



# Constructed Gender Relations at School Environment on School Dropout among Adolescents in Maputo Province and City in Mozambique

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**Abstract:** Over the years, there has been a notable improvement in school attendance for school-going children. However, school dropout among girls has been experienced in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Mozambique. This paper examines the extent to which constructed gender relations in the school environment can influence school dropouts in Maputo Province and Maputo City in Mozambique. The study employed social feminist theory. The study used a qualitative case study research design guided by both a pragmatic and transformative worldview. The study targeted 92 school dropouts, 7 key informants (Secondary school heads), 16 secondary school teachers, and 30 non-dropout students in Maputo City and Maputo Province. Snowball Sampling was used in selecting study participants, whereby each person interviewed was asked to suggest additional people for interviewing until saturation was achieved. Data collection methods were in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. The study revealed that a good relationship in the school environment plays a role in ensuring that adolescents can develop social competence and the ability to make the sort of relationship required for cohesive studies. Also, social cohesion within the school environment influences the social well-being and retention of the adolescent in school and in shaping the future of an individual. The study concluded that reinforcement of teachers and students is paramount for adolescents to develop a positive attitude towards their studies. The study recommends that the government of Mozambique should formulate and implement educational policies to guide in retention of students in school.

**Keywords:** Gender Relation, Adolescent, School dropout, School environment, Mozambique

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## 1. Introduction

Globally, education is regarded as a prime mover for the socio-economic development of countries and accounts for as much as 20% of the annual Gross National Product (GNP) of developing nations (Alvares, Gillies, & Biadsher, 2008). This is considered so because education has been found to improve the productive value of human beings by imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour traits referred to as human, social and cultural capital which are required in producing goods and services (Lazear, 2006). In addition to the productive value, education

promotes harmonious co-existence, population control, healthy living, effective citizenship, nutritional adequacy and child upbringing.

Moreover, despite global pledges to achieve Education for All by 2015, nearly 58 million children of primary school age worldwide were not enrolled in school in 2012, but less than one-quarter of these 'out-of-school' children were dropouts (SIDA, 2016). Instead, most (77%) had not yet started school, and many of these children-especially in West and Central Africa and South Asia-were not expected to ever do so (UIS and UNICEF, 2015).

Currently 303 million including boys and girls aged 5-17 years old are out of school. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest out-of-school rates for all age groups. 34 of the 63 million out-of-school children of primary school age. Girls of every school-age group are more likely to be excluded from education than boys across sub-Saharan Africa (UIS, 2018), that way we can assume that gender is a factor in determining the dropout rate. For instance, the presence of pregnant girl(s) in a classroom is not only a threat to their own academic achievement but also to the collective academic performance of the class as well as the classroom harmony (Bhana et al., 2010)

Despite large increases in enrolment rates in lower primary school grades in Mozambique, most children are still not completing primary education. For upper primary schooling (EP2), the official completion rate is abysmal, especially in rural areas where even at age 19 it is only about 14% for males and 8% for females (Fox et al., 2012). The sources of inefficiencies in the public service provision system leading to such statistics are likely to be varied. Given these extremely low completion rates and the fact that the problem is even more pronounced for girls, demand-side factors are likely to be relevant. Improving our understanding of and providing practical approaches to relax these demand-side barriers would therefore contribute to improving the performance of the public sector in the area of education in terms of the number of primary school graduates it produces. Improving education, and especially that of girls, would also likely contribute to improved economic growth (see, e.g., reviews by Topel 1999, Temple 2001, Krueger and Lindahl 2001, Sianesi and Van Reenen 2003, Sala-i-Martin et al., 2004). Abu-Ghaida and Klasen (2004), for instance, estimate that closing the education gap between males and females would increase the growth rate of GDP per capita by 0.3 percentage points in Mozambique.

The focus of this paper is on constructed gender relations in the school environment and how it influences school dropout in Maputo city in Mozambique. School dropout is a phenomenon that negatively influences the educational process throughout the world. Several studies have been carried out to understand and explain the implications of school dropout, beginning with the identity of those who drop out, dropout rates, reasons for dropping out, consequences, and solutions offered to this problem. Notwithstanding, research information and results on school dropouts are still needed to explain the phenomenon further and in varied contexts in order to aid in the implementation of effective interventions that address the problem.

## The study objective

To analyze the constructed gender relations in the school environment (pupils-teachers; pupil-pupil) which

can influence school dropout in Maputo Province and Maputo City in Mozambique.

## 2. Literature Review

Education is a significant function of society, and the school is the main institution where society sustains its existence (Zengin, 2021). For this reason, school is a “key factor” in development (Stanica, 2019). Although the type and reasons vary, many countries are faced with the drop-out problem. Ramburger (2011) has defined school dropout as a status, an event, and the process of being absent from school with or without valid reasons. School dropout is the situation of individuals who are not enrolled in school and have not graduated, but who can nevertheless enrol and graduate again. As a state, it affects a group of individuals and reveals how many individuals at some point are dropouts. Dropping out of school as a process, means students do not suddenly drop out of school or fail to attend school. As a process, it reveals what kind of attitudes, behaviours, and performance indicators of the school precedes the decision to leave school and when they occur, what are the guidelines for the development of intervention strategies to keep students in school (Rumberger, 2011).

