

Identifying Factors that Influence Female Students' Dropout Rate in Senior Secondary Schools in Montserrado County, Liberia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the Factors that Influence the Dropout Rate of Female Students in Senior Secondary Schools in Montserrado County, Liberia. Four research questions are formulated to guide the study: to identify the extent to which poverty influence the dropout rates of girls in Senior Secondary schools, to examine how domestic labor affected female students' dropout rate in Senior Secondary Schools, to examine the extent to which parents' attitude influence female students' dropout rate in Senior Secondary Schools, and lastly to investigate how the community's perception of female education affect dropout rates in Senior Secondary schools. A descriptive research design was used to carry out the study. The sample consisted of 4 education officers, 40 students, 20 head teachers, 10 teachers, and 15 parents. The findings revealed that there were several factors that influenced the dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Montserrado County, ranging from early marriages, initiation rites, the attitudes of parents, and domestic labor. These factors were found to be overwhelming for the girl child.

The results also indicate that the school administrators use various methods in handling female students' dropout rate: guidance and counseling, recommendations for bursary fund fees forms, punishments involving parents in matters of student discipline, and mobilization of community members and well-wishers to pay for the disadvantaged girls in secondary schools. However, the administrators also agreed that more funding and support from the government and well-wishers were needed to reduce the dropout rate of the female students in secondary schools. It was found that poverty was another factor in paying school fees for female students in secondary schools.

Keywords: Identifying Factors, Influencing Female Students, Dropout Rate, Senior Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Educational attainment represents an important goal for youth to gain the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This will help them to upgrade the standard of living and social advancement, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. For these reasons, youths should have equal opportunity in education, as they are the most valuable asset for development and building a better Somalia.

Despite this fact, there is a problem of girls dropping out of school in Montserrado County, where the capital of Liberia is situated, where the research was conducted. The causes are related to the early traditional ways of thinking and accompanied by the financial groups of the current Liberia. In other words, the causes could also be classified into three segments, namely, Cultural factors, Social factors and Economical factors.

Culturally, Liberians believed that a woman is only half of a man, i.e., she is weak and less intelligent. That backward idea still prevails in the minds of some Liberians.

Interestingly, indigenous Liberian men influenced their daughters through advice that allowing females to go to school is a waste of time because they should be taught to only take care of their husbands and homes. Traditionally, “How can I say that my wife should be equal to me?” “I bought her from her father because I paid dowry,” **the men added.**

Socially, Liberians are less or very flexible, and they tend to stick to the old traditional values, often quoting that “Leaving a tradition will bring about God’s Wrath”.

Economically, most of the schools are in the hands of private people, and students pay huge unregulated fees in both Liberian Dollars and USD (LRD\$ 75,000 and USD\$400) per academic school year. Other private schools charge more than LRD\$ 100.00 and USD\$ 800. The private schools determine tuition and other fees without input from the National Government (NG) or the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Regrettably, many parents are unable to pay such huge money due to a poor economic situation. Therefore, many Liberian children remain out of school due to poverty. In Liberia, the government spends a small percentage of its resources on education; despite this effort, however, female dropouts in secondary education are high. Thus it is worth here to mention that Liberian is one of the countries in Africa where school enrolment for girls at primary school hardly reached 23% between 2005 and 2009 of the total admittance but the number seems to decrease further and now stands at below 12% as they transit from primary to secondary education (Ministry of Education 2011).

Tawand and Gordon (2004) in their study established that gender disparity continues to persist in certain areas, and this will cause a hindrance for girls to complete their education. Thus, they will eventually not compete with the boys not only in education but also for other socio-economic opportunities in their lives, as well.

Besides, there is an irony of the situation here. Literacy remains a major impediment in the development and well-being of women, according to the UNESCO Report (UNESCO, 2007). There is also a wide diversity of literature on how low socio-economic status, race, and gender cultural differences contribute to this gap in educational outcomes. This is because there have not been enough studies on gender differences within groups in Liberia (Auman, Johnson, 2014).

Furthermore, a high population of dropouts often has increased social service costs, more crimes, less civic participation, and higher levels of concentrated inter-generational poverty (Neild and Balfanz 2006). It is worth stating that the enrolment of students at secondary education has progressively increased from 800,000 in 2003 to 2,000,000 by the year 2013, i.e., an increase of nearly 49% (data from Information Management Education System). Despite this expansion, in secondary school education, the gravity of the matter is that this has not reduced the Female dropouts. The issue of female dropout has remained priority number one throughout Liberia in general, and particularly in Monrovia, Montserrado County.

In conclusion, this research study focused on the factors influencing female secondary school students’ dropouts in Montserrado County to find reasons, results, and remedies.

Demographic Profile of Liberia

Liberia is a West African country situated on the coast near the Gulf of Guinea and shares its borders with the following countries such as Sierra Leone, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast. The country's total surface area is 37,189 square miles (96,320 square kilometers), which ranks 108th in the world in terms of sheer size. Liberia has an estimated population of 4.94 million. This compares to the 2008 census population of 3.47 million. Of the official population, 1.1 million people lived in Montserrado County, the most populous county and home of Monrovia. The Greater Monrovia area is home to about 25% of Liberia's population. The next most populous region is Nimba County, with about 500,000 residents. Liberia has a population density of just 127 people per square mile, 49 people per square kilometer, which ranks 134th globally in

terms of population density (Countrymeters.info, 2019). Liberia has 16 indigenous ethnic groups and several foreign minorities, but English is the national language. 95% of the population are indigenous people. The sixteen (16) ethnic groups include The Gio (or Dan), Mano, Bassa, Kpelle, Grebo, Vai, Gola, Kru, Krahn, Mandingo, Fante, Dei (or Dewoin), Bella, Mende, Loma, and the Americo-Liberians or Congo people (Countrymeters.info, 2019). Table 1 below shows the country's basic demographic profile, including population estimates for 2019, based on the latest United Nations Data (Countrymeters.info, 2019).

