REPORT OF THE
COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY TECHNICAL CONSULTANT ON ARRESTING HIGH FEMALE DROP-OUT RATE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ONDO/EKITI STATES

BEING A TECHNICAL REPORT

SUBMITTED BY

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INTRODUCTION

The possibility of arresting high female drop-out rate through focussing on the role headteachers can play as managers of pupils' school environment was the main concern of this project.

My particular focus or Terms of Reference (TOR) in the project was to:

- do a school-environmental study of two sample communities (rural and urban);

- investigate the psycho-social factors which can impinge on the pupils' continuing participation in the schooling process;

- critically assess the counselling need of the headteachers, as an intervention strategy in arresting high female (and male) drop-out rate in Ondo/Ekiti States.

In the sample communities, headteachers, teachers and pupils were interviewed, disciplined observation of the school environment and the classroom dynamics were carried out, school records were scrutinized, questionnaires were filled by headteachers and teachers, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) which were facts-revealing were carried out with headteachers, pupils and parents. Case studies of some drop-outs was done.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Attrition rate at primary school level in Ondo/Ekiti States is fairly high.

- Statistically, no significant differences between the drop-out rate among females and males, but raw figures indicate a progressing high rate among males than females.

- More male headteachers than female headteachers, and more female classroom teachers than males.

- Broken home is a ·very prime contributor to absenteeism, irregular attendance at school and eventual drop-out.

- Financially deprived and unsupportive home background were strong indices of dropping out.

- Lack of continued appreciation of the value of education among many of the parents and pupils due to:

  * their perceived evident high rate of unemployment among all levels of school leavers.

  * artisans, craftsmen and those involved in less educational activities being seen to be either affluent or at least able to live comfortably.

- Parental death, especially of the father often contributed to dropping out tendency, as a result of inability of mothers to meet the financial involvement of children's schooling single-handedly.

- The psychologically-based problems of majority of the children at risk of dropping out of school include:

  * Inferiority complex: arising from lack of possession of basic school materials and also the wearing of either torn, shabby, tattered or worn-out uniforms and shoes.

  * Low self-concept: many of them were shy, highly hesitant,

nervous and lacked self-confidence.

* <u>Sense of failure</u>: they felt they were failures in life.

* <u>Sense of guilt and shame</u>: many were unable to overcome guilt and shame after being caught stealing, telling grievous lies or caught in immoral circumstances.

* <u>Feeling of intimidation</u>: teachers scolded them and magnified their predicaments. Some were also bullied by mates.

* <u>School phobia</u>: fear of the school system as a result of a combination of reasons.

- All headteachers and teachers agreed that counselling can help stem the tide of dropping out of school.

- Headteachers and teachers presently only admonish pupils and not actually carry out counselling.

- Headteachers and teachers need training in the use of counselling techniques.

- Headteachers and teachers were apathetic and indifferent to the phenomenon of dropping out of school.

- Teachers were found to have remote wish and delight to teach fewer pupils to reduce the work-load on them.

- Lack of basic instructional materials such as chalk, reference books, etc.

- Disaffection with the school environment by all of pupils, parents, teachers and headteachers due to:

    *   inadequate furniture for sitting and writing for pupils and even teachers.

    *   anxiety-inducing dilapidated buildings and blown off or leaking roofs.

    *   ill-equipped, barren and stark classroom environment - very few or no well-drawn, brightly coloured educative wall pictures.

    *   dearth of library and laboratory facilities or science corner.

- Absence of recreational facilities and programmes for females which can psychologically attune a child to school.

- Few cases of dropping out of school as a result of pregnancy.

- Child labour found imposed on girl-children as part of cultural expectations. But child labour found among males, more as a result of the males' personal choice for early financial earnings, as well as quest for adventure.

- Parental desire for perpetuation of family trade and business, and the early integration into such occupation were found in some cases as precipitating drop-out in both sexes, but especially among males.

- Absence of indices of school culture like school-motto, school anthem, prizes/awards for academic and co-curricular activities in almost all the schools visited.

- Majority of teachers and headteachers had low expectations of the pupils.

- School inspection by Education Authorities was highly sporadic.

- Continuous Assessment Records was only fairly well kept in the schools visited.

