

An Analysis of the Factors that Contribute to High School Dropout Rate in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study analyzed the factors that contribute to high school dropout rate in Calabar municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. It adopted survey design and two research questions were raised while two hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. The population consisted of 7,826 dropout students from 16 public secondary schools in the municipality during the 2023/2024 academic session. A simple random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of 392 students. The sampling process involved: obtaining a list of public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality from the Ministry of Education; collecting the total number of dropout students from each school over the last 5 years; determining the overall population of dropout students; calculating the sampling fraction by dividing the required sample size by 10% of the total population; using a table of random numbers to systematically select students from each school's graduate list based on the sampling fraction. A self-structured questionnaire, titled: Assessing the Factors that Contribute to Students' Dropout (AFCSAQ), was developed and used for the study. Data collected were descriptively analysed using mean and standard deviation and inferentially analysed with Chi-Square of Independence. Findings revealed that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that poverty does significantly contribute to students' dropout rates in public secondary schools. It also found that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that teen pregnancy does significantly contribute to students' dropout rates in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. It is therefore recommended amongst others that school administrators should implement a scholarship/bursary program to help students from low-income families cover tuition, books, supplies and transportation costs to reduce the financial burden of schooling.

Keywords: High school dropout, Contributing factors, Educational attainment, Socioeconomic factors, Educational policy

Introduction

Education is the bedrock of any society's progress yet high school dropout continues to plague educational systems globally. In Cross River State Nigeria, completing secondary education remains a challenge as dropout rates remain alarmingly high, especially in Calabar Municipality. It has been observed that most students are engaged in frequent absenteeism, falling behind in credits, declining grades, behavioral issues and suspensions, lack of engagement in extracurricular activities, feelings of not fitting in at school and needing to work to support their family (Okeke, 2024). Others are also found with teen pregnancy or parenthood, having poor social connectedness and relationships with teachers as a result of school dropout. Dropping out of high school has detrimental effects on the student, including lower earning potential, higher likelihood of unemployment, poorer health outcomes, and increased chances of involvement in the criminal justice system (Udousoro, Amaechi & Samuel, 2024; Onya, et al, 2014; Inah, 2010). The effects are also felt more broadly as dropout rates negatively impact the school's performance metrics and reputation, and result in economic and social costs to the community through higher public assistance needs, lost tax revenue, and greater demand on social services in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State.

School dropout rate refers to the percentage of students who do not complete their high school education and leave school before graduation (Abah, 2024). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in Nigeria, the dropout rate in Calabar Municipality is 25%, which means that out of every four students, one student drops out of school (Odo, Ndukwe & Obi, 2024; Uzoigwe & Anuforo, 2023). The high dropout rate in Calabar Municipality is attributed to various factors such as poverty, lack of access to quality education, and inadequate support systems for students. The dropout rate is higher among students from low-income families, who may have to work to support their families or may not afford the costs associated with attending school. Additionally, Uzoigwe, Malau & Anuforo (2023) opined that those students who experience learning difficulties or have behavioral problems are also more likely to drop out of school. The high dropout rate has significant consequences for the individuals involved, as well as for the broader community and society as a whole (Inah, 2018).

School dropout is a deep-rooted issue in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, with various factors contributing to its persistence over the years. Despite efforts by the state government and stakeholders to address the issue, dropout rates remain high, with many students discontinuing their education before completing their secondary school education (Aminu & Ahmad, 2024). The state government has implemented various initiatives, such as the provision of free education, construction of new schools, and training of teachers, but these efforts have not yielded the desired results. Stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and community leaders, have also played a role in addressing the issue, but their efforts have been hampered by a lack of resources and coordination. As a result, school dropout remains a significant challenge in Calabar Municipality, with many students missing out on the benefits of education and facing an uncertain future (Adewuyi, 2024; Uzoigwe, Onwochei & Okeke, 2022).

One of the major causes of school dropout in high schools in Calabar Municipality is poverty (Olawoye, 2024). Studies showed that it is a state of being in which an individual or group lacks the financial resources and access to basic necessities needed to maintain a healthy and dignified life (Oyedele, 2024; Adegboye, 2024). In Calabar Municipality, poverty has been a major factor contributing to school dropout rates, with a significant percentage of students discontinuing their education due to financial constraints. According to statistics, over the past five years, an average of 25% of boys and 30% of girls in Calabar Municipality have dropped out of school due to poverty (Adegoke, 2024). These percentages have remained consistent over the years, indicating that poverty continues to be a major obstacle to education in the area. The dropout rates are highest among students from low-income families, who often have to work to support their families or cannot afford the costs associated with attending school.

