



Reasons for Dropout for Vocational High School Students^{*}

Ali TAŞ^a

Kırıkkale University

Veysel BORA^c

Mehmet Akif Ersoy University

Abdullah SELVİTOPU^b

Eskişehir Osmangazi University

Yusuf DEMİRKAYA^c

Mehmet Akif Ersoy University

Abstract

This study aimed to determine the reasons for dropout for persons who have not completed vocational education programme and left school without a diploma. By using snowball sampling method, 19 persons, willing to participate in the study, were reached. Data were obtained by semi structured interview forms. In data analysis process, inductive content analysis method was used. Findings show that reasons for dropout can be divided into four categories as "individual", "school", "family" and "neighborhood based". Most of the families supported their children but some couldn't due to low socio-economic status. Attitudes and behaviors of teachers, peers and school administration have major effects on students who are at dropout risk. Most of the participants have never thought of returning back to school. And also, most of the participants did not find it necessary to talk with psychological guidance and counseling services. It is known that dropping out causes lots of problems socially and individually so some precautions should be taken to prevent it.

Key Words

Vocational High School, Dropout, Reasons for Dropout, Individual, Social, Family.

Education refers to overall processes that help individuals to develop their behaviors, attitudes and abilities (Tezcan, 1985). It remains as the major tool by which people become empowered and the economic, social, and personal well-being of all citizens in all societies

is provided (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010). The prosperity of a country depends on its well qualified and educated human capital. Thus education level of a society is one of the most important indicators of socio economic development and productivity rates in a country (Çakmak, 2008).

* This study was presented as a proclamation in the 20. National Educational Sciences General Assembly held in Burdur between 8-10 September, 2011.

- a **Ali TAŞ, Ph.D.**, is currently an associate professor of Educational Sciences, Educational Administration Supervision Planning and Economy. His research interests include leadership, job satisfaction, classroom management, school management, and school development. *Correspondence:* Assoc. Prof. Ali TAŞ, Kırıkkale University, Faculty of Education, Yahşihan, Kırıkkale, Turkey. Email: atas865@gmail.com.
- b **Abdullah SELVİTOPU** is currently a Ph.D. student of Educational Administration. Contact: Eskişehir Osmangazi University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Administration, Eskişehir, Turkey. Email: apox24@hotmail.com.
- c **Veysel BORA** is currently a graduate student of Educational Administration. Contact: Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Administration, Burdur, Turkey. Email: veyselbora@hotmail.com.
- d **Yusuf DEMİRKAYA** is currently a graduate student of Educational Administration. Contact: Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Institute of Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Administration, Burdur, Turkey. Email: al736374@gmail.com.

Dropping out is a common severe problem for all countries in the world. It causes a big human and social capital loss in all countries. A high dropout rate also diminishes the pool of well qualified people from diverse backgrounds who will enter the professional and political ranks that make important policy decisions (APA, 2010). For example, in USA, it is estimated that in the next ten years twelve million students will leave school without having a diploma and that will cost USA about three trillion dollars (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2007). That is the case for Turkey, too. According to the report prepared by European Commission, in Turkey 44.3 percent of the 18-24 age group have left school without completing it (European Commission Press Releases, 2011). That means about half of the 18-24 age group do not have the necessary competences for living in better standards. And it also means long term losses that affect individuals and society (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

As Suh (2001) stated dropout means leaving school without having a diploma. Every year hundreds of students leave their school because of some problems like absenteeism, low achievement, grade repetition etc. Dropout is a complex problem (Rumberger, 2001). It is difficult to distinguish individual factors from the economic and social ones. Hence, dropout reasons can't be tied up to one dimension (Morara, 2007).

Dropping out has several consequences for both the person and the society. A drop-out will have serious educational deficiencies. Therefore, he will have difficulties in finding a good and well-paid job in the future. These individuals also have higher tendencies to work in illegal jobs, have health problems, increased demand for social services, and will cause high crime rates. These are some of the consequences of dropping out for the person. On the other hand, social consequences of dropout can be listed as *i*) high crime rates, *ii*) higher health costs, *iii*) social integration problems, *iv*) income inequality, *v*) low tax rates for the state (Rumberger, 1987).

In terms of human capital and country development, it is clear that dropout should be prevented or reduced as soon as possible. Therefore, this study dealt with vocational high schools, which are more severely damaged from dropout. The aim of vocational schooling is to prepare well qualified human supplies for labor market. It plays an important role in preparing young people for jobs, improving their abilities and meeting labor market needs. Countries are well aware of the fact that better vocational schooling means better competition.