- A high level of discrepancy between the data on enrolment and transfer supplied earlier by headteachers and the actual figures obtained on the field.

- Many of the schools in the rural setting:

    * were far from the town where teachers commute from.

    * lacked necessary amenities to encourage teacher residency.

    * lacked good accessible roads.

    * attracted high transport fares.

- A fairly high level of truancy which presented in two forms was found present in both urban and rural settings.

    * A form where teachers though physically present in the class, teach only 2 or 3 our of the day's 6-8 lessons. The rest of the time is spent on educationally unprofitable activities such as selling wares, sleeping, holding discussion etc.

    * A form - cooperative truancy - more common in the rural setting where an unwritten schedule is followed by all teachers (headteachers inclusive) as to who is absent on which day from school).

- High prevalence of repeaters in primary 6 due to:

*   non-placement in JS I resulting from poor performance in the Placement Examinations.

*   Parents' inability to cope immediately with the differential financial demands between primary and secondary school education.

- High prevalence of absenteeism during the planting and harvesting seasons among both sexes, and in both urban and rural settings, but with the males having a slightly higher prevalence rate in the rural setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEADTEACHERS

- Mount training in counselling techniques for headteachers so that they can:

  *   realize the potentials reposed within them to shapen the pupils' lives positively.

  *   appreciate the pupils' psycho-social problems.

  *   be equipped to deal at basic level with the pupils' psycho-social problems.

  *   recognize the principle of individual differences in their pupils.

- Train headteachers in the use of Behaviour Modification Strategy to help them:

  *   re-orientate teachers towards their work and towards the pupils.

  *   modify the high-risk drop-out behaviour of pupils.

- Train headteachers in the basics and use of inter-personal skills to foster

more positive and result oriented interactions between them and their teachers, the pupils, the parents and the relevant education authorities. A headteacher adept in good inter-personal skills can obtain a lot materially, financially and in terms of goodwill and cooperation from civil organizations, P.T.A., philanthropists, teachers and pupils for the maintenance and sustenance of the physical and human elements in his school.

- Train headteachers to value the keeping and the supply of reliable data when data are required from them. It is believed that headteachers impute motives when asked to supply data, and depending on the direction of their motives, the data are either inflated or under-quoted.

- Encourage headteachers to supervise teachers' activities and also monitor pupils' attendance at school.

- Encourage headteachers to evolve school culture (indexed by school motto, school anthem, prizes/awards etc.), since this can be psychologically motivating and educationally challenging to pupils and can remotely encourage and sustain pupils' interest in schooling.

- Headteachers should understand the role of motivation and positive reinforcement (which is not necessarily material) in their school administration. When this is achieved, the likelihood is that teachers will apply themselves to their job and this positive application can enable pupils appreciate the value of education, thereby reducing the tendency

and likelihood of dropping out.

- Though cases of teenage pregnancy and other forms of promiscuity were not rampant, headteachers should include sexuality education in the school curriculum, and counselling extended to this aspect too.

DETAILS OF WORK DONE (METHODOLOGY)

SAMPLE

All the categories of sample used in this study, except the actual schools visited, were pre-selected by the local government education secretaries, and the headteachers in accordance with some guidelines given by NEGSEMA - the organizers of the project. They were assembled at designated locations in each of the urban and rural communities used. They are hereafter sometimes referred to as captive audience.

The Communities: Ondo West and Ondo East local governments with their headquarters as Ondo Town were used as the urban sample. The two are administered educationally by a Local Government Education Authority (LGEA), divided into 4 zones and with 141 primary schools under its jurisdiction. The proximity of the two Local Government Areas made the educational administration by one Central Education Authority possible.

The rural community was represented by Ikere-Ekiti and Ise-Orun Local Government Areas, with each under the educational administration of its own Education Authority, since the two Local Government Areas were fairly distant from each other.

The Headteachers and Teachers

A total of 98 headteachers (49 from urban and 49 from rural) and 86 classroom teachers (45 urban, 41 rural) were involved in the study. Majority of both the headteachers and teachers clustered around the age-range of 35-45 years, but as expected, the headteachers were older. All the headteachers and teachers were professionally qualified, though there were more NCE holders among the classroom teachers than the headteachers. The single holder of a University degree (B.Ed.) was a headteacher.

