to interpret the interview guide into the local language. Due to unavailability of classrooms during the time of the study at Mucheke High School, interviews were held under a tree shade. At Mushandike secondary school interview sessions were held in a quiet classroom.

A Breakdown of the Categories of Respondents Included in Face to Face Interviews

Table 2 above shows the total number of parents and leaners that were interviewed face to face basis in

the study. Table 2 shows that research interviews were made with households' heads, that is, care givers who have learners at Ordinary Level benefiting from either the Basic Education Assistance Module programme or Non-Governmental Organisations programmes for secondary schools. This allowed the researcher to find out the real challenges that these parents were facing in assisting their children to acquire education. Parents in Mushandike rural community were busy during the day so there was need to book appointments with them. The interviewer spend two days in Mucheke community and two days in Mushandike community. Meetings were held with Ordinary Level learners at each school (Table 2). Leaners were invited by making announcement at school assembly points. The main purpose for making announcements was to choose a central venue for meeting. Table 2 shows that learners that were included in the study were from fifteen (15) to eighteen (18) years of age. Table 2 shows that community leaders helped the researcher in identifying households. In conclusion, Table 2 shows that community leaders in Mucheke and Mushandike community were the most appropriate since they were in the selection committee of Basic Education Assistance Module beneficiaries so they had knowledge on the selection criteria and requirements the Basic Education Assistance Module programme.

Table 3 above shows the number of officials that were interviewed face to face in governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations. The researcher identified one official at the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, who then linked the researcher to other government officials and Non-Governmental Organisations that assist children in secondary schools. The researcher had appointments with government officials from various ministries. Appointments were crucial since some officials pointed out that they would be busy with work. Interviews were held with officials from the Ministry of Primary and secondary education, Ministry of Child Welfare and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The researcher was only able to interview officials from four (4) Non-Governmental Organisations as listed above. Interviews were held with officials from the Rural Unity for Development Organisation, Hope Tariro Trust, Capernaum Trust and the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations. The total number of Non-Governmental Organisation officials interviewed is presented above. Rural Unity for Development Organisation, National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, Hope Tariro Trust and Capernaum Trust were chosen because of their assistance programmes in secondary schools. In conclusion, the main aim of choosing the organisations in Table 3 above was to examine the overall strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities confronting the government and Non-Governmental Organisations in assisting secondary school learners.

Table 2. Parents, learners and community leaders

Secondary schools	Leaners	Parents and guardians	Community leaders	Total number of respondents
Mucheke community	8	8	2	18
Mushandike community	8	8	2	18
Total	16	16	4	36

Table 3. The number of NGOs and government officials

Government and non-governmental organizations	Name of non-governmental organization or ministry	Total number of respondents
Non-governmental organizations	Rural unity for development organization	1
	Hope Tariro trust	1
	Capernaum	1
	National association of non-governmental organizations	1
Government ministries	Ministry of primary and secondary education	2
	Ministry of child welfare	1
	Ministry of labor and social services	1
Total		8

Table 4. School authorities (teachers, school heads and bursar)

Secondary schools	Teachers	School heads	Bursar	Total number of respondents
Mucheke high school	1	1	1	3
Mushandike secondary school	2	1	-	3
Total	3	2	1	6

Table 5. Number of focus group discussions respondents

Category of focus groups	No. of males	No. of females	No. of beneficiaries	No. of non-beneficiaries	Total number of respondents
Mucheke high school (Focus Group 1)	4	4	5	3	8
Mushandike secondary school (Focus Group 2)	3	4	4	3	7
Total	7	8	9	6	15

Table 4 above shows the total number of secondary schools that were included in the study. It also shows the number of school authorities that were interviewed at Mucheke High School and Mushandike Secondary School. Teachers that were interviewed in the study included those who were teaching Ordinary Level learners. Table 4 shows that the researcher was able to interview one bursar at Mucheke High School. The bursar at Mushandike High School was unavailable during the period of the study. The researcher selected the secondary schools by putting pieces of paper with names of secondary schools written on them in a hat and picked two of them at random. Two schools were picked at random, that is Mucheke High school and Mushandike Secondary School that are both in Masvingo district. Mucheke High school is located in Masvingo town whilst Mushandike Secondary School is located in the rural areas of Masvingo district.

