

The Status and Causes of Secondary School Students' Dropouts: The Case of East Gojjam Administrative Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract- Persistent high dropout rates of secondary school students generate huge social and private costs. Thus, this study was intended to identify the status and causes of secondary school students' dropouts in East Gojjam administrative zone. To achieve this objective descriptive survey research design with mixed approach was employed. From 18 woredas of the zone, six woredas were purposively selected to conduct the study. From these six woredas, six secondary schools were selected using simple random sampling techniques. 175 teachers were selected through systematic random sampling technique to fill questionnaire and 168 of them were properly filled and returned the questionnaires. Qualitative data also collected through interview from 5 principals, 5 supervisors and 5 district education experts. 18 dropout returnee students and 30 Parent-Student-Teacher Association (PSTA) members were also participated in focus group discussions. Documents of schools and zone education department were consulted to examine the trends and status of dropout rates. The obtained quantitative data was analyzed using one-sample t-test and qualitative data was analyzed through word narration thematically. Hence, the study revealed that the trends of students' dropout rates in secondary schools of the study area showed a declining tendency and the highest dropout rates were existed in grade nine. The study also identified that the magnitude of dropout rates of students vary from year to year and among grade levels. The result of the study pointed out that several student-related, parents-related and school-related factors were contributed to secondary school students' dropout in the zone. It is suggested that teachers, principals and school administrations should work with students and their families to minimize early departure of pupils' from secondary schools.

Index Terms- Dropout, Trends, Causes, Secondary school

I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays indispensable role for all economic, political, social development and a principal means of improving the welfare of society at large. It also accelerates economic growth by maximizing labor productivity, promotes citizens innovative capacity of technologies and facilitates the diffusion and transmission of new knowledge and technologies. Hence, high levels of literacy and numeracy are pre-requisites for creating competitive work force and a nation of effective parents and active citizens. (UNESCO, 1998; Hanushek and Wobmann, 2008). Education is also a basic right in itself. Expanding access

to quality education for rural people is thus of crucial importance in the realization of human rights (MOE, 2002).

Despite direct and indirect link between education and labor market returns, the education system of most African countries characterized by high rates of dropout, which result in educational inefficiency and wastage of scarce resources (Habtamu, 2002). Thus, high students drop out figures might be a strong indicator of the future shortages of skilled labor force (De Sousa & Tesfa, 1999). Besides, dropping out is a serious problem because it denies fundamental human right of individual student to education by early departure of a student from school without completion of a given grade level (MOE, 2002).

The problem of dropping out should be the concern of every member of society since it has negative consequences both at individual and societal level. For society, drop out resulted in wastage of scarce resources (teachers who have already employed) and student time (time taken to attend school) (Koskei, Tonui, and Simiyu, 2015). Dropout has also adverse effect on nation progress by jeopardizing human capital formation needed for economic development. As to Azzam (2007) major social costs of drop out of school include reduced political participation, increased demand for social services, increased crime rates and poor levels of health.

Individual students also suffer negatively from dropping out of school. On average, youth who are dropping out are more likely to experience future unemployment, engage in crime, underemployment, and lower earnings (Thurton, Collins, and Daugherty, 2006).

Conceiving the negative consequences of drop out for society and individuals, facilitating school completion for all students must be a priority for educators, administrators, researchers and policy makers. In this regard, Bongani (2014) asserted that the ongoing neglect of such an important topic to developing countries renders the problem a near permanent stumbling block on the road to the elimination of poverty.

Addressing drop out has been high on the agenda of the Ethiopian government for several years believing that preventing drop out and encouraging successful completion of secondary school can enhance economic growth and social development. It can ensure that students graduate with at least the minimum qualifications needed for economic labor market and for further education & training. Thus, ministry of education planned to reduce drop out and repetition rates of general secondary education and expand general secondary school in view of its universalization by 2020 in line with the middle income country vision (MOE, 2010b).

