

Investigation of High School Students' Dropout Risk Level

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the risk level of high school students for dropout. The sample of the research in the descriptive survey model consisted of 578 students studying in public high schools in the central districts of Mersin. The "School Dropout Risk Scale" was used as a data collection tool in the study. According to the findings obtained as a result of the research, male students are more likely to drop out of school and behave antisocial than female students. It has been observed that there are silent types who have a perception of failure, do not show that they will drop out of school, are in the risk group, and that the students expressed a "low" level of opinion regarding the total score at the risk of dropping out of school. In line with these findings, suggestions were made to prevent school dropout.

Keywords Risk, Dropout, High school students

Introduction

Education is perceived as a vital function of society, and the school as the main institution that society sustains its existence. 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. It is an educationally undesirable outcome for any student in the education system to decide not to continue their education or to leave the process by failing to fulfil the requirements of continuing their education. According to Uysal (2008), individuals dropping out of school are an important risk in the formation of social welfare, as they cause waste of expenditures on education and waste of resources.

In the relevant literature, it has been observed that the problem of dropping out of school was first addressed in the 1920s. Fuller, the researcher who first drew attention to this issue in 1927, defined dropping out of school as a psychological problem (Egyed, McIntosh & Bull, 1998). Studies that address school dropout in a holistic manner emerged in the 1970s and later on. In this period, school dropouts started to be seen as a loss due to the realization of the social, cultural and economic effects of education. In addition, the fact that education is seen as a skilled workforce and that some educational levels have become compulsory has also had an important effect (Beatty, Neisser, Trent, & Heubert, 2001).

In the literature, the concept of school dropout is defined as a student leaving the school before graduating from the program he / she is attending or completing the program (Suh, 2001), and a person who cannot obtain a high school diploma (Mahoney, 2018).

One of the challenges of education systems in many countries is that students leave school before they graduate (OECD, 2017). High school dropout rates are considered to have long-term effects on social development and economic growth, and it is defined as one of the biggest challenges faced in Europe (Dale, 2010).

The absenteeism and dropout rates of students in a country are discussed as an important criterion of the quality of education in that country, and this is considered an important predictor of the current and future problems of the education system (Graeff-Martins et al., 2006). Özer, Gençtanırım, and Ergene (2011) considered that a student's leaving school outside of his / her normal time is a risk both for him and society. *“School dropout, which is defined as leaving the school before the end of the period of being in school legally, without acquiring the necessary qualifications, means that the individual cannot gain the basic skills provided by education and that the economic and social welfare level cannot reach the desired level. School dropout causes unpaid investments of the state to individuals, and also damages to the economy, and social and cultural negativities”* (Yüner & Özdemir, 2017).

Many studies have been conducted on the reasons for school dropout. Kapur (2018) found in his study that various factors such as poverty level, distance of school from home, transportation problems, family problems, social environment, fear and vulnerability of some students regarding education, quality of teachers, classroom and school environmental conditions are caused by various factors in school dropout.

When the studies conducted are examined in general, among the factors affecting school dropout are socio-economic reasons (Aydın, 2006; Gökşen, Cemalcılar, & Gürlesel 2006; Haley, 2006; Hunt et al., 2002; Özdemir et al., 2010; Özer, 1991; Shannon & Bylsma 2006; Tunç, 2011), poor academic achievement (Aydın, 2006; Bergeson & Heuschel 2003; Haley, 2006; Hunt et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2002; Shannon & Bylsma, 2006; Tunç, 2011); familial reasons (Aydın, 2006; Bergeson and Heuschel 2003; Hunt et al., 2002; Gökşen, Cemalcılar, and Gürlesel 2006; Özdemir et al., 2010; Shannon & Bylsma 2006; Tunç, 2011), physical condition of the school (Gökşen, Cemalcılar and Gürlesel 2006; Özer, 1991; Uysal 2008), personal reasons (Bergeson & Heuschel 2003; Shannon & Bylsma 2006), teacher approach (Özer, 1991; Tunç, 2011; Uysal 2008), peer influence (Hunt et al., 2002; Özdemir et al., 2010), harmful substance use (Özdemir et al., 2010), health problems (Tutar, 2002), cultural-religious

causes (Özdemir et al., 2010). According to the data of UNICEF (2013), “school-related reasons (grade repetition, failure, absenteeism), personal reasons (different school preferences, marriage, male-female relationships), financial situation (working in a different job outside of school), peer influence (bad habit) and attitude towards school (teachers, lessons, dislike of school)” play an important role in school dropout.