Momo et al. (2018) in a systematic review of the literature on the causes of early school leaving in Africa and Asia, described a school dropout as a pupil who does not complete the final year of the educational level enrolled in; leaving school before completing primary education, completing primary education but not progressing to secondary grades and leaving school before completing secondary grades. Momo further defines such students as; a student who is absent from school for at least one month, who fails to take exams, or who is absent in the next year at the school; leaving school before completing at least the final secondary grade; no transition from primary or secondary school to higher education to obtain formal work qualifications.

Ramburger et al. (2017), Witte et al. (2013), Rumberger & Lim (2008), and Ramburger (2001) have researched the reasons for school dropout, reviewed issues, and evidence, and sought what can be done. Witte et al (2013) in a critical review of the literature on school dropout, reviews the growing literature on early school leaving clarifying what it entails, underlying problems, and methodologies issues raised in the literature. The authors investigate the levels, methods, and models with which the topic has been studied, (dis) advantages of each other, and also bring a wide set of policy measures. Witte et al (2013) pose the following potential predictors of school dropout: Student-related factors, family-related factors, school-related factors, community-related factors, and complex interaction.

Rumberger (2001) examines why students drop out of school and what can be done about it. He summarizes who drops out of school, and reviews the theoretical and empirical research that attempts to explain why students drop out of school based on two different conceptual frameworks that are both useful and necessary to understand this complex phenomenon. Johansson and Uhnoo (2019) wrote a systematic and integrative research review on risk factors interventions for dropping out of school. They mapped the existing research on risk and protective factors related to dropping out of school, secondly, they identified the consequences of dropping out, thirdly, identified interventions available to prevent dropouts, and finally, identified the effects of these interventions, both in terms of outcomes and cost-effectiveness. In addition, they made a program theoretical summary of the research in which strengths and weaknesses in the previous research are identified taking into account the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels.

Three dimensions of engagement were found in the extensive review of research literature, by Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004): Behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement: Behavioural engagement represents behaviours that demonstrate students' attachment and involvement in both the academic and social aspects of school, such as doing homework and participating in extracurricular activities like athletics or student government. On the other hand, emotional engagement refers to students' affective reactions to their experiences in school and in their classes, such as whether they are happy or bored.

Cognitive engagement represents mental behaviours that contribute to learning, such as trying hard and expanding effort on academic tasks. The antecedents include school-level factors, such as school size, communal structures, and disciplinary practices, and classroom-level factors, such as teacher support, peers, classroom structure, and task characteristics. There is a distinction that must be noted between engagements: there is an engagement that includes student attitudes and an engagement in which student attitude is a precursor to engagement. This distinction reflects the fact that students may arrive at school with a set of attitudes, while engagement only occurs as a result of students' experiences after they arrive (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Models of student engagement are related to and often incorporate concepts from models of student motivation. Connel (1990) as quoted by (Rumberger & Lim, 2008) has developed a model of student motivation that postulates individuals are motivated to engage in activities that meet three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The degree to which students perceive the school setting as meeting those needs determines how engaged or disaffected, they will be in school. Student-teacher relationship: In a

study by Woolley, Kol and Bowen (2009), which emphasizes the academic relationship between student and teacher, it was found that teacher support mediated the effect of classmates and parents on student behaviour. Therefore, teachers' interest in and motivation towards teaching and learning are critical variables in the prevention of school dropout.

Scheifele, Streblo & Retelsdorf (2013) proposed three dimensions of teacher interest: subject, didactic and educational interest. This related study by Scheifele (2017) explains that subject interest refers to their interest in the subject they teach in school. Academic interest involves teachers' attention to their teaching methods; these methods are mainly aimed at developing efficient work habits, social skills and moral values. Teachers' educational interests are related to the scholarly or pedagogical aspect of the teaching profession. Teachers' expectations for performance (commonly referred to as teacher expectations) are defined as teachers' beliefs about their student's academic abilities and subsequent levels of achievement. Differences in teachers' expectations are important because when teachers have different expectations for groups of students, they can involve, support and teach their students differently. Emphasis is placed on learning in the new environment to deal with different situations (Valente, Lourenço & Nemeth, 2020).

Zhang (2015) found that there is a strong relationship between teachers' behavior and students' academic achievement along with other factors such as teacher education, teaching experience, and professional qualification, among others. For individual children, their interactions with teachers matter to their social experiences with peers. This is because teacher-child interactions can be observed by all classmates, which helps classmates draw inferences about children's attributes and likeability and form a classroom consensus about children's reputations (Hughes and Im, 2016). Teachers are the most important school-based influence on student academic performance (Hattie, 2003; Kyriakides, Christoforou, & Charalambous, 2013; Rowe, 2003) and they account for up to 30% of the variance in student achievement (Hattie, 2009).