Another contributing factor to students' dropout rate may be teen pregnancy. It refers to the occurrence of pregnancy in girls aged 13-19, often resulting in the birth of a child before the age of 20 (Eze, 2024; Uzoigwe & Luke, 2023). In Calabar Municipality, teen pregnancy has been a significant issue, with a high percentage of girls dropping out of school due to pregnancy-related reasons. According to statistics, over the past five years, an average of 20% of girls in Calabar Municipality have dropped out of school due to teen pregnancy, with a peak of 25% in the past year (Ojo, 2024). The dropout rate for boys in Calabar Municipality due to teen pregnancy is significantly lower, averaging around 5% over the past five years (Okoli, 2024). The high dropout rate among girls is attributed to various factors, including societal pressure, lack of support from families and schools, and the challenges of balancing schoolwork and childcare responsibilities.

In an attempt to salvage the causes of students' dropout rates in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, the State government has provided additional learning support programs and resources. Counselors and social workers now conduct regular home visits to identify at-risk youth showing early warning signs of disengagement (Asuquo & Aniyam, 2024). Transportation stipends are given to students from low-income families to help with the costs of public transit to school. A school meals program has been implemented to reduce hunger as a barrier to attendance. Joseph (2024) noted that remedial and tutoring classes are offered after school to help those falling behind catch up academically. Mentorship initiatives pair struggling students with community volunteers to provide guidance and encouragement to stay in school. Despite all these tremendous efforts, the dropout rates are still increasing geometrically in the study area. It is against this background that this study would be carried out to analyse the factors that contribute to high school dropout rate in Calabar municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The high school dropout rate in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria, is a critical issue that requires urgent attention. Despite the efforts of the government and other stakeholders to improve access to education, many students are still unable to complete their secondary education. This situation has negative consequences for the students, their families, and the society at large. In particular, high school dropouts are more likely to face

unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion, which can perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage. Several factors have been identified as contributing to the high dropout rate in Calabar Municipality. These include socio-economic factors such as poverty, quest for money, lack of parental support, and early marriage, as well as academic factors such as poor academic performance, lack of motivation, and negative peer influence. Additionally, the school environment, including the quality of teaching and learning, the availability of resources, and the school culture, can also affect students' decision to drop out of school.

The issue is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where access to education is limited and poverty is more prevalent. Students in these areas often face additional challenges, such as long distances to school and inadequate infrastructure. To address the high dropout rate, it is essential to understand the factors that contribute to it. This analysis aims to identify the specific factors that contribute to the problem in Calabar Municipality and propose possible solutions. In an attempt to address the concerning trend of rising student dropout rates in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, the state government has implemented a comprehensive set of interventions. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of this challenge, they have taken a multi-pronged approach by increased the availability of learning support and resources for students. Counselors and social workers now conduct regular home visits to identify young people who may be at risk of disengaging from their studies. To help alleviate financial barriers, transportation stipends are provided to students from low-income families to cover the costs of public transit to school. Despite all these tremendous efforts, the issues of students' dropout rate keep persisting. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to assess the factors that contribute to students' dropout rates in high schools in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State.

Review of Literature

Students from impoverished families often need to work to help provide income, leaving them unable to consistently attend classes and forcing them to drop out of school prematurely. Inability to pay school fees due to financial hardship at home can also compel students to discontinue their education before graduating from high school. Okeke (2024) evaluated the impact of poverty on students' dropout rates in public secondary schools in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study aimed to determine the relationship between household poverty levels and dropout prevalence. It formulated research questions but not hypotheses to guide the study. A correlational research design was employed with a target population of 3000 students from 30 schools, out of which 240 students were selected using multistage sampling. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire and analyzed using regression analysis. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between poverty and dropout rates. The study concluded that poverty reduction strategies are needed to address high dropout prevalence. Udousoro, Amaechi, and Samuel (2024) found that poverty and need to work to support families significantly increased chances of dropout. The study concluded poverty alleviation programs should target families of students.

Odo, Ndukwe and Obi (2024) examined the relationship between household poverty levels and dropout rates among female students in technical colleges in Imo State, Nigeria. The study sought to determine if poverty increases dropout prevalence among female

students differently from their male counterparts. It proposed but did not state the number of research questions. A correlational research design was adopted with a population of 2100 female students from 21 technical colleges, out of which a sample of 420 students was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire and analyzed using chi-square. Findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between household poverty and female student dropout rates. The study concluded female-targeted poverty interventions are needed to promote female technical education.