The Parents

A total of 51 parents, who were predominantly farmers, traders, with a few civil servants (majority of these from the urban sample) were involved in the study. Only 1 female was among the 20 parents from the urban community, while only 2 females were among the 31 parents from the rural community.

The Pupils

Two categories of children or pupils were used in the study.

(1) A total of 90 (47 urban, 43 rural) children highly at risk of dropping out of school were used. Prolonged absenteeism, truancy, irregular attendance at school, regular repetition, and dearth of basic school materials were indices used in obtaining children at risk of dropping out.

(2) The other category involved other children within the school system who were randomly picked when the schools were visited.

(3)   An actual drop-out - a boy who dropped out in 1993 after father's death, and mother's inability to cope with the financial demands of schooling.

<u>The School</u>

A total of 9 schools were actually visited, though we passed by many of them as we journeyed to the sampled schools.

PROJECT INSTRUMENTS AND TOOLS

1.   <u>Questionnaire</u>

An 18-item questionnaire, developed by this consultant, and divided into two sections was filled by both the headteachers and the teachers. Section I solicited information on the biodata of the respondents, while Section II which focused mainly on the respondents' perception of the role of Counselling in arresting high drop-out rate, also sought from the respondents reasons for dropping out of school, and suggestion as to the positive implementation of counselling in the primary schools. (The Questionnaire is attached as Appendix).

2.   <u>Interviews</u>

Interviews were held with headteachers and teachers to:

(a)   further solicit relevant information on the phenomenon of dropping out of school, and

(b)   to corroborate through an informal strategy, the information supplied on the questionnaire for the purpose of reliability and validity.

Indepth interview was held with some of the children-at-risk of dropping out of school brought as a captive audience, using purposive random sampling.

Pupils, randomly picked when we visited the sampled schools, were also interviewed.

3. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

This was held with the children-at-risk of dropping out and also with the parents. Each Focus Group in the categories of pupils and parents at each urban or rural community had five subjects.

4. Observation

Disciplined Observation of the general school environment starting with the morning assembly as well as of classroom dynamics during lessons were carried out in the schools visited.

5. Scrutiny of School Records

Some school records - the Class Register, Continuous Assessment Records, Cumulative Record Folders, Teachers' Marks Books, Anecdotal Record Book and Punishment Book which were available were scrutinized.

6. Case Study Method

PROCEDURE

At the designated centres in each community (urban and rural) headteachers, pupils and parents were asked to sit in homogenous groups after the initial introduction of the purpose of the study by the Project Coordinator.

Headteachers and Teachers

To the headteachers and teachers groups, I gave out the questionnaires, and left them to fill after reading through with them since they were literate enough to

encounter no problem with the simple questionnaire. After the completion of the questionnaire, open-ended interview was held with each group (headteachers and teachers), where information was solicited on the phenomenon of dropping out, reasons for dropping out, and suggestions regarding possible and feasible solutions to stem the tide of dropping out.

The Parent Group

An initial group discussion was held with the parent group where reasons for dropping out of school were discussed, profiles of drop outs they knew about were taken, and parental value of education for both sexes of children were focused upon. The parents thereafter broke up into focus groups with five members in each group. A group facilitator of their choice was chosen and three main issues were focused on in each group namely:

- Assessment of causes of dropping-out of school.

- Role of parents in the emergence of solutions to the problem

- Evaluation of the possibility of parents coming together into community cooperative group to mount pressure and sanctions on children and on parents whose children manifest indices of dropping out.

The Pupils

For the pupils, after singing and clapping as a strategy of enlisting their interest and cooperation, the phenomenon of dropping out of school was discussed, and profiles of known drop-outs were taken. After this, pupils who presented strongly with some of the psychological indices of dropping out such as signs of nervousness,

wearing of tattered clothes, noticed inactiveness during the earlier group discussion, were randomly picked for case study.

At The Schools

When the schools were visited, class registers were scrutinized to:

- ascertain trend of enrolment of boys and girls.

- assess pattern of indices of dropping out of schools among boys and girls.

- establish basis of discussion of case study subjects with teachers.

Apart from the Class Registers, Continuous Assessment Records were scrutinized to assess pattern of performance of the children-at-risk of dropping out, as well as general pattern regarding implementation of Continuous Assessment in the schools.