Additionally, teacher-child closeness is grounded in positive interactions, such as warm and open communications, between a teacher and a child, which forms a secure base for children to feel cared for and connected to the classroom environment. Teacher-child closeness is associated with children's engagement in classroom activities and their social competencies and peer acceptance (Chen et al., 2020). Responsiveness can be ascertained when students familiarize themselves with their teachers' and institution's code of conduct (Cazden 2001). Teacher's behavior and academic performance are measured by the standard inventory used in this research, comprises eight distinct components of behavior (clarity, enthusiasm,

interaction, organization, pacing, disclosure, speech, and rapport) while the academic performance of the students was measured by their CGPA (Anwar, 2020). Anwar found that directive and tolerance teacher behaviour is the most effective behaviour because the teachers who always adopted this behaviour, their students performed very well and excellent while the teachers who always adopted authoritative or aggressive behaviour in the class, their students learned poorly in the class that is why they performed average or good in the class. Behavior impacts the learning abilities and academic performance of the students that are taught by the teachers at hand (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca & Malone, 2006).

On the contrary, excessive involvement in conflictual situations redirects the people's energy and attention away from their common objectives, and often leads to affective conflicts, in which case the professional performance of the respective people tends to decrease drastically (Catana, 2015). Taiwo, Omole & Omole (2014) observed that sexual harassment may result in a myriad of problems whereby a student may have trouble learning or drop out of school, lose trust in school officials, become isolated, nurse constant fear for personal safety and have low self-esteem, which may prevent the student from achieving her maximum potential. Many adolescents experience sexual harassment, and victims of sexual harassment have higher risks regarding well-being and health behavior such as higher risks of suicidal thoughts, suicidal ideation, and feeling unsafe at school (de Lijster et al., 2016; Sweeting et al., 2000; Osorio, 2010; MMAS, 2011).

### **Social feminism theory**

Socialist feminists share radical feminist's views that gender oppression is a central form of oppression, and they view social activism as essential to meeting their goals. They have also sought a more complex analysis of sexism than that endorsed by radical feminists, one that examines the manner in which oppression is shaped by class, economics, nationality, race and history. In general, socialist feminists attempt to integrate: i) an analysis of the structure of production, class, and capitalism (Marxist perspectives); ii) the control of women's bodies, reproduction and sexuality and the manner in which this control is shaped by patriarchy (radical feminism), iii) and the impact of gender role socialization (liberal feminism).

Socialist feminists believe that individual opportunity alone will not lead to an egalitarian world, the realization of human potential will only be achieved through the restructuring of personal, e.g., family, and public, e.g., employment experiences of men and women. Universal access to economic and work options, education, housing, birth control, and child care is essential (Enns & Sinacore, 2001).

Feminist socialists have examined alienation as it relates to women's experiences of sexuality, motherhood and education. Women have experienced alienation from their own sexuality through sexual objectification and being treated as sexual commodities, alienation from motherhood through the control of obstetric science and other experts and alienation from their intellectual strengths by being confined by definitions of intelligence and competence set forth primarily by men (Enns & Sinacore, 2001).

The reasons why females are more likely than males to be out of school are often related to social power structures and socially constructed norms that define the roles that boys/men and girls/women should play and those gendered roles affect the rights, responsibilities, opportunities and capabilities of males and females, including their access to and treatment in school. The sexual division of labor for example, in the household, where women/girls are assumed to bear responsibility for raising children, cooking and cleaning, while boys/men are responsible for generating income and more masculine household tasks, such as maintaining machinery or washing the car (Subramanian, 2005).

Mainly because of gendered perceptions of adolescent girls' roles and responsibilities, in most developing countries, girls' enrolment rates fall when they reach lower secondary school age and then decline further when they reach upper secondary school age. All feminist theorizing has political goals, and the main aim of this perspective is the achievement of a fair and just society and the removal of any barriers that prevent the full equality of men and women (Davies, 2010).

### **3. Methodology**

This study was carried out in Mozambique, in Sub-Saharan Africa. Mozambique is currently among the 28 countries at risk of not achieving gender parity in primary or secondary education before the year 2015 or even 2025 (UNESCO, 2007) and there is available evidence showing a high non-completion rate within the different regions of Mozambique and also a big difference between males and females. Mozambique is a country located in Southern Africa bordered by the Indian Ocean to the east, Tanzania to the north, Malawi and Zambia to the northwest, Zimbabwe to the west and Eswatini (Swaziland) and South Africa to the Southwest.

The study used a qualitative case study research design guided by both a pragmatic and transformative worldview. The study targeted 92 school dropouts, 7 key informants (Secondary school heads), 16 secondary school teachers and 30 non-dropout students in Maputo City and Maputo Province. Snowball Sampling was used in selecting study participants, whereby each person interviewed was asked to suggest additional people for interviewing until saturation was achieved.