Table 1: Population Estimated for Liberia

Projected population for 2019	50,28,892
Total area	111,370 km ² (43,000 mi ²)
Population density	45.2 per km ² (117.0 people/mi ²)
Sex ratio	1.10 (2,528,061 men to 2,501,149 women)
Median age	18.6 years
Life expectancy (2016)	57.0 years (55.4 - men, 58.6 - women)
Literacy rate	47.60%

Note: Based on the latest United Nations Data, Source: Population data for every country as of 2018. Available at <http://countrymeters.info/en/> [Accessed 24 Oct. 2019].

Statement of the problem

The School, being the cradle of a child's development, provides the Child with emotional and educational support. In secondary education, a large number of students who enroll in form one do not complete the four-year secondary cycle. This is the problem that the rural Montserrado region witnesses in Montserrado County's Secondary Schools.

There are twenty-six (26) Educational Districts in Montserrado County. The study was carried out in Montserrado County, which is where the capital city, Monrovia, is located. It is the most densely populated region in the country. It consists of 26 educational districts. It has the highest number of secondary schools in Liberia. People from different clans and different socioeconomic statuses reside there.

Furthermore, the inhabitants of each of the other regions are from one or two clans. For these reasons, Montserrado County was considered to be suitable for this study. It is the problem of dropouts of mostly girls, who leave their secondary schooling for some reasons.

First, Poverty could be one of the reasons, because parents may be unable to find the school fees required, and other educational items needed.

Second, sex and early marriage may be contributing to girls' dropouts. Some may even be eloping with their lovers for adventure and sex satisfaction. Despite the government's efforts through the Ministry of Education (MOE) to disburse bursaries and constituency development allocations every year, some of these efforts have not borne fruit. The Ministry of Education launched in 1999 a huge project, which is called "Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), which was intended to curtail dropout. This initiative is meant to increase the chances of girls remaining in school to gain an education and prevent them from dropping out.

The Liberian Constitution does not have any policy outlawing early marriage because of the traditional beliefs. Therefore, no matter what happens when two parents agree to wed their children, the government cannot do anything. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other local women NGOs and organizations are campaigning to sensitize society to stop the practice of early marriage, but this is not gaining ground yet. The government has also come in with rehabilitation and reconstruction strategies. However, there is no data on the progress being made on this initiative, hence the study.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to determine the factors influencing female students' dropout rates in Secondary schools in Montserrado County.

Objectives of the study

The following were the objectives of the study;

1. To examine the extent to which poverty influences the dropout rates of girls in senior secondary schools in Montserrado County, Liberia.
2. To examine the effects of domestic labor on the female dropout rate in senior secondary schools in Montserrado County, Liberia.
3. To assess the influence of parents' attitudes towards female education on dropout rates in secondary education in Montserrado County, Liberia.
4. To determine the influence of school punishments on dropout rates among female students in secondary schools in Montserrado County, Liberia.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. To what extent does poverty influence the dropout rates of girls in senior secondary schools in Montserrado County, Liberia?
2. How does domestic labor effect of female dropout rate in senior secondary schools in Montserrado County, Liberia?
3. To what extent does parental attitude influence female education on dropout rates in secondary education in Montserrado County, Liberia?
4. How does the community's perception of female education on dropout rates in senior secondary schools in Montserrado County, Liberia?

Significance of the Study

The study was intended to be of value to various groups in the following ways. They are:

The study findings may be used to impress upon political and community opinion leaders to campaign for female education in Montserrado County and the entire Liberia. The findings will guide educational officers who are currently operating in Montserrado County to initiate strategies in targeting the retention of female students in school. It is anticipated that the study findings may provide information to the policy-makers on how to plan for enrollment of female students in secondary schools.

The findings may also help policy-makers and educational stakeholders through the documented level of female dropouts by regions to come up with policies to mitigate the challenges facing female students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This Section emphasizes that the literature is relevant to the study. Attempts are also made to identify the gaps in the existing literature that this study is meant to address. It is presented to depict the study variables highlighted in the specific objectives, which include the causes of dropouts: poverty, domestic labor, attitude of parents, and social effects. Areas covered in the literature review that are relevant to the study include the following: Advantages of Educating Girls, Early marriages and dropout of girls in secondary schools, Attitudes of parents towards secondary school education for girls, Domestic labor and the dropout of girls in

secondary schools, Roles in society and how they affect the dropout of girls in secondary schools, Poverty and its impact on the dropout of girls in secondary schools.

Effects of Girls' Education on Socio-economic Development

Research has shown that providing women with education improves nutritional values, proper hygiene, and management of households (World Bank, 2001). Female education therefore leads to improved health and education, reduced infant mortality rates, higher earnings, reduced fertility rate, and improved quality of life for Nations (King and Hill, 1993). Education changes women's attitude towards their roles in both the household and the workplace. It gives them a wider range of options for economic activities (Zhan and Sherraden, 2003).

Despite the benefits resulting from female education, most developing countries are still at the level of analyzing their situations and trying to develop programs which address the problems of improving female education (Wang, 2003). The government of Somalia and other partners in education development are committed to providing access to education for Somalis. Stakeholders are looking for viable cost cost-effective, and sustainable strategies, which would enhance the development of education in the country (Weerdt, 2006). There is documented evidence that female education is one of the most important forces of development (UNESCO, 2007). While it is important to educate both females and males, Forum for Africa Women Educationists (FAWE, 2010) enumerates many reasons in favor of educating the girl child.