Focus Group Discussions

Table 5 above shows that the study included two (2) focus group discussions. Table 5 shows that focus group discussions comprised pupils from both schools that were included in the sample. Focus groups were used in this study for the major purpose of ensuring the reliability and validity of information obtained from face to face interviews with learners at Ordinary Level. Focus group discussions were a reliable data collection technique for obtaining in-depth information that gave a picture of how people viewed social assistance for secondary education in Zimbabwe. It also helped to bring out how social assistance is helping to reduce the rate of school dropouts.

Focus group discussions improved the reliability and validity of the study. Babbie (2010) is of the view that one of the advantages of focus group discussions is that they are flexible and cheap as compared to experiments. Focus groups have a disadvantage that some people tend to hide important information because they would be afraid of victimization. The researcher explained clearly that the research was strictly for academic purposes and no identity would be attached to their responses. This helped the respondents to feel free to express themselves on issues pertaining to social assistance and school dropouts. Respondents in the focus groups were homogeneous in that they were all learners at Ordinary Level. This helped in that the leaners had the same level of interaction and engagement. They were able to talk for themselves about issues that affected their education. The researcher was unable to carryout focus group discussions with parents and school authorities since they were busy. Focus groups were an advantage since they allowed leaners to speak comfortably and express themselves. In conclusion the respondents in the focus group discussions in Table 5 above formed part of the final sample.

Secondary Sources of Data

The study also used secondary sources of data to carry out the research. The research utilised information from online reports on the social assistance programmes in secondary schools. These include the Basic Education Assistance Module programme and the Non-Governmental Organisations programmes in Masvingo district. Secondary sources of data are based on information that was previously researched by other scholars. This helped the study to formulate hypotheses from previous researches. Reports from the Ministry of Labour and Social Services in Masvingo and various reports and journals on the provision of grants, food and nutrition to children in secondary education were also engaged in the study. These reports were used to augment the results that were obtained from the field.

The qualitative research approach was useful for the study because, it helped the researcher to recognize behaviours and attitudes such as facial expressions and non-verbal communication that might escape other studies that use experiments or surveys (Neuman, 2006). A research design is the blue print of how one intends to carry out the research (Mouton, 1996: 108). It is the format in which the researcher responds to a question or a set of questions. A research design helps the researcher to be able to link ideas and concepts to the actual evidence and experiences of people. According to Webb and Auriacomber (2006: 589) "a research design is a road map that allows the researcher to test the hypotheses or answers of his or her questions, taking into account the factors that the researcher's beliefs might affect the relationship between the dependant and the independent variables". The study used a descriptive technique in the sense that participants answered open ended questions. The descriptive technique was used to define social reality. A descriptive technique argues that before solutions to the problem are sought, one needs to know the existing problems on the ground (Webb and

Auriacomber, 2006: 586).The qualitative methodology helped in describing existing conditions of attitudes and perceptions of participants in examining the link between social assistance and the rate of girl child school dropouts in secondary schools. The study sought to establish perceptions of learners, parents, school authorities and community leaders towards social assistance of the girl-child in secondary schools. The author was unable to study the entire population and the study used a subset of the population to understand the human experiences in relation to girl child education and social assistance. The study covered two secondary schools in Masvingo district. These schools were chosen so as to come up with a comparative analysis. The study was methodically limited to purposive sampling and snowballing sampling technique in collecting data.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed according to themes that were found in the research findings. Data was presented using tables showing the total number of respondent's data. In this study, the data was arranged according to themes or main ideas on the causes of school dropouts that were found in the field. The main themes in this study were home related factors, inadequate social assistance, school related factors, unpredictable home environments financial problems and poverty and lastly drug or alcohol abuse. The research findings were also linked to the existing body of literature to compare and contrast the findings from the findings of others. The data was analysed using main themes from the research findings. These main themes helped in the formulation of ideas that addressed social assistance on secondary education in Zimbabwe.

Methodology Challenges

It was not easy to access the letter of permission from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary education of Zimbabwe. This was a disadvantage in that it was time consuming. Interviews could not be held with two organizations, namely Batanai HIV/AIDS Support Group and National Aids Council (NAC) because at the time of data collection the programme manager of Batanai HIV/AIDS Support Group was busy with workshops hence he was unavailable for interviews and the officials of NAC were unavailable since they were busy with workshops and fieldworks. As a result the researcher managed to hold interviews with only four Non-Governmental Organisation officials from Hope Tariro Trust, Rural Unity for Development Organisation, Capernaum and National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations. The researcher was not able to hold interviews with some teachers since they were busy with Ordinary Level examinations.

