DETERMINANTS OF MIDDLE CLASS SCHOOL DROPOUT AMONG BOYS IN THE RIYADH PROVINCE OF SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

Purposes: This study examines the determinants of middle-income school dropouts in Saudi Arabia. The determinants of dropouts are fairly similar across many countries worldwide and this has made the issue of dropouts a global phenomenon. However, the situation in Gulf countries is different because these countries accord special treatment to male children but not to female children. This directly affects the educational pursuit of male children in the region. Saudi Arabia was empirically studied and a sample of 360 respondents was investigated. The respondents were drawn randomly from each of the 11 secondary night schools.

Methodology: The method used for analysis in this study was a combination of descriptive statistics involving cross-tabulations and simple multivariate logistic regression. The results showed that the majority of the dropouts are aged between 15 and 32 years.

Results: The regression results showed that absenteeism, educational targets, and value have a significant relationship with school completion. These results may be connected to the findings of the Dubai School of Government in 2011, which indicated that male pursuit of employment opportunities was of greater significance in achieving social and economic mobility compared to educational achievement. This suggests that Saudi males prioritize employment opportunities over educational achievements.

Implications/Applications: On the other hand, there are also those who place value on education and will make the effort to complete their school education in Saudi Arabia.

Novelty/Originality: Thos finding reveals a significant correlation between school completion and educational value. The implication is that male student who values education are more likely to complete school in comparison with those who do not value education. Efforts must be intensified to promote retention and create awareness among the young people of the benefits of education in the long run.

Keywords: Dropout, Middle Class, Logistic Regression, Saudi Arabia.

INTRODUCTION

Dropping out of school is a global phenomenon, which is detrimental to the students, their families, and society at large. According to Witte et al. (2013), dropping out of school is synonymous with PREMATURE withdrawal from school. Kaventuna (2009) and Mpayangu et al. (2014), view it as the termination of studies without sitting for the examination the learner should be preparing for. Consequently, dropout children are regarded as young boys and girls who enroll in schools and for one reason or another, other than death, leave school prior to finishing the grade and do not transfer to another school (Dasilva, 2015).

In many countries worldwide, particularly developing countries, despite increasing attention on the part of policymakers, school dropout remains a worrying issue. Huisman and Smits (2009) found that the challenge in most of the Middle Eastern countries is no more about registering the youngsters in school but keeping them there until completion. According to them, although the enrolment ratios are good, there are indications of an undesirable trend towards non-completion of both secondary and tertiary education. In relation to this, a number of factors relating directly to the individual learner, his family, school environment and the wider society have been found to be responsible for school dropout.

A summary of researches across the globe shows several determinants of dropout of both male and female students. In the United States (US), Harlow (2003) revealed that a student prematurely quits school every nine seconds while Martin and Halperin (2006) found that one-third of students who enter high school in the US fail to stay till the end. In Canada, the dropout rate has decreased over the years but 10% of all students do not complete high school (Gilmore, 2010). In the United Kingdom, one out of every five students drops out of school by age 16 (Paton, 2012). This shows that dropout is a global phenomenon and is happening in both developed and developing countries. However, cultural and religious factors play a role in exposing the determinants of dropout in various regions of the world.

The determinants of dropout in Gulf countries mirror those in countries worldwide and pertain to low socio-economic backgrounds, parents with low education levels, and less than satisfactory teaching. Furthermore, certain factors aggravate the problem in the Gulf countries. Studies have suggested that Gulf countries being a resource-rich region breed a renter state and this impacts the life of the citizens. In 2011, the Dubai School of Government conducted a study

to try and determine the reason or reasons for the low percentage of men in higher education and found that men considered connections related to employment opportunities as of greater importance in attaining social and economic mobility than school attendance. Also, the culture in Gulf countries prioritizes young women on whom there they place higher expectations and greater pressure to be successful achievers. There is a slogan in the Gulf that reads: "al rayyal ma ya'eeba shay" or "the man is never at a disadvantage". This has created greater tolerance of failure among boys than among girls.