This procedure is appropriate when the members of a special population are difficult to locate. The process of selecting a snowball sample reveals important aspects of the populations being sampled, uncovering the dynamics of natural and organic social networks.

Data collection methods used in this study included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. The recorded data were analysed qualitatively. All the recorded data was transcribed, categorized and the emerging themes identified. The interviews were given a code unit and each response was analyzed individually. From this, main themes and sub-themes were identified and categorized.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The following themes emerged under the following social relations: i) Relations of conflict, ii) Relations of coercion. Under relations of conflict, there were five themes that emerged. These were the relationship of conflict with teachers; ii) Relation of conflict over absenteeism; iii) Relationship of conflict over pregnancy; and iv) Relations of coercion (by teachers).

### 4.1 Relationship of Conflict with Teachers

Conflict situations are a quite frequent reality in every organization, including the school. These conflicts are a reality minimized and/or hidden by teachers and school managers, and they eventually affect the quality of the learning environment, as well as the teacher's performance. According to Catana, (2015), excessive involvement in conflictual situations redirects the people's energy and attention away from their common objectives, and often leads to affective conflicts, in which case the professional performance of the respective people tends to decrease drastically. Throughout the research, conflicting relationships between teachers and girls that contributed to school dropout were highlighted, such as: sexual harassment of girls by male teachers, disharmonious coexistence evidenced by traces of rivalry in which the girls claimed that the teachers did not like them for a variety of reasons, the existence of inattentive teachers who did not motivate whose demand and reprimand measures were not appreciated by the girls, they did not like the teachers who gave them many school tasks to carry out at home. One of the interviewees applauded and appreciated the teachers' support that:

*The teachers were good, although I felt that at some point, they didn't pay enough attention to the cause that made me drop out of school as illustrated; a teacher failed me because that was his intention and*

*didn't give me any attention during my 8<sup>th</sup> Grade.*

#### 4.1.1 Sexual Harassment of Girls by Male Teachers

The scale and prevalence of sexual abuse against students are rampant since they are underreported. Sexual harassment by teachers in schools has also been described as an unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that makes you feel uncomfortable, fearful, or powerless, and interferes with your schoolwork. Most girls drop out of school due to sexual harassment by their teachers and fellow students as one narrates:

*"Especially the teachers who wanted to have a romantic relationship with me and the result of that was the pregnancy I had; even my friends are sexually harassed, but there's nowhere to complain. I think girls are afraid, just like I was afraid"* (GGG. Age: 23 years. Class: 9<sup>th</sup> Grade).

According to Taiwo, Omole & Omole (2014), Sexual harassment may result in a myriad of problems whereby a student may have trouble learning or drop out of school, lose trust in school officials, become isolated, nurse constant fear for personal safety and have low self-esteem, which may prevent the student from achieving her maximum potential. The school environment became intolerable due to the constant harassment from the teachers. One of the respondents claimed that

*"It was due to such behavior that led her to drop out of school; because they have sexual harassment and I suffered a lot from it"*(LLL. Age: 24 years. Class: 9<sup>th</sup>).

It was out of sexual harassment that forced most students to stop attending school. Another respondent narrated that:

*"My relationship with my father did not contribute to my dropping out of school, on the contrary, if he had known that I was being harassed, he would have made efforts to keep me from dropping out. What really contributed was the harassment, because some teachers said that I have to get sexually involved with them or else I would fail my class"* (Maria Antonia (Pseudonym) Age: 27 Years. Withdrawal Class: 9<sup>th</sup> Class).

Research done indicates, that sexual harassment leads to risk factors such as psychological symptoms whereby they lead to victims developing persistent sadness,

negative outlook, irritability, mood swings, impulsivity, emotional flooding, anxiety, fears of loss of control, excessive guilt and shame, escape fantasies, compulsive thoughts, rage episodes, obsessional fears, crying spells, persistent anger, and fear, decreased self-esteem, self-doubt, diminished self-confidence, decreased concentration, feelings of humiliation, helplessness, vulnerability, and alienation. (Taiwo et al., 2015). In all African societies, sexual perpetrators have always been condemned as a disgrace to the community. Further, their image is often tarnished within the immediate environment and referred to as outsiders since they bring shame to the community.

#### 4.1.2 Disharmonious Coexistence between Teachers and Girls

Teacher effectiveness has been strongly linked to student achievement and as one aspect of teacher quality, can be measured by student achievement. One of the most striking characteristics of human beings is diversity. Different ways of being, thinking, and existing, different needs, world views, and ethical positions mark the relationships between people. In this sense, the school as a microcosm of society brings together different views of the world, and different ways of being, thinking, and living, thus becoming a space for representing social differences and being a place where different conflicts occur daily. According to Valente, Lourenço & Nemeth, (2020), dealing with this situation type requires learning. That is why teachers need training in conflict management to correctly manage classroom conflicts and educate students on conflict management.