Short unstructured interviews were held with randomly selected children in the schools visited on the phenomenon of dropping out of schools, as well as their expectation in life, and what they would like to see improved in the school system to make schooling interesting and challenging.

Statistics of enrolment for children currently in primaries 1-6 were also taken from headteachers of the schools visited. Attempt was made to collect cohort statistics of current primary 6 pupils from their primary one, but it was almost impossible to make sense out of this attempt. The statistics were either not available, or discrepancies were unexplainable to allow for reliability.

A few case studies of the children at risk of dropping out were also continued

and completed in the schools. (The case study of the selected children started on the day they were all assembled at the designated centres for each community).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study confirms earlier studies (West, 1980); Reid, 1985) that indices of dropping out of school include prolonged absenteeism, constant lateness to school, truancy, irregular attendance at school, regular repetition, lack of basic school needs, and poor performance. The presence of a combination of these indices which are inter-related eventually result in dropping out of school.

In the Nigerian situation, as presented by the findings of this study, an immediate cause of the high risk state of dropping-out of school is poverty and poverty has its immediate effects on the phenomenon of school drop-out as teased out below. It is poverty that is responsible for parents not equipping their children with the basic school needs like books, pencil, biro, good uniform, shoes, etc. The interviews revealed that the school levy or fees which usually starts from primary 3 ranges between only N150.00 and N450.00, and yet many parents on account of inability to pay this levy or fee subject their children to prolonged absenteeism or irregular attendance at school. In some cases, they eventually withdraw the children or the children decide to opt out of school. A child who does not possess basic school materials feels inferior among the mates and develops low self-concept - psychological factors that are not conducive to learning. These psychological factors coupled with regular absenteeism as a result of either being sent back home from school, or being asked to stay home by the parents who knew they had not met the school's demand

show up in poor performance - another negative psychological message to the child's self-concept and sense of achievement. The poor performance often earns the child sarcastic and unfavourable comments from the teachers, and also atimes, sadly though, from the parents who had forgotten (consciously or otherwise), the relationship of the poor performance to their non-financial support of the child at school. The vicious cycle begins.

It is poverty that accounts for the pattern of absenteeism found in this study, when children are withdrawn by their parents to help on the farms during the planting and harvesting seasons. If parents are able to pay for the labour needed on the farms that represent their major means of livelihood, as confessed by them in the cause of the interviews, then the children's withdrawal to the farms will not be necessary. The period of this study coincided with the early planting season when the first rains fall, and many school-age children were found on some farms.

It is poverty that makes it difficult and almost impossible for a mother to single-handedly finance the education of her child/children after the husband's death, as was found in this study.

Another face of poverty showed up during the interview with the pupils (all the categories used in the study) who complained that teachers send them to their personal farms to work during school hours, or ask them to sell wares for them. Some parents who spoke in anger corroborated the pupils' story during the interviews with them.

If teachers, who complained not only of meagre salaries but also of non-

payment on schedule were not suffering from the poverty syndrome, they probably would not be perpetuating the above mentioned acts. It is poverty that accounts for the different faces of teacher truancy earlier mentioned under summary of findings. If teachers were financially buoyant, they would be able to support their transport fares to and fro schools, instead of the cooperative truancy type found; nor be physically present in school, yet spend the instructional period selling wares after teaching only 2 or 3 lessons.

The teacher-poverty syndrome can easily lead to pupils' loss of interest in schooling. Loss of interest may result in pupils' feeling that they are either wasting time in school with a teacher who does not teach all the lessons, or sends them to the farm or makes them sales agents. The fear of being compelled to work on the farm can create school phobia. A teacher who wastes instructional periods will not likely complete the syllabus or will have to rush the pupils when examinations are approaching. None of the above augurs well for good academic performance. Loss of interest in schooling, school phobia and poor academic performance which have been related to the observed teacher - poverty situation are strong indicators of dropping out of school.

Poverty as outlined thus far was remotely caused by the poor economic situation of the country, occasioned by fraudulent practices in high places, selfishness and greed on the part of our leaders, imposition of sanctions on the country by the international community, unintelligent and unnecessary involvement in the internal problems of other nations to which Nigeria plays "the big brother". An apt example

is the Liberian issue on which the Nigerian Government had spent over N4b (four billion naira) while ignoring many domestic areas that need financial upliftment.