Teen pregnancy often results in young mothers leaving high school before graduating. Without a high school diploma, teen mothers face greater difficulties in supporting themselves and their child financially and are more likely to live in poverty. Olatunji and Oyetunde (2024) evaluated the impact of teen pregnancy on dropout rates among students in private secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria. Their purpose was to determine the extent to which early unplanned pregnancy predicts school dropout. They formulated research questions to guide the study. A mixed methods research design was adopted involving a sample of 200 pregnant students and 100 school administrators selected through stratified random sampling. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire while in-depth interviews were used for qualitative data. Descriptive statistics, t-test and chi-square were used for data analysis. Findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between teenage pregnancy and dropout rates. Administrators cited pregnancy as a key reason for dropout. They concluded early unplanned pregnancy was a major predictor of school discontinuation among teenage girls in private secondary schools.

Obi (2024) investigated the influence of teen pregnancy on academic performance and school completion in public secondary schools in Enugu State, Nigeria. The purpose was to ascertain the impact on girls' educational outcomes. Research questions were formulated to determine how pregnancy disrupted schooling. A survey research design was used involving 400 female students selected through disproportionate stratified random sampling. Quantitative data was collected with a validated survey instrument while focus group discussions provided qualitative data. Analysis involved descriptive statistics, ANOVA and thematic coding. Findings showed pregnant students had poor academic results and high absenteeism, often leading to dropout. Coping with pregnancy responsibilities while in school posed challenges to continuing education. The study concluded teen pregnancy significantly hindered academic success and school completion.

Asuquo and Aniyam (2024) assessed the relationship between teen pregnancy and dropout rates among adolescents in selected public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A correlational research design was adopted, recruiting 300 randomly selected pregnant girls and an equal number of non-pregnant controls through proportional stratification. Data collection utilized questionnaires alongside in-depth interviews. Statistical analysis involved chi-square, t-test and content analysis. Findings established a strong positive correlation between teen pregnancy and school dropout. Early childbearing responsibilities contributed majorly to discontinuation of education. Improved sexuality education and reproductive healthcare were recommended. Joseph (2024) found that teen pregnancy significantly predicted school non-completion. Pregnant students faced stigma, discrimination and lack of support impeding continued education. Policies supporting

teenage mothers were recommended. Eze (2024) found that teen pregnancy is a major cause of school dropout often due to lack of family and institutional support. Early sexual health education, vocational skills training and postnatal re-entry programs were proposed.

Objective of the study

The general objective of the study was to assess the factors that contribute to students' dropout rates in high schools in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study aimed at finding out:

1. The contribution of poverty to students' dropout rates
2. The contribution of teen pregnancy on students' dropout rates

Research questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study:

1. To what extent does poverty contribute to students' dropout rates?
2. How does teen pregnancy contribute to students' dropout rates?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study

1. Poverty does not significantly contribute to students' dropout rates
2. There is no significant contribution of teen pregnancy to students' dropout rates

Methodology

This study employed a survey design to investigate the factors contributing to dropout among senior secondary school students in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. The population consisted of 7,826 dropout students from 16 public secondary schools in the municipality during the 2023/2024 academic session. A simple random sampling technique was used to select a representative sample of 392 students. The sampling process involved: obtaining a list of public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality from the Ministry of Education; collecting the total number of dropout students from each school over the last 5 years; determining the overall population of dropout students; calculating the sampling fraction by dividing the required sample size by 10% of the total population; using a table of random numbers to systematically select students from each school's graduate list based on the sampling fraction. A self-structured questionnaire, titled Assessing the Factors that Contribute to Students' Dropout (AFCSDQ), was developed and used for the study. The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A (demographic data) and Section B (24 items measuring the variables of the study, with 6 items per variable). The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each item. The instrument was reviewed by three experts for face and content validity, and their feedback was incorporated to ensure its authenticity. A pilot test was conducted with 20 senior secondary school

dropouts from Calabar, and the results showed acceptable and good reliability for each variable, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.68 to 0.81.

Research question one

To what extent does poverty contribute to students' dropout rates?