Evidence shows that teachers are the most important school-based influence on student academic performance (Hattie, 2003; Kyriakides, Christoforou, & Charalambous, 2013; Rowe, 2003) and that they account for up to 30% of the variance in student achievement (Hattie, 2009). Cases of rivalry between teachers and students negatively affected most girls who felt that most teachers never liked them for a number of reasons. One of the respondents claimed that,

*“It was even worse, because due to my more robust physical appearance, I was somehow harassed by them so this was one of the reasons that made me lazy to go to school to imagine that it would get there to be harassed by those who should be educators”* (Age: 24 years. Withdrawal Class: 10<sup>th</sup> Class).

From the findings, it is evident that most of the girls ended up scoring so poorly in their studies as one of them claimed:

*“Not very good, I was never good at school, the grades were low, I didn't even like it, sometimes I missed it, and the relationship was not good with the teachers.”*

For students to continue with their studies and perform well, teachers should emphasize positive aspects of students rather than negative aspects since it helps the students to be more forthcoming with positive behavior.

In cases where teachers appraised their students negatively, the students were demoralized, hence they never liked their studies. For instance, one respondent said that the relationship with the teachers was conflicting, My relationship, especially with the female Portuguese teacher, was conflicting:

*“Because I was realistic with her, I told her once that she was ugly and she took that as an offense and always tried to harm me. Everything I said in her class was wrong and he even lowered my grades to make me fail”* (Anderson (Pseudonym). Age: 22 Years).

In some cases, there is an overemphasized negative student attitude rather than praise that leads to bad relationships between instructors and students. Most students withdraw psychologically and even they tend to have a negative attitude towards their instructor. One respondent said that her relationship with the pedagogical director had brought a bad relationship with her. This finding concurs with other studies that indicate that students' academic outcomes cannot be achieved if the foundation that holds or bonds them is broken. For Cazden (2001), responsiveness can be ascertained when students familiarize themselves with their teachers' and institution's code of conduct. Institutions create learning environments for students to build effective interpersonal relationships with their teachers.

Cazden (2001) added that the teacher-student relationship is one of the significant factors in the learning environment. Additionally, social relationships define students' intellectual functioning. Failure to establish such kind of relationships, will affect the social well-being and academic performance of the student. For example, one respondent claimed that;

*“Portuguese teacher who was the school's pedagogical director, as she was very annoying and made the students afraid of her, which somehow influenced the interviewee not to try too hard. and don't worry about going to the blackboard during class because she always complicated*

*the students.”* (Andersan De Natividade Muthemba. Age: 22 Years. Dropout Class: 10<sup>th</sup> Class).

Additionally, another respondent claimed that there was a teacher who never liked her though other teachers never had any issue with her. In her own words:

*“The chemistry teacher didn't like me and I didn't like her, the relationship with the others was normal”* (MJT, 17 years old, 9th MC).

Additionally, another student claimed that her relationship with one of the teachers was a bad one since she had expressed a negative attitude and perception about the teacher's physical appearance. For her she felt that she was honest and sincere thus, there was no need for the teacher to hate her. In her words, she narrated that:

*“Only one teacher didn't like me, the Portuguese teacher because she cut her hair and I told her she was ugly. I was very realistic with her. She didn't like it, and she told the class director that I should fail and the director didn't agree with her. She was ugly and I was very realistic with her.”*

### 4.1.3 Uncaring and Inattentive Teachers

Teacher praise or reprimands have a subsequent effect on student behavior and performance. The teacher's praise yields positive outcomes, unlike reprimand whereby students may be affected and develop a judgemental attitude towards the instructor. For instance, one respondent narrated that a lack of motivation from the teacher made her drop out of school as shown. For instance:

*“Teachers influenced my decision to leave ... school. They usually don't have all that attention to motivate you as a student to be able to continue and not give up...”*

Integrating social life and the classroom environment is a difficult task that calls for teachers who are assertive to understand the diversity of student backgrounds. For positive relations between the teacher and the students, there is a need to understand life outside the classroom since it may help to explain subtle nuances inside the classroom, such as patterns of proactivity or reactivity, and administer the correct discipline measures. One student said;

*“The relationship with most teachers was good, except with the math teacher as he was more reprimanding.”* (RSF. Age: 29 Years. Withdrawal Class: 10th Class).

Anwar (2020) carried out a study on teacher's behavior and academic performance and found out that teacher behavior, as measured by the standard inventory used in this research, comprises eight distinct components of behavior (clarity, enthusiasm, interaction, organization, pacing, disclosure, speech, and rapport) while the academic performance of the students was measured by their CGPA. Anwar found that directive and tolerance teacher behaviour is the most effective behaviour because the teachers who always adopted this behaviour, their students performed very well and excellent while the teachers who always adopted authoritative or aggressive behaviour in the class, their students learned poorly in the class that is why they performed average or good in the class.