However, high dropping out of students from schools has been one of the main challenges of the education system of Ethiopia in general, and secondary school in particular. For instance, the MOE data of 2010 showed that more than 17% of school age students of general secondary education were dropped out from the schools. The trend analysis for drop out showed a decline tendency from 2003 to 2005. It might be the government measures such as increase budget allocation to education, construct new schools, recruit and train teachers and the like to reduce drop out (FDRE, 2004). Nevertheless, dropout rates began again started to show an increasing trends from 2006 to 2009 (MOE & UNICEF, 2012). MOE 2010 data also showed that dropout trend of general secondary school students of Amhara region, had also high rates of drop out, nearly the national average (16.6%). Supporting this, UNESCO (2015) revealed that one of critical problems of the Ethiopia’s education sector is a high dropout rate almost at all levels.

Several factors were mentioned associated with students’ dropout in Ethiopia. Previous studies conducted on primary schools and female students drop out (Zehle, 2009; Maeregu & Tadesse ,2015; Habtamu, 2002 and MOE and UNICEF ,2012) revealed that several personal, school and family related factors contributed to students’ dropout. Some of the factors mentioned comprise ill-health, mal nutrition, low students interest to education, low employment opportunities to graduates, teachers’ methods of instruction, range of costs associated with schooling like uniform, travel, equipment and students’ opportunity costs.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is investigating the status and causes of secondary school students’ dropouts in East Gojjam administrative zone. Therefore, the study specifically addresses the following issues:

- To examine the magnitude of secondary school students drop out rate in the zone.
- To point out major factors that make secondary school students drop out in the zone.

III. METHODS

1.1. Participants

The participants of the present study comprised of 175 teachers, who were selected from districts of East Gojjam Zone Secondary schools using systematic random sampling technique to fill questionnaire. 5 principals, 5 supervisors and 5 woreda education experts of sample woredas/schools of secondary schools was selected using purposively and interviewed. 18 dropout returnee students and 30 Parent-Student-Teacher Association (PSTA) members were also participated in focus group discussions.

1.2. Instruments

In the study both close- ended and open-ended questionnaires having five-likert scale (where 1 stands for very low, 5 very high) were developed based on the review of related literatures and utilized to collect data from participants. Interview, focus group discussion and document analysis were also employed as a supplementary data collection tools.

1.3. Reliability of the instrument

Before being used for the actual purpose, the questionnaires were piloted on 30 respondents, who were out of the sample area, to check its reliability using Chrombach alpha and obtained 0.89 alpha coefficients, which was considered as reliable and suitable for data collection. Concerning this, Andy (2006) contended that the values of Cronbach’s alpha greater than 0.8 is good.

1.4. Data Analysis Procedures

In the study both quantitative and qualitative data were used and analyzed accordingly. Quantitative data was cleaned, coded and entered in the computer for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0. Therefore, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage) and one sample t-test were computed. The data that was obtained from open ended questionnaires, interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and document analysis were analyzed qualitatively using word description and narration thematically.

IV. RESULTS

1.5. The Status and Trends of Students Dropout Rates

Table 1: The Magnitude of Dropout Rates of East Gojjam zone by Grade level

Academic Year	Grade 9		Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12		Total	
	Total dropout	%	Total dropout	%	Total dropout	%	Total dropout	%	Total dropout	%
2005 E.C.	859	13.11	211	6.16	117	10.22	33	2.31	1220	9.5
2006 E.C.	3709	12.19	1209	4.90	628	8.61	262	3.92	5808	8.41
2007 E.C.	2641	8.7	667	2.92	656	6.69	177	2.65	4141	5.94

Source: adopted from East Gojjam Zone Education Department Annual Reports

Data was obtained after reviewing East Gojjam zone education department annual reports. As shown in the table 2, the magnitude of dropout rate was 9.50%, 8.41% and 5.94% for 2005-2007E.C. academic years respectively. Hence, this data indicated that there was a decreasing trend of dropout rate of secondary school students of East Gojjam Zone. From this, it can

be concluded that the trends of students’ dropout rate in secondary schools of the study area show a decreasing tendency. Concerning grade level there was a high dropout rate in grades nine and eleven students than grades ten and twelve students. Moreover, highest rates of dropout were registered in grade nine

than the rest grade levels (grade 10, 11 and 12) from 2005-2007E.C. academic years in the study area.