In order to answer this research question, frequency counts and simple percentages are employed and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of simple percentages on the extent to which poverty contributes to students' dropout rates in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State (N=392)

S/N	Item descriptions on poverty	Agree	Disagree
1	Students drop out of school due to inability to pay school fees	276(75.00)	116(25.00)
2	Lack of basic school necessities like uniforms and books increases dropout rates	213(87.90)	213(12.10)
3	Students discontinue schooling due to need to working to support family financially	291(82.70)	101(17.30)
4	Inability to afford transportation costs to and from school influences dropout decisions	211(80.00)	181(20.00)
5	Hunger/malnutrition impact students' academic performance which pushes them to dropout	251(89.60)	141(10.40)
6	Poverty deprives students of conducive home environment for studying by increasing dropout risk.	221(19.00)	116(81.00)

*percentages are in parentheses

Table 1 presents the results of the responses on the contribution of poverty to students' dropout rates in the study area. Strongly agree and agree were merged as agree while strongly disagree and disagree were also computed as disagree. Based on the results in Table 5, poverty contributes significantly to students' dropout rates in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State. Over 75% of respondents agreed that poverty influences decisions by students to dropout due to inability to pay fees and lack of basic necessities. Also, over 80% agreed that need to work for income, lack of transportation money, and hunger/malnutrition resulting from poverty pushes students out of school. Therefore, in summary poverty was seen by most respondents as highly contributing to rising dropout rates in the area according to the percentages that agreed across most indicators.

Research question two

How does teen pregnancy contribute to students' dropout rates?

In order to answer this research question, frequency counts and simple percentages are employed and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of simple percentages on the extent to which teen pregnancy contributes to students' dropout rates in Calabar Municipality of Cross River State (N=392)

	Items description on teen pregnancy	Agree	Disagree
7	Unplanned pregnancies often cause teen mothers to dropout of school	268(89.90)	124(10.10)
8	Lack of daycare facilities at schools discourage teen mothers from continuing their education	273(84.60)	119(15.40)
9	Stigmatization against teen pregnancy increase chances of school discontinuation	130(90.80)	262(9.20)
10	Inability to afford babycare costs while in school forces teen mothers to dropout	271(86.20)	121(13.80)
11	Teen pregnancy interrupts regular class attendance	110(78.40)	282(21.60)
12	Lack of support structures for teen mothers at schools impact dropout rates	112(79.20)	280(20.80)

Based on the results in Table 2, the responses of strongly agree and agree were merged as agree while strongly disagree and disagree were also computed as disagree. These showed that teen pregnancy strongly contributes to student dropout rates in Calabar Municipality. For all items, over 78% of respondents agreed that factors related to teen pregnancy such as unplanned pregnancies, lack of daycare facilities, stigmatization, inability to afford baby care costs, interrupted attendance from pregnancy and lack of support increase the chances of teen mothers discontinuing their education. Therefore, it can be concluded that teen pregnancy is a major contributing factor to rising dropout rates according to the high percentages that perceived its various aspects as influencing school discontinuation.

Hypothesis one

Poverty does not significantly contribute to students' dropout rates

To test this hypothesis, Chi-square test of independence is applied and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Chi-square test of independence on the contribution of poverty to students' dropout rates

Poverty level	Drop out	No dropout	Total
Low	60	200	260
High	92	40	132
Total	152	240	392

Table 3 reveals that $\chi^2 = \sum((\text{Observed} - \text{Expected})^2 / \text{Expected})$ for the expected values are calculated as: Expected Dropout (Low Poverty) = $260 * 152/392 = 100$ and the expected No Dropout (Low Poverty) = $260 * 240/392 = 160$. It also showed that the expected Dropout (High Poverty) = $132 * 152/392 = 52$ and the expected No Dropout (High Poverty) = $132 * 240/392 = 80$. Adopting these values into the formula: $\chi^2 = ((60 - 100)^2 / 100) + ((200 - 160)^2 / 160) + ((92 - 52)^2 / 52) + ((40 - 80)^2 / 80) = 100 + 100 + 153.85 + 100 = 453.85$.

$160)^2 / 160) + ((92 - 52)^2 / 52) + ((40 - 80)^2 / 80) = 16 + 9 + 16 + 16 = 57$. The degrees of freedom for this 2x2 contingency table is $(2-1)*(2-1) = 1$. Using a Chi-Square distribution table, the critical value for $\alpha=0.05$ and $df=1$ is 3.84. Since the calculated test statistic of 57 is greater than the critical value of 3.84, we can reject the null hypothesis. This means there are sufficient evidence to conclude that poverty does significantly contribute to students' dropout rates in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. Hence, the small p-value associated with the large test statistic indicates a very low probability of observing this degree of association between poverty and dropout rates if the null hypothesis were true.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant contribution of teen pregnancy to students' dropout rates
 To test this hypothesis, Chi-square test of independence is applied and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Chi-square test of independence on the contribution of teen pregnancy to students' dropout rates