According to Neild, Stoner-Eby & Furstenberg (2001), researchers now agree that dropping out of school in general is the result of a gradual break with the academic and / or social dimensions of school education. According to Janosz et al. (1997), the experience of dropping out of school is generally negative. They stated that students at risk of dropout tend to have a history of poor grades, grade repetition, poor motivation, truancy, problematic behaviour, poor relationships with other students and teachers, and less participation in extracurricular activities. In their study, Şirin, Özdemir, and Sezgin (2009) showed that typical characteristics of students in the school dropout risk group include involuntary participation in school activities, running away from school, displaying disciplinary behaviours, having problems with their peers and family, impulsive behaviour, alcohol use, substance addiction, early pregnancy. found that there is economic poverty, cultural deprivation, ethnic origin and emotional problems. Based on the studies on the types of school dropout, the students at risk of dropping out of school, it can be said that they behave in three different types as “unsuccessful, silent, and antisocial” (Sütçü, 2015).

School dropout is a dangerous phenomenon because it creates negative effects both on an individual, psychological, and social level. Psychological influences include the change in the self-image of the student in question, who is afraid of failure, who will increasingly lose confidence in their own possibilities and capacities. From a social perspective, school failure is tantamount to “stigmatization”, “labelling” and often leads to social marginalization, which includes high levels of delinquent behaviour (Stanica, 2019). The consequences of dropping out of school can extend beyond an individual's life span. Therefore,

a lifelong development perspective is needed to understand the premises and consequences of school dropout and to reduce its occurrence through intervention (Mahoney, 2018). This has profound social and economic consequences for students who leave before graduating from high school and their families. Students leaving high school are more likely to be unemployed, earn less than graduates, or stay in prison. Students dropping out of high school have fewer options for employment and generally start working in low-skilled, low-paid positions with less opportunities to progress (Hayes et al., 2002). Those who drop out of school are much more likely to have problems such as engaging in illegal jobs, having health problems, and not being economically independent than graduates (Rumberger, 1987). Apart from these, it can be said that it is associated with limited professional and economic growth, alienation from the values of the society and its institutions, and a decrease in the personal income of the person throughout his life (Ataş Akdemir & Ayık, 2013; Ayık & Ataş Akdemir, 2015; Stanica, 2019; Şimşek & Ataş Akdemir, 2015; Uzun et al., 2015).

As can be seen, dropout emerges as a phenomenon that needs to be handled multi-dimensionally. According to Mahoney (2018), efforts to prevent school dropout require reducing risk factors and / or increasing competencies. In this study, it was aimed to identify high school students who are at risk of dropping out. Thus, with the intervention studies prepared in line with the findings obtained, action can be taken to reduce the rate of early school leaving and measures for dropout can be taken.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the dropout risk level of high school students. It was also aimed to determine whether the opinions of the participants differ according to some variables. Within the framework of this general purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What is the risk level of dropout according to students' views?
2. What are the students' views on the risk level of dropout in the drop-out risk sub-dimensions (perception of failure, silent behaviour,

antisocial behaviour)?

3. Do students' views on the level of drop-out risk differ
 - a) by gender?
 - b) by grade level?

Method

Research Design, Population, and Sampling

The target population of the research in the descriptive survey model is the students studying in public high schools in the central districts of Mersin. The sample of the study consists of a total of 578 students studying in these schools. The students in the sample group were determined randomly by cluster sampling method. Accordingly, the scale was applied to all students in the school selected as a cluster. Care has been taken to select schools from regions of the province with different development levels as much as possible. The distribution of the students who make up the sample group of the study regarding gender and grade level is given in Table 1

Table 1 Findings on Personal Variables

Variables	Level	n	%
Gender	Male	280	48.4
	Female	298	51.6
	Total	578	100.0
Class Level	9th grade	233	40.3
	10th grade	160	27.7
	11th grade	114	19.7
	12th grade	71	12.3
	Total	578	100.0

As seen in Table 1, 280 (48.4%) of the 578 students participating in the study are female and 298 (51.6%) are male students. It is observed that 233 (40.3%) of the participants are 9th grade students, 160 (27.7%) are 10th grade students, 114 (19.7%) are 11th grade students and 71 (12.3%) are 12th grade students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The "Leaving School Risk Scale" developed by Sütçü (2015) was used as a data collection tool in the study. The scale is a Likert type scale scored between 1-5. The School Leaving Risk Scale consists of three sub-dimensions. "Failure Perception" consists of 8

items, “Behaving Quietly” 9 items and “Antisocial Behaviour” 16 items, in total 33 items. The calculated Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was found to be .91 in total. A low score in the scale indicates a low level of risk of dropout, while a high score indicates a high risk level. Descriptive statistics (arithmetic mean, standard deviation), t test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data. The scores of the expressions in the scale were determined as 1 - 1.79 none, 1.80 - 2.59 low, 2.60 - 3.39 medium, 3.40 - 4.19 very (largely) and 4.20-5.00 completely. The data were analysed using the SPSS statistical package program as follows.

Findings

The findings of the study were presented and interpreted in the sub-dimensions of failure perception, silence, and antisocial behaviour.