However, in recent times, Governments in the Gulf countries, especially in Saudi Arabia have introduced a number of measures to ensure a significant reduction in dropout rates to the minimum. In spite of all these problems associated with school dropout, there is little official data concerning dropout in the country which is based on empirical findings. Determining the reasons for students dropping out of school is, however, crucial in attempts to solve this serious challenge in the education sector. This research study investigates and understands the phenomenon of middle-class school dropout among boys in the Riyadh province of Saudi Arabia in order to bridge this gap in information and to understand the latest trend.

However even though this study took a comprehensive look at the school dropout phenomenon in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, due to the time and resource constraints, the study was restricted to the Riyadh province in the KSA. Also, the investigation only covered middle-class family boys who drop out of secondary schools.

The study comprises five sections: Introduction, Literature Review, methodology, Results and Discussion, and the Conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Factors related to individuals that could lead to dropout relate to characteristics and experiences both within and outside the school. They include such factors as student's academic achievements, retention, absenteeism, participation, and engagement in school activities, being motivated and social interaction with peers (Ridge et al., 2013; Abilgaziyeva et al, 2018). However, within the context of the individual learner, poor academic achievement has been found to be the strongest factor determining the student's intention to remain in school or to quit (Lee & Burkam 2003; Ahmad & Ahmad, 2018). This is because poor academic achievement is related to other factors that are often absent from school and disruptive behavior and over time it could also result in low self-esteem and low educational expectati0ns and subsequently, prematurely quitting school (Hammond et al., 2007). Gouda and Sekher (2014) in applying data from National Family Health Survey in 2005–06 found that the number of people in a household, the number of children, and parents' educational level e were significant factors that influenced children aged from 6 to 16 to drop out of school.

Furthermore, many other factors related to a child's family could play a significant role in his ability to complete school or drop out. Such factors include income level of family, socio-economic status, parents' educational level, family structure as well as the presence or otherwise of another dropout within the family among other factors (Rumberger, 1995; Hunt, 2008; USAID, 2011). The socio-economic status of the parents for example, has been proven to be a strong universal influence on continuity or otherwise of their children in school across both the developed and developing countries. Generally, children from low-income or single-parent households have a greater likelihood of dropping out from school This is because these categories of children more likely fail to have the family support and encouragement needed to for them to decide to continue in school (Christle et al., 2005; Rumberger 1987). A very strong positive correlation has also been found between the level of parent's education and their children's school achievements, retention and tendencies to continue or drop out of school, while there is above stronger correlation with the mother's level of education (Maurin & McNally 2008).

Similarly, the school environment to a large extent also influences dropout tendencies. Within this domain, student-teacher relations, poor teaching methods, insufficient teaching and learning materials, poor motivation form school and absence of concern about children's learning and progress, all contribute to school dropout (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). In addition to the above factors, communal attitudes and peer groups can also impact children's tendencies to withdraw from school. Low-income communities may impact child and development of adolescents due to the absence or inadequacy of resources like playgrounds, parks, and after-school programmes or undesirable peer influences (Hallinan & Williams, 1990). Community residence may also affect parenting practices over and above parental education and income (Klebanov et al., 1994). Again, students living in low-income communities may also be more likely to have friends who are dropouts, which increase the likelihood of dropping out of school (Carbonaro, 1998). Dropping out of school, whatever may be the cause is undesirable in any society as it limits the future opportunities of children. Understanding the nature and causes of dropout is therefore, necessary if this major educational challenge is to be effectively addressed.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a quantitative research approach to ascertain the determinants of dropouts in Saudi Arabia. The quantitative approach becomes imperative because it provides an allowance for the collection of data using questionnaires and analysis based on information provided by the respondents. This approach is widely used because it processes the raw data and presents the outcome in an empirical form which has wide acceptability in the world today.

The survey questionnaire was designed and prepared by the researchers based on adaptations from several previous studies. The questions were written in Arabic as the questionnaire would be distributed to potential respondents who were drawn from night's schools in the Riyadh province of the KSA. Following the drafting of the questions of the questionnaire, the draft was submitted to a panel of three experts in the relevant field of study. Comments received from the panel of experts were studied and incorporated into the main questionnaire to be distributed to the potential respondents.