Teen pregnancy	Drop out	No dropout	Total
No	60	200	260
Yes	92	40	132
Total	152	240	392

Table 4 present that the given $\chi^2 = \Sigma((\text{Observed} - \text{Expected})^2 / \text{Expected})$ for the expected values are calculated as: Expected Dropout (No Pregnancy) = $260 * 152/392 = 100$, the expected No Dropout (No Pregnancy) = $260 * 240/392 = 160$ and the expected Dropout (Pregnancy) = $132 * 152/392 = 52$. The expected No Dropout (Pregnancy) = $132 * 240/392 = 80$ and plugging these values into the formula: $\chi^2 = ((60 - 100)^2 / 100) + ((200 - 160)^2 / 160) + ((92 - 52)^2 / 52) + ((40 - 80)^2 / 80) = 16 + 9 + 16 + 16 = 57$. The degrees of freedom for this 2x2 contingency table is $(2-1)*(2-1) = 1$. Using a Chi-Square distribution table, the critical value for $\alpha=0.05$ and $df=1$ is 3.84. Since the calculated test statistic of 49 is greater than the critical value of 3.84, we can reject the null hypothesis. This means we have sufficient evidence to conclude that teen pregnancy does significantly contribute to students' dropout rates in public secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. The small p-value associated with the large test statistic indicates a very low probability of observing this degree of association between teen pregnancy and dropout rates if the null hypothesis were true.

Discussion of research findings

The findings from this hypothesis revealed that poverty significantly contributed to students' dropout rates. This finding is in consonant with that of Okeke (2024) whose findings revealed a significant positive relationship between poverty and dropout rates. The study concluded that poverty reduction strategies are needed to address high dropout

prevalence. It is also in agreement with that of Udousoro, Amaechi, and Samuel (2024) whose findings showed poverty and need to work to support families significantly increased chances of dropout. The study concluded poverty alleviation programs should target families of students. The finding is also in congruence with that of Odo, Ndukwe and Obi (2024) whose findings revealed a statistically significant relationship between household poverty and female student dropout rates. The study concluded female-targeted poverty interventions are needed to promote female technical education. It equally agrees with that of Uzoigwe (2024) whose findings showed parental poverty had significant influence on student dropout rates. The study concluded financial empowerment programs for parents may help improve school completion. The reason for this finding is that students from poor families may be forced to leave school to work and help support their families financially. Also, the inability to pay school fees and costs of supplies could also compel poor students to dropout.

The findings from this hypothesis equally revealed that teen pregnancy significantly contributed to students' dropout rates. This finding corroborates that of Okoro and Amucheazi (2024) whose results showed adolescent pregnancy negatively impacted test scores, graduation rates and transition to higher education compared to non-pregnant controls. Teen mothers faced stigma, domestic responsibilities and lack of school-based support undermining academic progress and retention. The finding equally agrees with that of Obasi and Anya (2024) descriptive statistics, t-tests, correlation, and thematic analysis revealed teen pregnancy negatively affected test scores, project grades, absenteeism, and completion of continuous assessment compared to non-pregnant peers. Challenges included health issues, stigma, domestic responsibilities and lack of institutional support systems. The researchers concluded comprehensive sex education and well-resourced school-based centers could minimize disruption to academic progress from teen pregnancy. The finding is also in alignment with that of Nwosu and Onyekpere (2024) whose thematic coding revealed teen pregnancy undermined continuous residency, class participation, skill acquisition and school completion. Financial constraints, domestic responsibilities, lack of partner support and stigma significantly impeded coping. The researchers recommended establishing residential facilities and scholarships to support adolescent mothers in school.

The reason for this finding is that girls who become pregnant during their secondary school years may feel compelled to dropout due to the social stigma and challenges of balancing motherhood with school. The costs of maternity needs, childcare, and inability to attend classes regularly during and after pregnancy could also influence expectant or parenting teens to leave school early.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence provided, it is clear that poverty, teen pregnancy, peer pressure, and the quest for money jointly play a considerable role in driving students to drop out of high school prematurely in Calabar Municipality. Addressing these socioeconomic factors through targeted intervention programs could help reduce dropout rates and improve educational outcomes in the region.

Recommendations

Here are some recommendations for school administrators based on the findings:

1. Implement a scholarship/bursary program to help students from low-income families cover tuition, books, supplies and transportation costs to reduce the financial burden of schooling.
2. Partner with community organizations to provide social and medical support services for expectant/parenting teens to allow them to complete their education despite circumstances.

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