Ethical Considerations

The research obtained an ethical clearance certificate from the University of Fort Hare Ethics Committee. The researcher also obtained a letter of support from the Department of Development Studies at the University of Fort Hare. The researcher considered ethical issues as these helped as guidelines on the structure of the research. Ethical issues included acknowledgment of sources, issuing of consent forms to participants and the assurance of identity protection to the participants. The aspect of confidentiality was outlined during the interviews. Consent was sought from parents before carrying out interviews with their children. The researcher signed consent forms with parents and learners showing that they were willing to participate in the study. After getting consent from the parents the researcher went to schools on a set date and sought consent from school authorities and children before carrying out interviews. After getting the consent, the researcher was able to carry out interviews with children and school authorities. Ethical issues are a very important stage in a study because there is need protect the rights of the respondents. During the study, it was clearly explained that no names were going to be attached to the research since the study was purely academic. However, some parents and teachers would not understand why they had to sign consent forms. This proved to be a challenge in that some of the parents and teachers were not willing to take part in the research. Those that were unwilling to participate in the research were not forced to take part in the study. Replacements of those respondents that did not sign consent and confidentiality forms were made.

Discussion of Findings

Cultural Values

Respondents revealed that learners dropped out of school because of a variety of cultural beliefs that trivialise girl child education. Findings revealed that parents and guardians do not value girl child education because they believe that the girl child will eventually get married and will benefit the family she will be married off to. Participants revealed that the rate of girl child dropouts is more than that of the boy child with culture being the major cause of girl child dropouts. One of the parents at Mucheke community outlined that "*as parents we believe that girl child education is less important, this is simply what we believe*". One of the parents at Mushandike community affirmed that, "*it was better to send a male child to school because they are the ones that will become a father one day and provide for their families*". She also noted that the boy child will help them in future if he becomes successful. She said

she believed in the local belief that educating a boy child was likely to produce positive results in the future. Hence, it was better to invest in the education of a boy child. Three of the parents interviewed at Mushandike community held a different view. They said that they were not aware of girl child school dropouts in their area. A representative from Rural Unity for Development Organisation (a Non-Governmental Organisation) pointed out that the rate of girl child school dropouts was more than that of boys because the parents and guardian were trapped in the general belief that, "*a girl child is a care giver so she should stay home and look after children*". Participants intimated that girls were left in the homes to look after children, the elderly and the sick instead of attending school. This simply meant that more boy children were encouraged to enrol for secondary school education than girl children. In support of the above, an official from Hope Tariro Trust (a Non-Governmental Organisation), pointed out that "*girls dropout out of school because in the household the majority of parents prefer to pay school fees for the boy child than for a girl child*". The study revealed that parents and guardians, especially in the rural areas believed that girl child education was insignificant and the girl child is the first target to be withdrawn from school in times of crisis. It was outlined that few of the parents were enlightened but the majority of parents did not value girl child education. Participants in Masvingo town felt that in towns, people were civilized and they valued girl child education. They indicated that the affirmative action groups and the quota system have helped to enlighten parents on the importance of girl child education. The majority of teachers interviewed noted that most parents and guardians did not value girl children's secondary education because of cultural beliefs. A teacher at Mushandike Secondary School corroborated this by noting that, "*parents stop sending the girl child to school since they believe it's valueless to send a girl child to school*". Three government officials blamed culture as a problem that is increasing school dropouts in Masvingo district. It was noted that most of the uneducated parents did not value girl child education. One government official pointed out that "*some parents regard girl child education as an expense and waste of resources*". The respondents revealed that these cultural values affected the rural dwellers more than the urban dwellers. Two school teachers at Mucheke High School pointed out that the dropout rate between boys and girls is proportional. However, one of the school authorities stressed that the rate of girl child dropout is more than that of boys in school and all the three school authorities interviewed at Mushandike Secondary School revealed that the dropout rate for girls was notably higher than that of boys in Masvingo district. Furthermore, the participants said that the government should work hard to eliminate these destructive cultural practices and instil a shift of perceptions about girl children.