These are:

Educating girls is a basic human right, educating girls promotes gender equity Educating girls is a better investment than boy's education because it has the highest return investment in the developing Countries; it has multiple effects, and empowers women to bring about other necessary changes like smaller family size, increased income, and non-profit productivity. Although it is agreed that educating females brings more benefits to society than educating males, more males and especially in less industrialized economies of Africa, continue to go to school and work their way up there (Yambo, Kindiki, and Tuitoek, 2012).

To put it, women who constitute half of humankind unfortunately form 2/3 of the world's illiterates (USAID, 2004). In Africa, 64% of illiterates are women (UNESCO, 2007). In Liberia, there is no exact percentage of Female illiterates. Most Societies worldwide prefer to educate boys over girls, and this is particularly so for poor families.

Importantly, education is considered by the United Nations as a basic human right inscribed into its laws in 1948 and is the instrument used for achieving social equality and higher economic growth (UNICEF, 1992). Governments use education as a tool for fighting ignorance, poverty, and disease. It is a vital factor for socio-economic developments (Todaro, 1982). In this case, it is therefore used as a means for training and producing human resources needed to manage the economic, social, and political sectors of the country. There has been an increased investment in education.

Therefore, higher enrolment has increased the Gross National Product as well as the total education budget by the sponsors' funding education in both Primary & Secondary Schools. The GNP in developing countries rose from 2.3% in 1960 to 4.5% in 1984 (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985).

Although literature review has some variations on the role of education, most scholars agree that educational institutions impart knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes which are essential for the preservation and continuity of life in society. It is a means of enhancing social development (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). It has also been realized that economic implication in education leads to higher output, higher wages, changes in distribution of earned income between the rich and the poor, and leads to economic mobility (Schultz, 1989), Colcolough and Lewin, 1993; and (Thurow:-1997). However, the level of education, which leads to maximizing the above-stated effect, was not indicated.

Some economic and sociological theories reveal that education increases females' participation in the labor force. As such, education changes their attitudes towards their role in the household and the workplace (Mincer, 1962). It gives them openings for a wider range of options in economic activities. The skills they obtain through education give them the ability and potential to participate in various developmental activities and related vocational programs.

In continuance, a study in India revealed that infants of illiterate women in rural areas had a mortality rate more than double that of infants whose mothers had at least basic primary education (Caldwell, 1977). Literate mothers make better use of scarce resources for their children's welfare than do illiterate mothers with higher income (Floro and Wolf, 1990). It has also been established that female education delays marriages, lowers fertility rates, and results in smaller family size (Herz, 1991).

To digress, females with more education increase the desire to have more children enroll in schools for education. (Behrman, 1990) and (Lavy, 1992) revealed that parental schooling promotes children's schooling. Education also increases farm productivity by giving females access to agricultural and co-operative training, contact with agricultural extension workers, implementation of new farming ideas, and use of existing facilities (Floro and Wolf, 1990). Therefore, Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs), UNESCO, and Forum for African Women Education (FAWE) have been in the forefront agitating for the promotion of female education and empowerment (UNESCO, 1995). Conferences like the ones held in Jomtien, in Thailand 1990 and the Pan African Conferences on the Education of Girls held in Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso in April 1993 adopted measures aimed at reducing gender disparities in education.

Abagi (1995) asserted that school participation of girls in parts of the world, and particularly in the African region, still lags. The inequality between boys and girls, women and men in the field of education and consequent employment, in politics, and socio-economic life is very significant and hence creates debate among educationists, researchers, and gender lobby groups. A study carried out by UNESCO (UNESCO:1989) in the Asian-Pacific region found that illiteracy remains a major impediment to the development and well-being of women in the region, where nearly 63.2% of the world's illiterate women live. Gender discrimination in education started in the colonial days when the colonial governments introduced policies which discriminated against women (Mbilinyi and Mbughuni, 19991). With the attainment of independence in many African countries, gender discrimination persisted at all levels of education despite the government's social policies.

A further study by Weerdt (2006) revealed that ignorance and poverty hamper the education of females. The majority of girls engage in household chores, particularly in African countries. A practice that must change the following provision of equal opportunities for all in the field of education: They should be engaged in productive and wage-earning activities as a powerful ally in the eradication of poverty worldwide. For some decades now, the global labor market has been recruiting not based on citizenship but on qualifications, competence, and suitability to the particular job.

In this market, Liberian women are victims of the gender discrimination experienced by their sisters elsewhere. Men are preferred even in cases where women may be equally or more qualified. This type of discrimination discourages females from acquiring higher education levels.

The United Nations Report of 2004 claimed that girls have very little education, to enter, remain, and complete education following a complicated interactive process of structural, cultural, and personal factors that make the school wastage rate for girls higher than for boys. This therefore calls for research into the effects of the high dropout rate of girls for secondary education in the Somalian education system so that appropriate measures can be taken to deal with this challenge of girl child learning.

Liberia is one of the Countries in Africa where school enrolment for girls at Primary Schools is higher, and decreases as they ascend to Secondary Schools. This pattern of the reduction of the girl-child needs to be investigated as they proceed to higher learning institutions so that the appropriate solution can be put in place

to address the challenges of the retention of girl child in Secondary Schools in Montserrado County in particular and Liberia at large.

Influence of Parental Attitudes on Girls Education

The attitude of parents towards the education of their children is an important determinant of the retention of girls in Secondary Schools. Illustrations of the parental attitudes on their children's education are discussed below.