OECD countries are not able to compete with cheap labor market in underdeveloped ones or because of technology, unskilled jobs in OECD countries have perished. Therefore, qualified labor force with vocational and technical skills is needed (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2011). This demand can be met by vocational schools.

After literature review, we found that there are limited studies about drop out reasons in Turkey (Özer, 1991; Özer, Gençtanırım, & Ergene, 2011; Şirin, Özdemir, & Sezgin, 2009; Türk-İş, 2006; Uysal, 2007). On the other hand, we could not retrieve any studies about the drop out reasons in vocational high schools. There is not any dropout monitoring program so we do not have accurate statistical numbers about dropout rates. In 2010, Education Reform Initiative, which is a non-profit organization, published a report about educational statistics in Turkey. According to that report, dropout rate in vocational high schools is about 9,4 percent; the highest rate compared to the other types of high schools (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi [ERG], 2010). It is clear that dropout problem in vocational high schools is severe and policy makers should take some precautions to prevent or reduce that number as soon as possible.

Method

Research Model

The goal of this study is to find out the reasons of dropping out in vocational high schools. To meet that goal, case study, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study.

Study Group

The study group consists of 19 participants, who have left vocational schools without a diploma. These participants were determined by snowball sampling method. According to Patton (1987) in snowball sampling method the researcher asks the first person a question like "Can you recommend someone to talk about that issue?" Firstly, one of the researchers contacted his relative who has dropped out of school. Then, with the help of this person we reached two more persons. By following their suggestions, we were able to reach 22 persons. But three of these 22 individuals initially contacted did not want to participate in the study. Thereby, the study group consisted of 19 participants.

Data Collection Instrument

The data in this study were collected with the help of a semi-structured interview form. First of all, the related literature was reviewed by every researcher and an interview form was prepared by each researcher respectively. Then, we discussed all the questions and prepared an interview form that included six questions. After that process, the form was reviewed by two faculty members specialized in educational administration and psychological guidance and counseling. According to their feedbacks one of the questions was rewritten.

Data Analysis

Inductive content analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained from participants. All the raw data were coded by the researchers respectively. Then, by using the codes, themes and sub themes were formed. Findings were supported by direct quotations from answers provided by the participants.

Validity and Reliability

In qualitative studies, validity is about the correctness of the scientific findings and reliability refers to the repeatability of findings. To ensure the validity and reliability of this study, some precautions were taken beforehand. These precautions are as follows;

- a) Related literature was reviewed by each researcher to increase the internal validity of the research and the contextual frame was composed. The participants were allowed to check their answers for once. Some of the participants, especially the female ones, were a little shy. But the researchers tried to help them relax by talking about other things.
- b) Research process was explained as clearly as possible to increase the external validity and reliability. All the steps of the study were described in detail.
- c) In order to ensure internal reliability of the study, all data were written without any interference.
- d) The raw and coded data are still being kept by the researchers. The data are open to everyone.

Results

The findings of the study are as follows;

- 1) Most participants dropped out of a vocational

high school because of individual factors. These factors are stated as absenteeism, intensive curriculum and grade repetition. As can be seen, absenteeism, intensive curriculum and grade repetition can cause high rates of dropout. Some of the participants dropped out because of having some problems with school administration and peers. Another dropout reason is related to family-based problems such as socio-economic status and low income. The last dropout reason for a female participant is about her family's mistrust of neighborhood.

- 2) Most participants think that their families showed concern for them in their school life. Families also tried to prevent their children from dropping out, but the participants dropped out anyway.
- 3) The attitudes and behaviors of teachers, peers and school administration have major roles during the process of dropping out. Most participants think that teachers are unfair in some of their practices. Participants also think they encountered the wrong person to be friends with.
- 4) In the dropout process, participants think it is unnecessary to talk with a counselor or go to guidance services. Some of them are unaware of the guidance services provided in their schools. Poor communication between students and guidance service is also a major problem.
- 5) Because of unwillingness to continue school, most participants never tried to return to school. Just a few of them attempted to go back once or twice.
- 6) Most participants are happy with their present lives. They have no regrets about dropping out. Some of them are working and earning money for their households. Some of them are attending open high school classes. Only one of them has married after dropping out.