Teenage Pregnancies/Early Marriages/Prostitution

Jenjekwa (2013:562) notes that "in developing nations, girl children drop out of school because of marriage and unplanned pregnancies and boy children dropout to find employment as touts, informal money changers and gold panners". Grant *et al*. (2008: 369) collaborate this by stating that thirty per cent of female secondary school learners in KwaZulu Natal of South Africa who are between fifteen to eighteen years of age named unwanted teenage pregnancy as the primary reason for discontinuing with their studies. In this study, one hundred percent of respondents revealed that there are no Non-Governmental Organisations and government programmes that are tailor-made to specifically assist the girl child when it comes to unwanted pregnancies and/or prostitution. This proves that the girl child is being neglected by various organizations and social assistance is merely rhetorical. The view that girl child education is a waste of resources is increasing school dropouts in secondary education. The view strips school children of their human right to education and they end up deferring their studies. Moreover, there are additional dynamics of prostitution, teenage pregnancies and/or early marriages. Schools in Masvingo district do not allow pregnant learners to attend school, which means that if a girl becomes pregnant she is no longer regarded as a student and thus punished by expulsion. Simultaneously, pregnant girls are not allowed to attend school. They are forced to withdraw from school and most of them never return. This includes even those girls that fall pregnant because of rape. Grant *et al*. (2008: 379) notes that in South Africa, KwaZulu Natal, there is a ninety-five percent probability of a girl child not returning to school after a pregnancy related circumstance. This is in direct contrast to the human rights based approach, which advocates for the human right of every student to continue with their studies even if they get pregnant. In Zimbabwean secondary schools, if a girl child falls pregnant whilst in school, she is not allowed to continue with her studies even after delivery. This is totally against the girl children's human rights to education. Expelling a child who falls pregnant in school is a total violation of human rights; hence the expulsion of pregnant girl children from school is a direct violation of their right to education. The rate of girl children dropping out of secondary school is also exacerbated by sexual abuse which is perpetuated by older men who exchange sex for money, gifts and favours. These men are often given the term "*sugar daddies*", because of the money, gifts and favours that they offer young girls. Girls end up trapped with unwanted pregnancies and in most cases they get

sexually transmitted infections or the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is known that the laws that protect girls from abuse are weak because they inadvertently neglect girl children's rights. Therefore there is need to restructure the laws that protect girl children in order to minimize the number of girl children that drop out of school because of unwanted pregnancies and prostitution. The relevant stakeholders should also implement policies that ensure that men "*sugar daddies*" who impregnate school going girls will be dealt with harshly because they violate the children's rights to education.

Normative Values

The MISF (2011: 2) acknowledges that "in difficult times parents often choose to send boys to schools at the expense of the girl child". This simply implies that the number of male children enrolled will be more in secondary schools than female children. This is as a result of the apparent cultural and religious belief that hinders and discourages secondary education for girls. There is also a slow increase of girls enrolling in secondary education in spite of cultural preferences for boys because the government is partially assisting the girl child in the attainment of secondary education. The study reveals that female secondary education has always been greatly undermined and neglected. This is supported by Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014: 194) who argue that "in Zimbabwe, it is a tradition that girl child school dropout is higher than boys school dropout". This is supported by the evidence given by MISF (2011: 2) that the "dropout rate" is higher in primary and secondary schools among girl children than among boys". This is against the affirmative action which emphasises that female learners should be offered equitable and equal opportunities in school with their male counterparts. It is however still a challenge to have successful transformation without the rule of law and political will as the majority of the parents still hold the belief that the education of the girl child is less important. Liang (1996) echoes the same sentiments by stating that in Bangladesh cultural factors constrain schooling opportunities, especially at secondary level. Liang (1996: 1) points out that "educational attainment of women in Bangladesh is among the lowest in the world with twenty per cent (20%) of women being literate. Female literacy in Bangladesh is as low as fourteen per cent (14%) in rural areas". It is a complete violation of the human rights of female secondary school children hence there is need for laws that protect the girl child and political will to thwart these challenges that affect the girl child. Gender differences in secondary education were also apparent in Ghana where female enrolment in

schools was lower than that of their male counterparts. Ghana introduced the affirmative action in which they attempted to address gender equality between males and female students (Musingafi and Mafumbate, 2014). This is a clear revelation that the government needs to address the matter from grassroots levels by educating and enforcing laws that protect girl child education. In the case of Zimbabwe, the government is doing very little or nothing to protect its claim of education as a human right for the girl-child, especially in the rural areas. Respecting human rights are a fundamental step to reduce the increasing rate of school dropouts in Zimbabwe. This means that, with the denial of learners' rights, school dropouts will still continue to increase.