A study carried out by Juma (1994) in Kwale and Taita Taveta districts in Kenya revealed that enrolment of girls in schools is lower than that of boys. Generally, most households have a negative attitude towards the education of girls. This impedes the education of girls (Ballara, 1992). Mothers favor the education of male children because they provide for them old age insurance. Male education is therefore seen as insurance for old age (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985).

Eshiwani (1993) supported this view and stated that parents invest in schooling for boys who are believed to retain and provide continuity of their roles and responsibilities to the family.

Sohoni (1995) asserted that the son is a potential and permanent source of income. In families where there is no protective cover of social security and pension provision, the son is the only protection parents have against poverty, old age, and other disabling circumstances. That is why they are preferred for education.

Okoja (2000), a Nigerian researcher, found out that many poor and large families preferred to educate boys for family continuity, headship of household and property inheritance, since girls marry off and go away from home. This is a general trend in most communities in our Republic. Men carry out most commercial activities. This is why males are preferred for education (UNESCO & UNICEF, 2001). Girls are seen as a source of productive labour force of another household when they marry off, while men, on the other hand, are given maximum training to attain a higher status as heads of Female African women. It is therefore very important to educate both boys and girls and practice affirmative action to protect the girl child and give equal opportunities for both children as required by the child rights.

Domestic Labor and Dropout Rate of Girls in Secondary Schools

In the African traditional setup up domestic labor is an activity for females in the family.

Sohoni (2005), UNICEF (2002), Crystyna (2004), Malenche (2006), and Hertz (2006) concurred that domestic gender roles for girls are numerous and they do not give them 16opportunities to go to school. The cultural arrangement that puts man as the head of the household complicates the matter more by giving him the power to decide who goes to school and who remains at home. Consequently, the device of the decision would be for the girl to remain at home while the boys go to school.

Mullopo (1988) stated that sexual division of labor meant that mothers had to rely on their daughters' labor. It is therefore very important for this domestic labor to be shared between the boys and girls in the family setup so that the girl child is not overburdened. The girls should also be given opportunities to study as boys and the study time to be balanced between them. The child rights also require that the students be given equal opportunities, and the issues of traditions of negativity towards girls and favoring boys should be avoided as much as possible.

Role of Society on Dropout Rate in Secondary Schools

The roles that individual members of Society perform are crucial determinants of whether one stays in school or not.

Mulopo (2000) asserted that sex roles, expectations of the African society, initiated sex imbalance in school and careers, since a girl's role was defined such that she would only be a mother, housewife, or home keeper.

The roles, at best, would only require a minimum level of education or none at all. He confirms this assertion by stating that sexual division of labor meant that mothers had to rely on their daughters' labour for household duties.

Michnik (1976) concurs with Mulopo (2000) and concludes that the opportunity cost of sending a daughter to school is very high. This therefore results in lower enrolment for girls in secondary school education.

Since gender roles for girls are many and continuous, girls have to work longer hours as their mothers, as opposed to boys, who have fewer gender related roles, which keep them busy through entertainment or loitering. This fact limits the opportunity of girls to access and complete their education as compared with boys (Onyango, 2003).

Globally, things have changed, and both boys and girls should be treated equally. Boys should cook in the kitchen and girls should slash the bushy compounds. Both boys and girls should be trained to take care of the households in Society. The mothers should not see girls as kitchen-oriented and the boys to be playing football in the field. That is why world sports have introduced men football and the female one too. Roles in Society should be shared equally by both sexes.

Impacts of Poverty on the Dropout Rate of Girls

When resources are scarce in a family, the option would be for the education of the boys to be granted and not for girls. In polygamous homes with many children, it follows that the education for girls suffers, Abagi (1996). Daily Nation of 14th March 2012 revealed that though parents are expected to meet more than 80% of their children's education, many cannot afford it due to poverty. In his investigation of factors responsible for the maintenance of gender disparity in higher education, Kasinte (2006) revealed that a family's financial capacity dictates who should be taken to school, and the preference is always the boys. He concurs with Abagi and asserts that when the resources are inadequate to educate both boys and girls, it is the girls who drop out of school to leave room for the boys to continue with their education. This is because it is viewed that the social benefits derived from female education are not likely to have much impact on family decisions (Onyango, 2003).

Because of this, Poverty disarranges the living standards and schooling of girls. It is worth noting, therefore, that both boys and girls are the same and both of them need education. Even if there is low income in a family, the resources should be shared equally so that both sexes get equal education. The retention of girls in Secondary School should not be interfered with in the name of promoting the boys' education. The girl child education is very important because retention of girls in Secondary Schools improves their quality of education, and this ensures that their dropout from Schools is checked to maintain their education cycle.

Summary of the Literature Review

The literature review given in this Section has revealed that several factors influence the dropout of girls at the secondary level of education. Many communities in Africa prefer giving better and higher education to boys than girls, particularly in the lower socio-economic class of people. Research studies that have been done show marked generalization and some weaknesses in the dropout of girls. The research study will reveal the actual factors on the ground of dropout of girls in secondary schools in Liberia.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This outlines the methodology used to collect data for this study. The chapter presents the research design, target population of the study, sample size, and sampling procedures. It also presents data collection methods and data collection instruments, data analysis, and presentation methods.

Research Design

Research design is a plan for carrying out a research project (Gay, 1993; Amin, 2005). The study used a descriptive survey design to obtain information about the causes and effects of girls' dropouts from secondary schools located at the Benadir region. The design of the study was a descriptive survey. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) and Gatima (2001) note that descriptive survey attempts to measure the "status quo" without questioning why it exists. According to Mugenda and Mugenda, the aim of a survey is to obtain information about the existing phenomena by asking individuals about their perception, attitude, behavior, or values.