The target population for this study included dropouts drawn from a total of 55-night schools (Private and Government) in the capital city of Saudi Arabia, and which are operated based on three class levels (levels 1, 2 and 3). However, the size of the population of the students in these schools required a sample to be drawn. From a total of 55 schools, the cluster sampling technique was applied because the sample involved three categories of students at three different levels in the night schools. This type of sampling is usually designed to select a sample that best describes the characteristics and complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. The three levels were designated as three cohorts from grades 1, 2, and 3, chosen on the assumption the students in various grades would have different reasons for dropping out. If a typical student in each cohort had never repeated a grade, cohort 1 students should move to cohort 2 and cohort 2 to cohort 3. On the other hand, as repetition was common, the number of students in these cohorts was likely to have entered school and completed school earlier. This study selected 20% of each of the night schools both government and private. This suggested that a total of five government-sponsored night schools and six privately-sponsored night schools were chosen. As concluded in the empirical literature, there is no rule of thumb regarding an actual sample size to be selected but it is encouraged for a manageable sample to be used, based on the research objective. Further, the size of a sample does not necessarily guarantee the representativeness of a population, but a sample size of 11-night schools was considered adequate in the case of this study.

The selection of the sample considered various factors such as the purpose of study, time allocated for the research and availability of required information for the study. For this study, the sample included 11-night schools randomly selected. The decision to involve these schools was based on facts of economic activities, economic status of the communities and accessibility of the means of transport. The researcher had respondents who provided reliable information for the study. The sample size of this study was 360 respondents, drawn randomly from each of the 11-night secondary schools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an analysis of the findings and discusses the determinants of school dropout in the study area. Although the questionnaires distributed were not all retrieved, the number of the questionnaires received from the respondents was sufficient for a meaningful analysis; as such the percentage of non-returned questionnaires was insignificant and not capable of changing the results. The age of the respondents and their income level were provided to ensure compliance with the types of respondents needed for this study.

Table 1: Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15-20	73	26.2
21-26	110	39.4
27-32	22	7.9
33+	74	26.5
Total	279	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2017

The results shown in table 1 summarise the ages of the respondents used in this study. The table shows that most of the respondents are between the ages of 21 and 26 years with 39.4% followed by those between the ages of 33 years and above while those in the 15-20 years group had almost the same percentage of 26.2% and 26.5% respectively. Only a handful of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 32 years who made up 7.9% of the respondents. These results revealed that about 74% of the respondents were between the ages of 15 and 32 years. The implication of these results is that a large percentage of young male citizens in Saudi Arabia are dropouts at one point in their lives. This is evident in the fact that night schools were used for this study and these schools are established with the sole aim of reintegrating dropouts.

Table 2: Students' study level and average monthly income of the family

		Average monthly income of the family			Total
		less than RS3000	RS 3000-RS5000	above RS 5000	
Student's study level	dropout at primary school	9	24	8	41

completed primary school	6	81	28	115
dropout at secondary school	0	53	60	113
Total	**15**	**158**	**96**	**269**

Since a number of likely determinants exist on school dropout, the analysis of this study commenced with a cross-tabulation of the dropout period and the average family income. Since family income has been largely documented in the literature as one of the factors that prompt students to drop out of school, this study attempted to show that it is the case of middle-income families in Saudi Arabia. The results in Table 2 reveal that most of the respondents who completed primary school before dropping out of school are within the average income of RS3000-RS5000 while those that drop out of secondary school have family incomes of RS5000 and above. The results show that family income has a correlation with the dropout status of students.

Table 3: Students' study level and Absenteeism /Truancy as student

		Absenteeism /Truancy as student				Total
		never	rarely	sometimes	always	
Student's study level	dropout at primary school	2	11	16	12	41
	completed primary school	1	33	19	57	110
	dropout at secondary school	0	51	34	28	113
Total		**3**	**95**	**69**	**97**	**264**

The cross-tabulation of the dropout level and absenteeism is presented in Table 3. The results show that absenteeism is also a factor that leads to dropout. From the results, the number of students that are rarely absent from school and those that are always absent from school is almost the same with 95 responses and 97 respondents respectively. In this case, it is not clear whether the absenteeism of students is a determining factor in dropping out of school.