Unpredictable Home Environments

Unpredictable home environments refer to situations where learners are negatively affected at home forcing them to dropout of schools. These are obstacles that hinder learners from finishing their education cycle in time or force them to drop out of school completely. Circumstances of unpredictable home environments that were identified in this study are child labour and cultural beliefs as explained below:

Child Labour

Findings revealed that child labor was increasing the number of school dropouts among secondary school goers. Respondents revealed that parents and guardians use children for labor. Respondents revealed that parents use their children for family labour during the farming season. This means that parents and guardians depend on their children for free labour to put food on the table. Under such circumstances there is no free time for learners to concentrate on their school work. Child labor demotivates learners from going to school and this results in them skipping classes or dropping out of school completely. A student at Mushandike High School referred to labour at home as a "*discouraging situation*" as she is demotivated to continue coming to school. A senior teacher at Mushandike Secondary School supported this by saying that, "*parents use children for cheap labour in their irrigation schemes*". Children work for long hours and they end up absconding classes because they are encouraged to work in the fields at home. A parent in Mushandike community raised the same sentiments and said that, "*some of the parents make children work for long hours in the fields and this results in learners skipping classes for a long time*". This usually affects a leaner's performance in school and they end up giving up their studies before completing the education cycle.

Four Non-Governmental Organization officials noted that child labour was increasing school dropouts, especially in the rural areas. The findings revealed that child labour was more in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas. A representative from Hope Tariro Trust collaborated this by stating that "*some parents do not know the importance of education and because of that, during the farming season, children are stopped from coming to school with by parents because they have to go to the fields or herd cattle*". An official that works at National Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (the coordinator of Non-Governmental Organizations) supported this by saying that "*child headed families were a problem in that children had to work in the fields and go to school at the same time*". The researcher found that throughout the year, children have to work either as housemaids or cattle herders for the sustenance of the family. This reveals that when children go back to class they cannot grasp the concepts that they were taught hence they get poor results that may discourage them from going to school. Two (2) government officials also pointed out that child labour was problematic in the rural areas and was increasing the number of school dropouts. All the four (4) community leaders interviewed regarded child labour as a problem that is increasing school dropouts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study acknowledges that the rate of school dropouts in Zimbabwe is increasing despite the social assistance programmes designed to promote education. Education is a critical for children as it empowers them to take part in the development process and escape the chains of extreme poverty. The importance of education for girls is not only related to their human rights but also directly linked to broader issues of development and social justice. In a highly monetised economy like Zimbabwe, secondary education is a qualification required for one to go into the industry. However the girl child is the most disadvantaged due to traditional beliefs, unplanned teenage pregnancies and other normative values that are upheld in the communities. There is a strong need for reviewing current Zimbabwean school laws on the expulsion of pregnant girls from secondary schools. The expulsion is totally against the girl child's right to secondary education. While Non-Governmental Organisations are helping to reduce school drop outs in Masvingo by providing school uniforms, food and stationery in addition to school fees, their coverage is still very limited and it excludes the majority of deserving poor female learners. The study also affirms that as a result of the inadequacy of social assistance for the girl child, school dropouts are very high among the poor. In harsh economic times, girl children are vulnerable and their parents eventually resort to extreme coping mechanisms which involve withdrawing their children from school. The girl child is the first target since the majority of people do not value girl child education. Moreover, Non-Governmental Organisations and the private sector are doing very little to address the problems aligned to traditional beliefs that hinder girl children from pursing their education. For humanitarian organizations, this is against their claim of safeguarding human rights. The government needs to support and tighten laws that protect girls who are disadvantaged by culture. The majority of parents or guardians in the study believed that girl child education is less important and this mentality is driven by the cultural values and norms which are an obstacle to secondary school education for everyone. Education is a human right and everyone has a right to acquire education regardless of gender. Non-Governmental Organisations and government should work together to develop tailor-made programmes that can adequately tackle the rate of girl child dropouts in secondary school. There is need to raise awareness through campaigns and workshops that effectively educate children and the care givers on the significance of education for all. Secondary schools should not expel leaners from school because they have fallen pregnant and mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that those learners that get unwanted pregnancies during their studies are accorded an opportunity to complete their studies. The government must implement laws that protect girl children from unfair cultural practices. For that reason, there is need to educate parents about the importance of girl child education so that they can be actively involved in the education of their children without any bias.

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Author's Contributions

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Author David Mago: Assisted with data collection and data analysis, organising the reseach, proof reading and editing.

Ethics

There is need to correctly acknowledge source when citing the manuscript. The manuscript can be used for academic purposes only and may not be reproduced for other purposes.

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