The study mainly employed qualitative approaches to data collection, analysis, and presentation. However, quantitative data was also collected, where it seemed appropriate, as data could be quantified, analyzed, and then presented in a quantitative format.

Target Population

Given that the individual respondents are the unit of analysis in this study, the study population comprises all key informants in Mogadishu who provide credible information about the issue at hand. The individuals targeted by the study were:

10 Educational officers, 404 Principals, 5504 Teachers, 186804 Students, and 35 Parents. These groups of individuals were targeted on the understanding that they possessed the information that would help the researcher to collect credible data required for the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Focusing on the nature of the study, respondents were selected purposefully, on the understanding that they were in a position to give the required data. For that matter, purposive sampling was used to identify the groups of individuals to be sampled for the study. Table 3.1 shows the respondents selected for this study and how they were selected

Table 3.1: Sampling framework

Category	Target No.	No. Selected	%	Sampling Technique
Education Officers	10	4	40	Interview
Head teachers	404	20	4.95	Questionnaire
Teachers	5504	10	0.18	Questionnaire
Students	186804	40	0.02	Questionnaire
Parents	35	17	48.5	Interview
Total	192757	91	93.6	

Ministry of Education officers are involved because this particular ministry is the one responsible of educational policy. Five officials from the Ministry of Education and 10 School Principals were sampled to participate in the study because they had first-hand information (Primary data) about girls' dropouts and their effects upon various groups. Besides, 50 teachers, 60 students, and 17 parents were also selected as respondents in the study.

In total, out of 235 respondents eligible for the study, the researcher was able to collect data from 142 respondents, being 60.4% of the target group. It was assumed that a low rate of response would not entirely compromise the validity and reliability of the study because respondents were purposively selected and had the requisite information for the study. Given the nature of the study, probability sampling was not deemed appropriate (Yin, 1994). Secondly, the massive quantity of qualitative data would be a problem during data analysis (Eisenhard, 1994).

Data Collection Instrument

Data was collected from varied sources using interviews, direct observation, and documentary analysis. An in-depth interview was held with respondents because, according to Gay (1994), they could respond to probing questions appropriately, which allows flexibility not only in asking, but also in getting in-depth information from respondents. This allowed the researcher to get detailed data that contained examples of events as they occurred in day-to-day lives in schools. The researcher also observed the problem from different angles to assess the extent of damage inflicted on girl dropouts and their parent, with consideration of the school managers and the 24 community. This instrument helped to verify the data obtained from other sources. Where possible, the researcher obtained documentary evidence to cross-check data obtained from the interviews. Available literature in documents, textbooks, and online sources also helped the researcher to focus on the issue at hand.

Validity of the Study Instruments

The researcher worked closely with advisors during the instrument construction process. All materials constructed were forwarded to the supervisors for checking. After several attempts and revisions, the instruments were deemed valid and admissible.

Reliability of the instrument

According to Kumar (2005), a research instrument is reliable if repeated measurements under similar conditions give the same results. To test the reliability of the instrument, the test-retest method of reliability was employed in the study during the pilot study. This involved administering the same instrument twice to the same group of subjects with a time lapse between the first and second test of two weeks.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), a coefficient of 0.80 or more simply showed that there is high reliability of data. The data collected in the two sessions were then correlated using the Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient formula. The value of 0.78 was obtained deeming the instruments reliable.

Data Collection Procedure

After receiving approval from the University of Liberia, the researcher approached the Ministry of Education in Montserrado County to be allowed to carry out the study. The 25 potential respondents were notified and permission sought from them before commencement of data collection. Permit from the existing educational networks working now in Montserrado County, authorizing them to collect data from the private secondary schools in the region, was also sought.

The principals of schools were also informed and asked for consent to allow the researcher to carry out the study in their schools. The researcher used a tape recorder during the interviews to capture all the data. This enabled him to stay focused and ask questions for clarification, and make notes later so that he did not miss out on anything during the interview. Additional data was obtained from various other sources, including newspaper records and school records.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ethically conducted this study: First, before the study, the respondents were informed of their rights and those who participated in the study did so, on their own free will, principle of confidentiality on the identity of the respondents was uphold by making sure that the identity of the respondents were not revealed, finally, the researcher made sure that no physical or psychological harm was inflicted on the respondents during the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative data were edited for completeness and organized according to the theme of causes of girl dropout due to: poverty, domestic labor, parent attitude, and social factors. Hence, the data is translated following the three research questions, giving meaning to the themes as they emerged from a massive qualitative narrative obtained from the multitude of respondents. From that point, data from different sources is compared to confirm or disconfirm the emergent themes.

Finally, the data is then presented quantitatively, i.e., in the form of tables by using SPSS and qualitatively in the form of narratives in accordance to the study objectives.

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. The data was collected from eight mixed secondary Schools. The results are presented and discussed by the research objectives that guided this study, which are:

- To assess the influence of parents' attitudes on female education on dropout rates in secondary education
- To examine the extent to which poverty influences the dropout rates of girls in Secondary schools
- To examine the effects of domestic labor on the female dropout rate in Secondary Schools 4. To determine the influence of school punishments on dropout rates among female students in secondary schools.

Instrument response rate

Out of 10 officers approached, 5 agreed to participate in the study, making a 50% rate. The researcher held interviews with the five officers, and the data obtained from these experts was quite enriching for the task. All ten principals were interviewed, making a 100% response rate, and out of 80 teachers identified, only 20 participated in the study to share their understanding and experience on the subject during their tenure as teachers, giving a 25% response rate. Seventeen parents whom the researcher selected were all interviewed in their homes, which gave a 100% response.