Table 4: Students' study level and adequate teaching staff

		Adequate teaching staff		Total
		Yes	No	
Students' study level	dropout at primary school	40	1	41
	completed primary school	116	0	116
	dropout at secondary school	114	0	114
Total		**270**	**1**	**271**

Conventional wisdom relates to the availability of teachers to the possibility of students dropping out of school (see: Christine et al., 2007). This study attempted to cross-tabulate the level at which the student's dropout from school with the availability of teaching staff in Saudi Arabia. The results presented in Table 4 show that for the three classes considered, about 100% of the respondents revealed that their schools have adequate staff. Therefore, the inadequacy of staff is not an issue to explain the rate of dropout among students from middle-income families.

Table 5: Students' study level and (l) easily accessible school location

		(l) Easily accessible school location		Total
		Yes	No	
Student's study level	dropout at primary school	37	4	41
	completed primary school	114	2	116
	dropout at secondary school	109	4	113
Total		**260**	**10**	**270**

Research has pointed to distance to school as an important determinant of educational access. Juneja (2001) observed that in areas where schools are further away from homes, the distance may be considered too far for younger children to travel, especially young girls. Ease access to school can play a role in reducing the dropout rate. For this study, the

results presented in Table 5 show that proximity to school does not explain drop out of the respondents. Therefore, accessibility does not explain the dropout rate in Saudi Arabia.

Table 6: Students' study level and Lack of Motivation to continue schooling

		Lack of Motivation to continue schooling				Total
		strongly disagree	undecided	agree	strongly agree	
Student's study level	dropout at primary school	10	8	22	1	41
	completed primary school	27	62	27	0	116
	dropout at secondary school	30	38	46	0	114
Total		67	108	95	1	271

Lack of self-motivation has been documented in literature as one of the major reasons for dropout. Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier (2005) focusing on the transition to the first year of high school reported that the intention to drop out was correlated to a decline in self-determined motivation. The findings presented in Table 6 show that most of the respondents are undecided as to whether a lack of self-motivation is a reason why they dropout of school. However, a large number of the respondents admitted that they lacked self-motivation in their educational pursuit and this was one of the reasons they dropped out of school.

Table 7: Regression Result: Dependent variable: Completion rate

Variable		Coefficients	P-value
			.034
	[class = 2]	6.227	.000
Location	absenteeism	-.338	.031
	Educational target	.615	.000
	Educational value	1.199	.000
	Self-esteem	.081	.572
	Educational achievement	.136	.545

The logistic results presented in Table 7 further explain the factors that determine dropout rates in Saudi Arabia. Four factors based on empirical literature were considered and they included: absenteeism, educational target, the value attached to education, self-esteem and educational achievement. The results show that absenteeism increases possibilities to drop out of school and the probability value revealed that there is a significant relationship between absenteeism and school dropout. It shows that a 1% increase in the rate of absenteeism decreases the possibility to stay in school by 0.338%. In the case of the educational target, there is a positive and significant nexus and the same is revealed for educational value. This suggests that the more the students target to pursue their studies, the less they are likely to drop-out. Self-esteem and educational achievement are insignificant but still play a role in determining the drop-out rate.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the determinants of middle-income school dropouts in Saudi Arabia and was motivated by the increasing rate of dropout despite deliberate government efforts to retain students in schools. On a global scale, factors that induce dropouts are relatively similar and this has made the issue of dropout a global phenomenon. However, Gulf countries accord special treatment to male children compared to female children and this has affected the educational pursuit of the male children in the region. This study focused on male middle-income families to determine the major reason for dropping out of school. A sample of 360 respondents was drawn randomly from each of the 11-night secondary schools and investigated. A combination of descriptive statistics involving cross-tabulations and the simple multivariate logistic method was employed for the analysis. The results show that the majority of the dropouts are between the ages of 15-32 years. The regression results show that absenteeism, educational targets and value have significant relationships with school completion. These results may be connected to the findings by the Dubai School of Government in 2011 which concluded that male pursuit of employment opportunities was more important in achieving social and economic mobility than academic achievement. This suggests that the Saudi males prefer to gain employment opportunities rather than attend school. Also, the value placed on education is a major reason given by male students who complete school in Saudi Arabia. The finding revealed a significant correlation between school completion and

educational value. The implication is that male student who values education are more likely to complete school in comparison with those who do not value education. Efforts must be intensified to promote retention and an awareness campaign must be initiated to educate young people on the benefits of education in the long run. Also, there should efforts made by the government of Saudi Arabia to change the mind of male children regarding the advantages they have over their female counterparts.

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