Teacher behavior, therefore, encompasses all the verbal and non-verbal behavior demonstrated by a teacher in an effort to impart education within an academic setting. One of the key factors that affect student performance leading to dropping out of school was the lack of attention and motivation from the teachers. One student claimed:

*“Teachers, they don't have all that attention to motivate the student, that is, to motivate me, to be able to continue and not give up, I don't know what”* (Age: 24 Years. Withdrawal Class: 10<sup>th</sup> Class).

The kind of teaching approach used during teaching also has an impact on the overall performance of a student. It is true that the teaching approach and techniques applied by different teachers have different results for student performance. For instance, one respondent said:

*“I had boring teachers who thought they were a lot, I didn't like them because they didn't even explain the contents well”* (EL, 24 years, 10th, MP).

However, the same respondent also mentioned having conflicting relationships with male teachers because, according to her:

*“I did not like the teachers because they always want to win over female students, they always talk about sex instead of teaching”.*

From the above findings, it is noted that such behavior impacts the learning abilities and academic performance of the students that are taught by the teachers at hand (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca & Malone, 2006). de Lijster et al. (2016), aver that many adolescents experience sexual harassment, and victims of sexual harassment have higher risks regarding well-being and health behavior such as higher risks of suicidal thoughts, suicidal ideation, and feeling unsafe at school. From the above findings, it is, therefore, important for

schools to rethink the effective academic and behavioral capacity building of teachers not only to help the teachers acquire the right teaching attitude but also eventually retain students in school.

#### 4.1.4 Students' Perceptions and Attitude to their Teachers

Students' development perceptions and attitude on their teachers depending on the kind of demand or emphasize given to his or her subject. Although this kind of perception exist, homework is generally used as a learning resource for educational activities. It provides students opportunities to improve their learning habits, learning performance, and aims to increase. However, students view homework differently according to their educational levels, beliefs, attitudes, and cultures. In the study, it was observed that there is no preference for teachers with a high level of demand in the course of the teaching and learning process, resulted to a conflicting relationship. The study also observed conflicting relationships with teachers and peers in the school environment derived solely from a lack of interest in school or studies. One respondent stated as follows:

*"The teachers did influence my decision to leave school...yes, yaaa, they gave me a lot of homework, they wanted me to know things I don't know and I don't even want to learn...." The same feeling extended to female and male colleagues: "haa... I was alone, I had no colleagues.... we studied in the same class but I didn't have friendships with anyone..." "No, I was alone because I didn't like school"*

In this study, it was also observed that students develop some kind of liking for a teacher regarding the kind of emphasis given on assignments and homework. Such kind of scenarios happen in cases where students do not understand the purpose of assignments and homework. For instance, one said:

*"I liked a Chemistry teacher because she was always nice to the students, but the Portuguese Teacher we used to call her as "Ciclone Idai" because she was very annoying, in case of missing a homework task she would send you out of the classroom and call the person in charge, because she was the pedagogical director" (VC. 20 years, 8th, MP).*

The situations reported by the interviewees show that a large part of the girls gave up going to school, justifying themselves on the basis of the conflicting relationships they had with their teachers. These phenomena can be

observed from several perspectives: The girls showed a greater affinity for teachers described as attentive because they motivated them to attend school, explained well and devoted themselves better to the subjects of these teachers, having conflicting relationships with others who did not have the same attitude; It was found that there was a misinterpretation of the exercise of the teachers' activity, where girls do not see the benefits of assigning homework tasks and the importance of demanding teachers to achieve educational goals

#### 4.1.6 Relation of Conflict to Absenteeism

Student absenteeism can result due to a number of factors such as parental poverty, assisting parents at home, lack of parental care, punishment at school, student attitude towards education, entertainment, and unconducive classrooms. This goes a long way to affecting their academic performance such that, they score low marks in class, they are unable to learn new techniques and examples used by the teacher in class and they respond wrongly to questions in class. This leads to a relationship conflict between girls and their instructors. For instance, one claimed that due to the family's instability, she was forced to miss some of the class. She said:

*"Lack of school fees and transport means to school; I used to arrive late and missed some classes." (O. 21 years, 8<sup>th</sup> grade dropout/MP).*

The teachers also complained a lot about the absenteeism of the girl in school. The findings here demonstrate conflicting relationships arising from a sequence of events that influenced school dropout of girls. To retain these students in school, teachers play a key role in providing an encouraging learning environment for their students to attend school on regular basis, hence leading to academic excellence. In cases where teachers do not take care of the general well-being of students, most of them give up and they may attend school irregularly.

Regarding the influence of teachers in the decision to drop out of school, one of the interviewees shared that the teacher discouraged her from continuing in school and did not like the way she was treated when she arrived late. One said that:

*"She was late and the teacher sent her away saying: "your presence doesn't help at all, go home" ... I dropped out of school at 19 years." (CT, 25 years 10<sup>th</sup>*



When she had doubts, the teacher didn't explain, she said she wouldn't change anything. At school they were not treated well and she preferred to stay with her mother". She dropped out at 19, MC). One of the major instrumental factors that may lead to students' motivation, attitude toward school, willingness to do homework, and confidence in their learning behavior is the teacher's attitude toward teaching the students.