Demographic information

The frequencies in section A of the background information were summed up according to the demographic representation and then converted to percentages. The data was collected on the causes of dropouts, in section B, the parents' attitudes in section C, the roles in the Society and domestic labor in section D, and the influence of poverty on the girl child dropout in section E. These data are presented in the order of the most prevalent to the least prevalent.

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to tabulate the results from which the analysis was done. Generally, the data obtained were presented using frequency distribution tables and percentages. The following are the different responses generated by the study. On the type of school, data revealed that all the schools visited were mixed. The respondents were asked to indicate their gender, and the data from the field on this item is summed up in Table 4.1

Table 4.1: Gender of The Teachers

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	33	82.5
Female	7	17.5
Total	40	100.0

From table 4.1, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents (teachers) were male at 82.5%, and all 22 head teachers. This is not a good trend for the girl child who is likely to lack a role model.

Table 4.2: Teaching Experience of The Head Teachers

# of Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0-5 years	5	22.7	22.7	22.7
5-10 years	15	68.2	68.2	90.9
10-15 years	2	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	22	100.0	100.0	

The information in Table 4.2 shows that the head teachers had enough teaching experience to guide the schools to prosperity. The majority of the head teachers, 15 (68.2%) had teaching experience of between 5 to 10 years teaching experience. Therefore, the population of the head teachers with 5 years or more teaching experience was 19 (77.3%).

Table 4.3: Head Teachers' Professional Qualifications

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Diploma	3	13.6	13.6
Graduate	7	31.8	45.5
Post graduate	12	54.5	100.0
Total	22	100.0	100.0

The information in Table 4.3 indicates that 19 (86.3%) of the respondents were holders of either a first degree or second degree, with those with a bachelor's degree being 13.6%, and 54.5% of the respondents had completed a master's degree program. This implies that all the head teachers had university degrees as their minimum qualifications.

Table 4.5: Age of Head Teachers

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-30	8	36.4	36.4
30-40	11	50.0	86.4
40-50	3	13.6	100.0
Total	22	100.0	100.0

Table 4.5 shows that half of the head teachers 11, 50%) were aged between 30-40. This data, combined with that of the teachers in Table 4.2, indicates we have a youthful team of teachers who should be energetic and enthusiastic to teach. This should be reflected in the students' performance and school attendance.

Table 4.10: Teachers' Opinion on The Reasons for Girls Dropping Out From Secondary Schools

	Frequency	Percent
Early married	4	10.0
Low girls' academic performance	36	90.0
Total	40	100.0

The data in Table 4.10 describes the respondents' opinions towards the reasons for the girls who drop out of secondary schools. The data indicate that the majority of the 35 respondents 36, 90%) felt that girls drop out of school due to low academic performance. However, this assertion was contradicted by the head teachers as seen in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Head Teachers' Opinion on Early Marriages' Effect on Students' Dropout Rates

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	16	72.7	72.7
No	6	27.3	100.0
Total	22	100.0	

As the data in Table 4.11 indicates, the majority of the head teachers 16, 72.7%) felt that the early marriages affected students' participation in school. The head teachers gave various reasons for the practice. The data on this concern is in Table 4.12

Table 4.12: The Reasons for Students' Dropping Out Due to Early Marriage

Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Finance	14	63.6
Low girls' academic performance	2	9.1
Socio-cultural	6	27.3
Total	22	100.0

In Table 4.12, the majority of the respondents, 14 (63.6%), indicated that finance is the major factor that causes early marriage. Even though poverty may be the cause of financial challenges facing the students, the attitude of parents towards the education of their daughters may also be playing a role.

The first objective of the study was to establish how parents' attitudes affected dropout rates of girls from secondary school education.

The general attitude of the parents can be measured through many indicators, among them is the willingness to pay fees, attend school functions, give support to the children, and so forth. The data on these factors is reported in Tables 4.12 to 4.13

Table 4.13: Head Teachers' Opinion on The General Attitude of Parents Towards the School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
They are satisfied	11	50.0	52.4	52.4
Not sure	10	45.5	47.6	100.0
Total	21	95.5	100.0	

The head teachers' response indicated in table 4.13 shows that half of the head teachers were satisfied with the attitude of the parents to towards the school. It was important to capture the opinion of the teachers on

how often parents visited schools to discuss the academic performance of their children. From the data gathered, it is found that all the teachers 100% indicated that parents visited schools regularly (monthly) to follow up on the performance of their children. This is a very good indication that the parents are keen on following the academics of their children. It became necessary to find out how parents responded whenever called upon to attend meetings in the school. The data collected from the head teachers is presented in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14: Frequency of Parents to Attend School Meetings to Discuss Their Daughters' Performance

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Fortnightly	7	31.8	31.8	31.8
Monthly	4	18.2	18.2	50.0
Per Term	9	40.9	40.9	90.9
Per Year	2	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	22	100.0	100.0	

The above table 4.14 indicates that the parents most discuss their daughter's performance per term is 9(40.9%), 7(31.8%) for fortnightly, 4(18.2%), and finally yearly 2(9.1%).

We can understand that the parents have not had much more discussion about their daughter's performance.

Table 4.16: Head Teachers' Response on The Parents' Willingness to Visit School When They Are Invited

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	16	72.7	72.7
No	6	27.3	100.0
Total	22	100.0	

The above table 4.16 shows that the majority of the head teachers 16, 72.7%) were of the opinion that parents do respond positively when invited to school meetings. Attitude can further be examined from the willingness of the parents to support their daughters materially. This information was captured from both teachers and head teachers and tabulated in the following tables.