Discussion

This study dealt with reasons for dropout in vocational high schools. According to the findings of this study, dropout reasons were categorized into four sub themes as individual, school, family and neighborhood based. In some studies about dropout, the reasons were stated as economy, socio-cultural and family, educational system and school (Gökşen, Cemalçılar, & Gürlesel, 2006) or family, economy, individual and neighborhood (Şirin et al., 2009). Participants stated the individual reasons of dropout as absenteeism, grade repetition, intensive curriculum and reluctance. This finding supports

the studies which found out the absenteeism as an important indicator of dropout (Carbonaro, 1998; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Rumberger, 1995; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). Some participants stated that they are reluctant to attend school because of having to repeat grades. They especially emphasized that they do not want to be in the same class with younger students. This is a psychological situation. According to that finding, it can be claimed that grade repetition and low achievement are important factors of dropout. Some studies support that finding (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Jimerson, 1999; Kaufman & Bradby, 1992; O'Higgins, D'Amato, Caroleo, & Barone, 2007; Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 1995). Participants, who dropped out because of school and neighborhood factors stated the reasons as remoteness of school, mistrust of neighborhood and teacher repression. A female participant emphasized that she dropped out because of his father's mistrust of neighborhood. Morara's (2007) study supports that finding. Family based reasons of dropout were socio-economic level of family and poverty. This finding shows that socio-economic status is an important factor in dropping out. Some studies about the role of family in dropout process support that finding (Bryk & Thum, 1989; McNeal, 1999; O'Higgins et al., 2007; Pong & Ju, 2000; Rumberger, 1995).

Most participants stated that their families supported them in all respects. Despite that support, they dropped out because of their reluctance to attend school. According to this finding, it can be said that personal preferences are more determining in school attendance. Six participants said that if their families' socio-economic status had been better, they wouldn't have dropped out. Similar findings can be found in literature. For example, in their study, Sabates, Hossain and Lewin (2010) found that socio-economic status of a family is an important factor in dropping out process. Another finding of this study is related to good relationships in the household and peer support. Studies about household relationships support this finding (McNeal, 1999; Özer et al., 2011; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996).

Another dropout reason stated by participants is related to the attitudes of teachers, peers and school administration. Most participants think that the teachers are unfair to them and have low competence in teaching. This finding points out the importance of being fair to students. Some participants emphasized their mistakes about choosing friends. They think they had bad friends

and because of them they skipped classes. Studies about teachers, peers and principals support this finding (Gökşen et al., 2006; Koedel, 2008; Lee & Burkam, 2000; Özer et al., 2011; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Şirin et al., 2009).

In this study, we also tried to focus on the role of guidance services during the dropping out process. According to the answers of the participants, some stated that they had no counselors in their schools. Some of them, who had a counselor, emphasized the poor communication between students and guidance services. Another reason stated by a few participants was the fact that they already decided to dropout so they thought it to be useless to talk with a counselor. In the literature we could not reach any studies about the role of guidance services during the dropout processes.

Another finding is related to the efforts to return to school. Most participants are unwilling to return to school. That shows us they are happy with their present lives. Most of them stated that they are happy because they think the school is really boring. They are freer and happier and do not want to return to school. Some of them also are attending open high school courses. That means if the school bores the individual, then he or she tends to drop out. A few participants wanted and tried to return to their school but they couldn't because of their families.

Most participants think their present lives are better and freer than the school life. Some of them are happy because they contribute to their family by working and earning money. But a few of them are regretful for dropping out. They are anxious about their future lives.

In conclusion, dropout is a common problem in schools especially in vocational ones. Dropout rate in vocational high schools should be prevented or reduced. Considering the findings of this study, it is suggested that students can benefit from training shops in vocational schools by earning some money with their work. In this way, they will not be a burden to their families. It is recommended that a dropout monitoring programme can be developed to track the students in national level. Dropout commissions can be established to prevent the dropouts in school level. Moreover, a strong collaboration with psychological guidance and counseling department, school administration, teachers and families is needed to prevent the dropouts.