Notwithstanding their abilities, an assuring smile from the teacher would encourage most students to perform well. Teachers sometimes develop negative attitude and perceptions towards lazy students, low performers, and disorganized students hence these affect the general performance of most students who eventually decide to be at home all the time. One student narrated that:

*"I was lazy, didn't attend every class, didn't do my homework"* (AA, 21 Years, 10th Class, MP).

This caused a conflicting relationship between her and the teacher forcing her to drop out of school. From the above evidence, it is clear that lack of commitment and support on the student's academic performance may lead to most students developing a negative attitude towards education and become regular absentees. As a result, most learners feel neglected hence referring themselves as failures.

One of the respondents said:

*"In secondary school, my teachers did not help me at all, I felt despised". My relationships with the teachers influenced my decision to drop out of school. ....Yes. My teachers didn't help me to dedicate myself to classes because when I was repeating, they scolded me"* (CAT, 19 years, 10<sup>th</sup> dropout, MC).

Therefore, this shows teachers' commitment, support and teaching behaviors correlate strongly with students' attitudes towards education hence reducing absenteeism, while, at the same time, discourage or amend those behaviors that are associated with low academic performance and lead them to high academic achievement.

#### **4.1.5 Relation of Conflict by Being Pregnancy**

Globally, teenage pregnancy has been a major interference with the educational achievement of female learners. It is one of the major contemporary social problems confronting most countries in the world. Most developing countries are experiencing high rates of teenage pregnancy which has become a threat to the progression of education. Bhana et al. (2010) argue that the presence of pregnant girl(s) in a classroom is not only a threat to their own academic achievement but

also to the collective academic performance of the class as well as the classroom harmony.

In Maputo province, early pregnancy is one of the most prominent factors as a cause of school dropout as evidenced by the interviewees. These girls reported having given up because they had not been able to deal with discrimination and experienced moments of prejudice on the part of some teachers, they described that the lack of support and stigmatization by the teachers made them feel ashamed and afraid of the school environment. One said:

*"I went to school but got pregnant early, with a lack of advice about this situation I ended up dropping out, at school they were laughed.... They talked badly (stigma for the pregnant girl), I ended up giving up anyway"*.

According to the study, discrimination and prejudice/stigma of pregnant adolescents also showed to happen in the school environment, both by teachers and colleagues.

One respondent described her situation as follows:

*"Some comments from teachers I didn't even hear, others were direct with her "child, what do you think you're going to do? Do you think any man will support you? ... Discrimination is always there. This helped in the decision to leave school out of shame, fear, both the teachers, so many colleagues saw me differently, and I experienced shame and fear. (MJT, 17 years old, 9th MC).*

Another respondent also said:

*"My relationship with fellow women and men influenced my decision to drop out of school through their comments behind my back and the bad looks."*

#### **4.1.5 Relations of Coercion**

The study also observed coercive relationships with male teachers in the form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment manifests itself and involves several problematic situations, ranging from psychological trauma to physical aggression. According to the interviewees, many of these situations occurred because the teachers who committed these acts did not see them as children and when they did not give in, they suffered blackmail, and they received sanctions that negatively affected their school performance. Even denouncing the harassment or in cases of having become pregnant with the teachers, they were always the ones who were harmed. In this regard, one of the respondents said:

*"I got pregnant by a teacher, as a result of sexual harassment and I couldn't continue to study at that school, besides, I had to take care of my son. And the teacher did not admit the pregnancy"* (GG. Age: 23 years, 9<sup>th</sup> grade dropout MP).

Another respondent said that:

*"I didn't have a good relationship with my teachers because they have sexual harassment and I suffered a lot from it"*. (LL. Age: 24 years, 9<sup>th</sup> grade dropout MP).

Many other respondents confirmed coercive relationships stemming from sexual harassment, as can be read below:

*"YEA; there were teachers who wanted to relate to me and blackmailed me with sex"* (LL. 24 years, 9<sup>th</sup> grade dropout, MP). *"YES, especially the teachers who wanted to have a romantic relationship with me and the result of that was the pregnancy I had; even my friends are sexually harassed, but there's nowhere to complain. I think women are afraid, just as I was afraid"* (LL. 24 years, 9<sup>th</sup> grade dropout, MP).

In addition to the consequences of sexual harassment that results in pregnancy, often not assumed by the perpetuating teachers, the study revealed that coercive relationships trigger another type of reaction in students, such as the development of a feeling of laziness attending school regularly. One respondent narrated:

*"With the teachers, just knowing that they had not very good tendencies also made me feel lazy about not going to school"* (Chaq, 24 years, 10<sup>th</sup> grade dropout/ MP).

Another respondent said:

*"I was blackmailed in the subjects that had the most problems: Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics, in the mathematics discipline I demanded values, Chemistry and Physics wanted sex in exchange for a ticket"* (VC, 8<sup>th</sup> grade dropout/MP).