Table 4.17: Teachers' Opinion on the Parents' Support with Personal Effects for Their Children to Use in School

Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	35	87.5
No	5	100.0
Total	40	100.0

The majority of the teachers, 35 (87.5%), felt that parents provided their children with the necessary personal effects to use in school. The kind of support demonstrated by the parents to make their children comfortable in school is a sign of a positive attitude towards the education of their daughters.

Table 4.19: Head Teachers' Opinion on The Parents' Provision of The Necessary Learning Materials of Their Daughters as Required by The Administration.

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	14	63.6	63.6
No	8	36.4	100.0
Total	22	100.0	

The majority of the head teachers, 14 (63.6%) thought that parents indeed provided the necessary learning materials for their daughters as required by the administration.

However, providing materials is one thing, but providing enough is another. It was therefore necessary to determine whether, in their opinion, the teachers and head teachers felt that the supplies were adequate. Data on this is captured in Table 4.20.

Table 4.25: Persons Responsible for Paying School Fees

Frequency		Percent	Cumulative Percent
Guardian	8	20.0	20.0
Parents	32	80.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

The opinions of the teachers, as reported in Table 4.25, are that the majority of them, 32 (80%), said that the parents who pay. This information, however, was contradicted by the head teachers as seen in Table 4.27.

Table 4.27: Information on Whether Girls Are Sent Home For School Fees

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	33	82.5	82.5
No	7	17.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

Data in table 4.27 indicates that the majority of the teachers, 33 (82.5%), confirmed that girls are sent home for fees. This information was collated with that from the head teachers as shown in Table 4.29.

Table 4.29: Response on the Students Who Are Sent For Fees if they Came Back to School

Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	12	54.5	54.5
No	10	45.5	100.0
Total	22	100.0	

The above table 4.29 indicates that the majority of the head teachers, 12 (54.5%), said that the students do come back with at least enough fees to keep them in school. This was confirmed by the teachers, who 90% indicated that students came back to school once they were sent for fees. Only 10% said that they were delayed in coming back, and even never came back at all. However, of those who do not get fees, 54.5% of the head teachers said they never returned to school, whereas 40.9% said that the students came back later, and one head teacher did not respond.

The feelings of the teachers were also collected on whether students were willing to come back to school once they had dropped out. The information is presented in Table 4.30.

Table 4.30: Feelings of Teachers on Whether Students Came Back to School After Dropping Out

	Frequency	Percent
Want to go back to school	4	10.0
Do not want to go back to school	32	80.0
Feel bitter and dejected	4	10.0
Total	40	100.0

The information in Table 4.30 describes the respondents' opinion on the feelings of the students who dropped out of the school willing to seek readmission. The majority of the students, 32 (80%), will not want to go back to school if they drop out. The observation on those who did not come back in time to continue with studies posed a challenge. The majority of them, as opined by the teachers, had difficulties coping with school work, hence eventually dropping out. The findings confirm that poverty is a crucial factor in the dropout rate of girls from school. The girls from a poor economic background do drop out of school due to non-payment of school fees.

Table 4.35: Effect of Domestic Labor on Students' Drop Out Rates

Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	13	59.1	59.1	59.1
No	9	40.9	40.9	81.8
				100.0
Total	22	100.0	100.0	

Based on data in Table 4.35, the majority of the head teachers, 13 (59.1%), indicated that some students dropped out of school because of domestic labor at home. The cases were more among the orphans as shown in Table 4.39.

Table 4.39: Response From The Head Teachers to Whether Students Are Ever Punished When They Make Mistakes

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	24	58.5	60.0
No	16	39.0	100.0
Total	40	97.6	
System	1	2.4	

About the data from the teachers in Table 4.39, 24 (58.5%) confirmed that students are indeed punished when they make mistakes. As such, there is no real punishment. It was important to establish the kinds of punishments given to the students. Data on this is presented in Table 4.40

Table 4.40: Type of Punishments Administered as Per The Head Teacher's Response

Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Corporal	13	59.1	65.0	65.0
Light	7	31.8	35.0	100.0
Manual	14	63.6	66.7	66.7
Total	20	90.9	100.0	
System	2	9.1		

The data from the head teachers in Table 4.40 indicates that 14 (63.6%) of them used manual punishment in their schools. The punishment was strictly administered by the head teachers as the teachers watched. This was stated by the majority of the head teachers, 72.7%, and only 27.3% indicated that the teachers are involved in punishing students by corporal punishment. This was confirmed by 61% of the teachers who indicated that they only watched as head teachers applied the punishment, 36.6% said they participated, whereas 2.4% did not respond.

Table 4.42: Teachers' Opinions on Punishments Causing Students' Dropout

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	9	22.0	22.5	22.5
No	31	75.6	77.5	100.0
Total	40	97.6	100.0	
System	1	2.4		

The data table 4.42 shows that the majority of the teachers, 31 (75.6%) thought that the punishment did not affect the girls' dropout rates. However, the head teachers differed with the teachers on this. The majority of the head teachers 13, 59.1%) stated that the students dropped out as a result of the punishments, with only 40.9% stating otherwise.

This may be explained since not all teachers would know the reasons for students dropping out or to follow up cases of indiscipline; we shall go by the opinion of the head teachers on this item. The researcher also wanted to know if guidance and counseling are provided in the students whenever they get involved in indiscipline cases. Data on this is captured in Table 4.43.