The qualitative data obtained from focus group discussion is in line with the above findings. One participant in the discussion expressed his views about early departure of students in the secondary schools in the following ways.

“Some students experienced problems with their transition to secondary school. This is due to the deterioration of school performance during their primary school achievement. Students were become desperate when they transferred to secondary

school due to their poor background in their primary school attainment. This negative experience decreased students’ commitment to school and contributed to their early school leaving”.

1.6. Major Factors that Contribute to Student Dropout

Table 2:Pupils related factors of Students Dropout

No	Pupils Related Factors	Mean	Mean difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std.error Mean
1	Disciplinary problems of students	2.77	-.232	-2.479	.014	.094
2	Health problems	2.60	-.405	-4.390	.000	.092
3	Pupil’s poor academic performance	2.94	-.060	-.549	.584	.108
4	Low expectation on future success	3.80	.798	8.676	.000	.092
5	Regular absenteeism from school	3.44	.440	4.788	.000	.092
6	Frequent repetition	2.77	-.226	-2.593	.010	.087
7	Peer influence	2.66	-.341	-4.172	.000	.082
8	Students’ low interest towards education	3.42	.417	3.860	.000	.108
9	Pupils pregnancy during schooling	2.99	-.012	-.099	.921	.121
10	Having various disabilities/hearing, visual, mental/	1.71	-1.286	-19.317	.000	.067
11	Pupil’s involvement in income generating activities	2.20	-.798	-8.604	.000	.093

N=168 df=167 P<0.05

Source: SPSS output of collected data

The study identified that pupils related factors that significantly contributed to secondary school students dropout were students low expectation on future success (M=3.80, t=8.676, P<0.05), regular absenteeism from school(M=3.44, t=4.788, P<0.05), and low interest towards education(M=3.42, t=3.860, P<0.05).

Consistent with the present study findings, previous study of Shadreck (2013) affirmed that lack of interest, even with high rates of return from educational investment, also appears to be a strong factor influencing a student's decision to drop out from school. Shadreck further asserted that less motivated students with low expectations concerning rewards from graduation and the job market play considerable role in one's decision to quit school.

Similarly, a study conducted by Haileselassie (2011) in the model primary schools of Central Tigray zone revealed

consistent result with the present study that pupils’ low expectation on future success and regular absenteeism from school were among the major contributing factors of students’ high dropout rate.

Consistently, one respondent during interview replied as follows:

Some students have less interest towards education. They go to school with the pressure of external forces. For instance completing a certain grade is compulsory to obtain driving license. Engaging in commercial activities or becoming a driver has better income than being employed in government offices. On the other hand, private occupations do not demand completing secondary schools at this time. That is why students drop out from this level not to disburse opportunity costs secondary education has.

Table 3: Parents Related Factors of Students Dropout

No	Parents Related Factors	Mean	Mean difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std.error Mean
12	Parent illness	2.52	-.476	-5.215	.000	.091
13	Parent death	2.25	-.750	-9.078	.000	.083
14	Family breakdown/divorce	2.30	-.702	-8.647	.000	.081
15	Parents need child labor	2.55	-.446	-4.521	.000	.099
16	Parents lack of perceived benefits from education	3.23	.226	2.352	.020	.096
17	Low level of parental education	3.38	.375	3.856	.000	.097

18	Low level of parents' monthly income (inability to afford expenses of school supplies)	3.46	.458	4.728	.000	.097
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N=168 df=167 P<0.05
Source: SPSS output of collected data

The study also pointed out that parents lack of perceived benefits from education (M=3.23, t= 2.352, P<0.05), low level of parental education (M=3.38, t= 3.856, P<0.05) and inability to afford expenses of school supplies (M=3.46, t= 4.728, P<0.05) were significant parent related factors of students drop out in the study area.