In more detail, the respondent explained the process of the consequences of coercive relationships by teachers that culminated in their pregnancy by her boyfriend in the following ways:

*The issue was not at home, in the problem of studying, it was already in the school itself ... in the sense that at some point in the 8th grade all the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers were the same in the 9th grade, except for one and the other, so in a way I suffered, that... harassment by some teachers who did not allow me to continue studying, they already allowed me to fail, or like, they were threats against the school, I couldn't make these kinds of things get home because not everyone reacts well to these kinds of things, especially in the parents' part, so they always try to blame the student, justifying the short skirts, the ways of dressing and I ended up getting pregnant with my boyfriend who is now my husband..."* we studied, they taught, there was a boring teacher, there came a time when in the classroom where I was, I had to pay to pass the class, I had no money and I was undisciplined, I won't lie, maybe the teacher didn't like me" (C.18 Years, 8th grade dropout/MC).

The study also revealed that the students' bodies/physical appearance is one of the reasons that male teachers feel desire or want to get involved with them, making us rethink on the introduction of school uniforms measures and the debates that took place from that. One respondent claimed:

*"My relationship with the teachers was even worse, because due to my more robust physical appearance, I had, in a way, certain harassment by them, so that was one of the reasons that made me feel lazy to go to school just imagining that I would get there and be harassed by teachers those who should be educators"* (Chaq. 24 years, 10<sup>th</sup> dropout).

The existence and practice of sexual violence in its various forms, such as abuse and sexual harassment, among several that occur at the family, domestic, and community level and in public institutions has been recognized in studies carried out in Mozambique over the years. By way of example, Sweeting et al. (2000) argue that the use of the teacher's position in the involvement with the students with evidence of a mismatch between the different perceptions and attitudes of the actors and the legislation in force.

Osorio (2006) in his research on school socialization: family and school education and gender violence in schools observes that sexual harassment is recognized as an act that aims to obtain sexual favours in exchange

for the student's academic performance. The Ministry of Women and Social Action (MMAS, 2011) has also recognized that sexual harassment by teachers is a manifestation of unequal power relationships between a man and a younger woman that, when happening, exposes her to physical and psychological suffering including vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection, unwanted pregnancy, and consequent school dropout.

#### 4.1.6 Lack of Cooperative Relationships with Colleagues

Conflict relationships with peers were manifested by isolation and lack of support in the difficulties and conflict situations experienced in the school environment. The interviewee below reported that she did not have the support of her colleagues after suffering from sexual violence:

*"I used to go to GM Secondary school at night, because there was no place for the day period, one day on my way home from school I was sexually assaulted and everyone knew about it even at school, so I couldn't go back to school because of the trauma I suffered. (BB, 19 years old, 8<sup>th</sup> grade dropout/ MP).*

In some situations, stigmatization does not manifest itself on the side of the teachers, when manifesting with colleagues, the girl is totally defenceless. The interviewee below reported that even though she was pregnant, she had a good relationship with the teachers, but the opposite happened with her male and female colleagues:

*"The relationship with the teachers was good, they explained well. The relationship with colleagues was not very good because they started to talk badly about me because of the pregnancy... they laughed at me." When questioning the attitudes of her colleagues, which discouraged her from continuing her studies, the interviewee commented: "Yes, because I suffered prejudice from my colleagues at school" (OO, 21 years old, 8<sup>th</sup> grade dropout/ MP).*

One of the interviewees shared that she had a good relationship with her colleagues, but that there was competition with her male colleagues: *"There were some colleagues who waddled because they had better-living conditions"* (Mart 19 years, 8<sup>th</sup> grade/ MC). One respondent shared having experienced good relationships, but marked by competition with male colleagues:

*"Normal relationship there was a certain competition on the part of men where they did not want any approach with their colleagues, much less cooperation to carry out school work". (NM, 21 years old, 9<sup>th</sup> grade, MC).*

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Findings from the study confirmed that the social environment in which adolescent lives is important for their well-being and development. Hence the study concludes that a good relationship in the school plays a part in ensuring that adolescents develop social competence and an ability to make the sort of relationship required for cohesive studies. Further, social cohesion within the school environment is a major factor in social well-being and positive adolescent development which helps in shaping the future of an individual. To realize competitive results, teachers help adolescents resolve the crisis they are left to 'find themselves, which can make them become socially disconnected and develop an exaggerated sense of own importance thus leading to the inability to make defined choices in the future hence affecting their studies. In addition, encouragement and reinforcement from teachers are very crucial for adolescence to develop a positive attitude towards their studies.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that the government of Mozambique should formulate and implement educational policies to guide in retention of students in school. It is also recommended that the good behavior of the teachers mediates well the relationship between students' academic achievement and school retention. Therefore, teachers should adopt the behavior that creates a conducive environment in class so that students can be motivated to learn and remain in school.

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