References /Kaynakça

- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2007). *The crises in American high schools*. Retrieved from http://www.all4ed.org/whats_at_stake/CrisisInHighSchools.pdf.
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Facing the school dropout dilemma*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropoutprevention.aspx#>.
- Bryk, A. S., & Thum, Y. M. (1989). The effects of high school organization on dropping out: An exploratory investigation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 26, 353-383.
- Carbonaro, W. J. (1998). A little help from my friend's parents: Intergenerational closure and educational outcomes. *Sociology of Education*, 71, 295-313.
- Çakmak, Ö. (2008) Eğitimin ekonomiye ve kalkınmaya etkisi. *Dicle Üniversitesi Ziya Gökalp Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 11, 33-41.
- Eğitim Reformu Girişimi. (2010). *Eğitim İzleme Raporu 2010*. <http://erg.sabanciuniv.edu> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- European Commission Press Releases. (2011). *Progress towards the common European objectives in education and training -Indicators and benchmarks 2010/2011*. Retrieved from <http://europa.eu/>
- Goldschmidt, P., & Wang, J. (1999). When can schools affect dropout behavior? A longitudinal multilevel analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 36, 715-738.
- Gökşen, F., Cemalcılar, Z. ve Gürlelel, C. (2006). *Türkiye'de ilköğretim okullarında okul terk ve izlenmesi ile önlenmesine yönelik politikalar*. <http://erg.sabanciuniv.edu/sites/erg.sabanciuniv.edu/files/> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Jimerson, S. R. (1999). On the failure of failure: Examining the association between early grade retention and education and employment outcomes during late adolescence. *Journal of School Psychology*, 37, 243-272.
- Kaufman, P., & Bradby, D. (1992). *Characteristics of at-risk students in the NELS:88*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Koedel, C. (2008). Teacher quality and dropout outcomes in a large, urban school district. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 64, 560-572.
- Lee, V. E., & Burkam, D. T. (2000, December). *Dropping out of high school: The role of school organization and structure*. Paper Presented for Conference: Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA.
- McNeal, R. B. (1999). Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out. *Social Forces*, 78, 117-144.
- Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı. (2011, Nisan). *Mesleki Eğitime Küresel Yaklaşımlar: OECD'nin "İş İçin Öğrenmek" Projesi Konferansı*. <http://abdigm.meb.gov.tr> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Morara, M. M. V. (2007). *Female dropouts in Botswana junior secondary schools: How much of a crises is it?* Ohio State University (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from <http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd/>
- O'Higgins, N., D'Amato, M., Caroleo, E. F., & Barone, A. (2007). Gone for good? Determinants of school dropout in Southern Italy. *Forthcoming Giornale degli Economisti*, 66 (2) 2-39.
- Özer, A., Gençtanırım, D. ve Ergene, T. (2011). Türk lise öğrencilerinde okul terkinin yordandması: Aracı ve etkileşim değişkenleri ile bir model testi. *Eğitim ve Bilim*, 36, 302-317.
- Özer, M. (1991). *İlköğretim okulları ikinci kademe (orta-okul) öğrencilerinin öğrenimi terk etme sorununun analizi* (Yayımlanmamış yüksek lisans tezi, Ankara Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Ankara). <http://tez2.yok.gov.tr/> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Patton, M. O. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in education*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Pong, S.-L., & Ju, D.-B. (2000). The effects of change in family structure and income on dropping out of middle and high school. *Journal of Family Issues*, 21, 147-169.
- Roderick, M. (1994). Grade Retention and School Dropout: Investigating the Association. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31, 729-759.
- Rumberger, R. W. (1987). High school dropout: A review of issues and evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 57, 101-121.
- Rumberger, R. W. (1995). Dropping out of middle school: A multilevel analysis of student and schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 583-625.
- Rumberger, R. W. (2001, January). *Why students drop out of school and what can be done*. Paper Presented for Conference: Dropouts in America: How severe is the problem? What do we know about intervention and prevention? Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA.
- Rumberger, R. W., & Thomas, S. L. (2000). The distribution of dropout and turnover rates among urban and suburban high schools. *Sociology of Education*, 73, 39-67.
- Sabates, R., Hossain, A., & Lewin, M. K. (2010). *School drop out in Bangladesh: New insights from longitudinal evidence*. Create Pathways To Access, Research Monograph No. 49.
- Schargel F. P., & Smink, J. (2001). *Strategies to help solve school dropout problem*. New York: Eye on Education.
- Suh, S. P. (2001). *Korean American adolescents perceptions of contributors to school dropout* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://library.villanova.edu>
- Swanson, C. B., & Schneider, B. (1999). Students on the move: Residential and educational mobility in America's schools. *Sociology of Education*, 72, 54-67.
- Şirin, H., Özdemir, S. ve Sezgin, F. (2009, Ekim). *Okulu terk eden çocukların ve velilerin okul terkine ilişkin görüşleri: Nitel bir inceleme*. XVIII. Ulusal Eğitim Bilimleri Kurultayı'nda sunulan bildiri, Ege Üniversitesi, İzmir.
- Teachman, J. D., Paasch, K., & Carver, K. (1996). School capital and dropping out of school. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 773-783.
- Tezcan, M. (1985). *Eğitim sosyolojisi*. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi Yayınları.
- Türk-İş. (2006). *Çalışan çocukların sorunları ve çözüm yolları*. <http://www.turkis.org.tr> adresinden edinilmiştir.
- Uysal, A. (2007). *Ortaöğretimde okulu bırakma olgusunun sosyolojik analizi: Kütahya örneği* (105K149 Nolu Proje Raporu). Ankara: Tübitak.