Governmental policies, and lack of commitment to education may be seen as other reasons for the drop-out issue. The government should meet some basic needs of its citizens and its educational sector. A good network of roads which are not available impinge on teachers' movement to their school especially in the rural areas. When a teacher pays a high fare commuting to school, waits for a long time before boarding a vehicle, and travels on rough roads daily with toil on his/her health, lack of commitment easily sets in. The situation is further compounded when he/she gets to work and does not find available, the necessary basic instructional materials like chalk, resource books, curriculum modules etc. to work with. Such a teacher will not apply the self to work. A teacher who does not have job-satisfaction will offer very little academically and psychologically to the children. The lack of job satisfaction can contribute to teachers' impatience with the pupils, indifference and apathy to work and even to those showing signs of dropping out of school. The resultant effect is that negative value of education is passed onto the pupils and some of the pupils who may not wish to "suffer" like the teacher (negative role model view), may think it is better to opt out of school, and early too, to find meaning to living. The vicious cycle continues.

The immediate and strategic effect of poverty go with strategic and long term effects. Some of these effects include:

- High rate of unskilled labour

- Slow march towards technological advancement

- Breeding of mediocrity among professionals

- Drop-outs especially females may not be able to actualize themselves, or encourage their children onto high level education; especially if they (parents) are financially successful.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of drop-out should not be ignored if the educational system of Nigeria is to progress. The current trend where artisans, craftsmen and those involved with less educational activities find employment more easily than those educationally advanced has subtle and negative correlation with schooling.

If headteachers are trained in different counselling techniques through seminars, workshops and short courses, they as managers of the school environment with their counselling knowledge play a very prominent role in arresting high drop-out rate in primary schools. The bedrock of education is the primary level and this foundation must be solidly layed without counting the cost.

APPENDIX

ONDO/EKITI STATES DROP-OUT PROJECT: TEACHERS
AND HEADTEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

INTRODUCTION

     This questionnaire is designed to assess the counselling training needs of teachers/headteachers in arresting the incidence of drop-out at the primary schools level. Please, feel free to give your candid opinion as this is purely for research purpose.

SECTION I

Name of School . . . .

State and Local Government Area of School . . . .

Age of School . . . .

Age of Respondent . . . .

Designation of Respondent: Teacher ( ) Headteacher ( ) (Tick one)

State of Origin and Local Government . . . .

Sex: Male ( ) Female ( ) (Tick one)

Qualification: . . . .

Years of Teaching Experience . . . .

SECTION II

Please put "yes" or "no" in front of each question or statement, except in a few cases.

1.   Is the education of female worth all the trouble?

2.   The society needs more educated males than females.

3.   A girl who reads up to primary 4 has done well.

4.   More females than males drop out of school in this State?

5.   Pupils generally drop out of school during the farming season.

6.   A teacher/headteacher should be very friendly with a pupil?

7.   If teachers/headteachers are patient with and kind to female pupils, many of them will not drop out of school.

8.   Counselling can help reduce the drop-out rate of pupils in this State.

9. Teachers/headteachers need a training in the techniques of counselling.

10. Counselling by teachers/headteachers should be done on:

    (a) Individual pupils ( ) (b) Pupils in group ( ) (c) Individuals and groups
    (Tick one).

11. Pupils in primary schools do not really need counselling.

12. If drop-out rate is to reduce, which category really needs counselling? (a) Pupils
    ( ), (b) Fathers ( ) (c) Mothers ( ) (d) Pupils ( ) (e) Both parents and pupils ( )
    (Tick as many as you think).

13. Repetition of class contributes to dropping out.

14. Counselling can help pupils avoid repeating classes.

15. If teachers/headteachers know more about pupils personality, drop-out rate can
    be reduced.

16. Do you think continuous assessment can help reduce dropping out of schools?
    Give reasons for your answer on the separate sheet provided.

17. As things are now, do you think teachers/headteachers can take on counselling
    of pupils and parents?

18. What suggestions can you give to make it possible for teachers/headteachers
    to take on counselling of pupils and parents. (Use the separate sheet of paper).