Table 4.43: Involvement of Guidance And Counseling Committee in Student Discipline

Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent
They punish students	6	14.6	15.0
They help the needy students	34	82.9	100.0
Total	40	97.6	
System	1	2.4	

From the data in Table 4.43, the majority of the teachers, 34 (82.9%), said that they only helped needy students, not in the punishing of students.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study concerning the factors that influence the dropout rates of female students in secondary schools in Montserrado County. It also presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study and hence gives suggestions for further research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influence the dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Montserrado County of Liberia. The study identified the gaps that paved the way for the recommendations of intervention measures that would improve the dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Montserrado County. This would enhance the attainment of their primary purpose of dropping female students in secondary schools.

Four research objectives were formulated to guide the study. Research objective one was to examine the extent to which poverty influences the dropout rates of girls in Secondary schools in Montserrado County, research objective three was to assess influence of parents' attitudes on female education on dropout rates in secondary education in Benadir Region, research objective two was to examine the effects of domestic labor on female dropout rate in Secondary Schools in Benadir Region, and research objective four sought to determine the effect of school punishments on the dropout rates of girls in secondary schools in Montserrado County.

The literature review dealt with the dropout rate of girls in secondary education. The areas covered by literature review included: Education of girls on socio-economic development, early marriages and dropout of girls in secondary schools, Influence of Parental attitudes on girls education, Domestic labor and dropout rate of girls in secondary schools, Role of society on dropout rate in secondary schools and lastly, Impacts of poverty on the dropout rate of girls in secondary schools. The sample consisted of four out of ten educational officers constituting 40% of the total officers, forty out of one hundred eighty-six thousand eight hundred and four students

constituting 0.0214% of the total number of students, twenty out of four hundred four head teachers representing 4.95% of the total number of head teachers in Montserrado County, ten out five thousand five hundred and four teachers constituting 0.18% of the total number of teachers in the region and seventeen out of the thirty-five parents representing 48.5% of the total number of parents. The method of allocation was to ensure that the population size was reflected in the sample size.

The findings revealed that several factors influenced the dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Montserrado County ranging from early marriage which affected the dropout of girl child, initiation rites which interfered with the normal school and class attendance, the attitudes of parents which at times were negative on the girl child and most of the parents preferred educating boys to girls, the roles in the society and domestic labour were overwhelming for the girl child leaving the girls to be seriously exhausted and cannot concentrate in the class work and lastly poverty which seriously affected the education of girls as a result of the death of parents which are experiencing to the Liberian society for the past 24 years of devastated civil unrest conflict, which leaving the girl child to lack school fees and depend on the guardians and well-wishers. The results of these are observed in the high dropout rate of female students in secondary schools.

According to these findings, the school Head teachers used various methods in handling female students' dropout in schools and these included guidance and counseling, recommendations for bursary fund fees forms, punishments involving parents in matters of student disciplines and mobilization of the community members and well-wishers to pay for the disadvantaged girls in secondary schools. However, the administrators also agreed that more funding and support from the government and well-wishers were needed to reduce the dropout rate of female students in secondary schools.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that influenced the dropout rate of female students in secondary schools in Montserrado County. It was also found that the factors which influenced the dropout of female students in secondary schools included early marriages of the female students, the initiation rites especially the Female Genital Mutilation which is common in our society, the attitudes of parents towards female students in comparison to boy child in traditional view, the roles in the society and domestic labor and lastly the poverty about paying school fees for the female students in secondary schools. The study also investigated the government's efforts put in place to curb the challenges of female dropout in secondary schools through the provision of bursary funds.

Recommendations

In light of the research findings, the researcher is pleased to make the following recommendations:

- It is recommended that peer educators/counselors be posted to the mixed and girls' secondary schools to survey the girls' problems and encourage them to seek help to curb the dropout of students through early marriages.
- It is again recommended that serious campaigns should be done by UNICEF, UNESCO, all educational agencies and the Liberian Government against the Female Genital Mutilation (F.G.M) as an initiation rite which wastes the girl child's time during initiation periods and thus making them

either to dropout as adults or reporting to school late which makes their performance poor and hence they give up.

- It is recommended that parents and guardians play their role in molding the female students instead of leaving the burden to the already overworked teachers. Parents should visit schools to find out how their daughters progress and spare time during the school holidays to be with their children. The parents' attitudes towards girl children should also change so that the boys should be treated like girls and their education should be the same as that of girls.
- The girls in secondary schools should not be overburdened by roles and domestic labor so that they can get a good time of studies and perform well in class. The girls should not be employed as housemaids and social workers at home to avoid dropping out of school.
- It is recommended that the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), youth groups and government agencies like Liberian National Women Organization and other donors come up strongly and set aside some funds to pay for the disadvantaged, orphaned and vulnerable girls who may be having serious challenges of school fees so that complete cycle of female education can be realized.
- It is recommended that gender equity and gender equality be given prominence in the education sector to promote the girl child education and fair distribution of responsibilities so that the female students are not disadvantaged.
- The government should use the findings in Montserrado County to help them solve the problems and handle keenly the challenges facing the female scholars in other divisions in the Republic of Liberia.
- The level of punishments should be moderated so that corporal punishment and hard labor are avoided to minimize the female dropouts and encourage the girl child retention in schools.

Suggestions for Future Research Directions

Taking the limitations and delimitations of the study, the researcher makes the following suggestions for further research:

- A national study should look at the female students' dropout rate as a psycho-social phenomenon in educational management. Such a study would suggest valid national strategies for understanding and helping the girl child in educational dropout as they study. It would also provide data on the problems faced by the female students in secondary schools in the whole country, especially Montserrado County.
- The role of parents and the board of governors in the management of female students' dropout in secondary schools.
- The role of guidance and counseling in the management of female students' dropout in secondary schools.
- A national study on Female Genital Mutilation as an initiation rite hindering the dropout of the girl child in secondary schools.

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