In line with the above finding National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) study conducted in the United States found that students from a lower socioeconomic status were more likely to drop out of school than a student from a higher socioeconomic status. This study further affirmed that

students from low-income families have a dropout rate of 10 percent than students from high-income families

One interviewed expert also give emphasis to parent's lack of perceived benefits from education as follows:

Parent's need of child labor is among the major parent related factors of students drop out. Since majority of the zone populations have engaged in agriculture, parents need their child labor during harvesting and other farming activities. This may lead students' missed many school days and finally depart from the system.

Table 4: School Related Factors of Students Dropout

No	School Related Factors	Mean	Mean difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Std. error Mean
19	Poor school management	3.30	.298	3.197	.002	.093
20	The large size of students in the class	3.04	.036	.298	.766	.120
21	Sexual harassment of female students in the school	2.80	-.196	-1.873	.063	.105
22	Shortage of school facilities (desk, chairs, toilets)	2.43	-.571	-5.688	.000	.100
23	Lack of qualified teachers in the school	1.99	-1.012	-11.810	.000	.086
24	Unavailability of enough teachers in the school	2.04	-.964	-10.387	.000	.093
25	Lack of encouragement given by teachers to pupils	2.46	-.542	-5.788	.000	.094
26	Lack of support to students who have academic difficulties	3.28	.181	2.021	.000	.097
27	Inappropriate evaluation of pupils performance	2.82	-.185	-2.126	.035	.087
28	School distance from pupils home	2.77	-.226	-2.361	.019	.096
29	Unattractive instructional techniques(methods)	3.47	.530	6.096	.000	.088
30	Irrelevancy of the curriculum to the students	2.67	-.333	-3.655	.000	.091
31	Shortage of students' textbook	2.64	-.363	-3.472	.001	.105

N=168 df=167 P<0.05
Source: SPSS output of collected data

School related factors of students drop out of school were disclosed in the study. Therefore, poor school management (M=3.30, t= 3.197, P<0.05), lack of additional support students faced academic difficulties (M=3.28, t= 2.012, P<0.05) and less attractive teacher's instructional methods (M=3.47, t= 6.096, P<0.05) became the major significant school related factor of students drop out in the study area.

Similarly, one interviewee expressed his view as follows:

Unless low achieving students obtained additional support, their frustration increases. They may like to cease their schooling not to repeat the same grade level. Besides, students are suspended for minor infractions in schools. For instance less attractive instructional strategies are being used by teachers without regard to individual student learning styles may lead students to quit from schools.

V. CONCLUSION

From the trend analysis results the study concluded that the magnitudes of dropout rates of students vary from year to year and among grade levels. It was found that students' dropout rates in secondary schools showed a declining tendency and there were highest dropout rates in grade nine. On the other hand, there was no single major factor that contributes to students high dropout rates in the zone. Rather, several pupil-related (low expectation on future success, regular absenteeism from school and low interest towards education), parent-related (lack of perceived benefits from education, low level of parental education and inability to afford expenses of school supplies) and school related factors (poor school management, lack of additional support of students and less attractive teacher's instructional methods) were identified as significant factors that induce students to early depart from schools and therefore there is need to take measures by teachers, principals and parent teacher association members to curb the problem.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is believed that if parents are informed, concerned, and involved with their child's education, students stay in school and perform successfully. Thus, parents should actively involve and engage in their child's education in schools to increase students' progression rates. Schools should provide support for students who are having difficulty succeeding academically and create self-help mechanisms for economically poor learners and improve teachers methods of instruction.

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