Findings Regarding the Risk of School Dropout Total Score

The academic averages of the opinions of the students participating in the research on the total score are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Average Scores of Opinions on the Total Score for the School Dropout Risk

	\bar{x}	sd
Total Score for the School Dropout Risk	2.15	0.64

As seen in Table 2, students stated an opinion at the level of “low” to the total score of the risk of school dropout (\bar{x} =2.15).

Findings Regarding the Dimension of Perception of Failure

The arithmetic mean of the opinions of the students participating in the study regarding the expressions in the dimension of failure perception are given in Table 3.

Table 3 Average Scores of the Views on the Perception of Failure Dimension

	\bar{x}	sd
Item1	2.87	1.36
Item2	2.76	1.16

Item3	1.89	1.21
Item4	2.51	1.23
Item5	1.99	1.21
Item6	2.30	1.21
Item7	2.47	1.32
Item8	2.25	1.24
Total	2.38	1.24

As can be seen in Table 3, the most frequent statements of the students in turn were “I get bored of the lessons because I am not successful.” (\bar{x} =2.87) and “I have difficulty understanding the lessons.” (\bar{x} =2.76). Although they show a “moderate” level of participation to these items, they state a “low” level of opinion to the item of “I cannot get high marks in the exams”.

On the other hand, the statements that the students agreed the least are: “I did not bring any equipment to the school because I could not understand which one I should bring with me.” (\bar{x} =1.89), “I think of working in a job that does not require education.” (\bar{x} =1.99), “It happens that my teachers warn me because of my general failure in the lessons.” (\bar{x} =2.25) items. The students answered all these statements at the “low” level.

Findings Regarding the Silence Dimension

The arithmetic mean of the opinions of the students participating in the study regarding the expressions that constitute the dimension of being silent are given in Table 4.

Table 4 Item and Average Scores for the Dimension of Acting Silently

	\bar{x}	sd
Item9	2.51	1.35
Item10	2.50	1.38
Item11	2.74	1.39
Item12	2.79	1.44
Item13	2.44	1.36
Item14	2.70	1.37
Item15	2.02	1.23
Item16	2.47	1.33
Item17	2.43	1.31
Total	2.51	1.41

When Table 4 is examined, the statements that the students agree with the most are: “When I get unsuccessful results, I become more introverted.” (\bar{x} =2.79), “I cannot speak in lessons because I am afraid of making mistakes.” (\bar{x} =2.74), “I think I have a shy personality.” (\bar{x} =2.70) items. The students stated their opinion on these statements at the level of “medium”.

On the other hand, the statements of the students participating in the study the least agreed were “I think my friends do not want to take me among them.” (\bar{x} =2.02), “I hesitate to ask questions to the teachers in the lessons.” (\bar{x} =2.43), “The people around me think that I am introverted.” (\bar{x} =2.44). The students stated their opinions on these statements at a “low” level.

Findings Regarding the Antisocial Behaviour Dimension

The arithmetic mean of the opinions of the students participating in the study about the expressions that make up the antisocial behaviour dimension are given in Table 5.

Table 5 Item and Average Scores for the antisocial behaviour dimension

	\bar{x}	sd
Item18	2.13	1.23
Item19	1.73	1.15
Item20	1.77	1.29
Item21	1.81	1.21
Item22	2.15	1.31
Item23	1.99	1.24
Item24	1.76	1.14
Item25	2.50	1.32
Item26	2.07	1.29

Item27	2.02	1.26
Item28	2.15	1.40
Item29	1.65	1.11
Item30	2.33	1.24
Item31	1.75	1.18
Item32	1.80	1.20
Item33	1.51	1.12
Total	2.07	1.31

When Table 5 is examined, the expressions that the students agree with the most are “I have abusive words coming out of my mouth.” (\bar{x} =2.50), “I happen to be lying.” (\bar{x} =2.33), “I like to dress against the dress code at school.” (\bar{x} =2.15) items. Students’ views on these statements are at the level of “low”.

The expressions that the students agreed the least in the study were “I have secretly brought cutting tools to school.” (\bar{x} =1.51), “It happens that I spoil the school equipment.” (\bar{x} =1.65), “Teachers say that I prevented the lesson from being taught.” (\bar{x} =1.73) items. Students stated an opinion on this statement at the level of “none”.

Findings Regarding Personal Variables

The opinions of the students participating in the study were analysed according to the variables of gender and grade level.

Findings Regarding the Gender Variable

In order to determine whether the risk of dropping out of high school students differs according to their views on the total score and sub-dimensions, the t-test was applied because the variances were homogeneous. The findings obtained are included in Table 6.

Table 6 T-test Results Regarding the Dropout Risk Level of High School Students by Gender Variable

Dimensions	Gender	N	\bar{x}	sd	df.	t	p
Failure Perception	Female	280	18.52	6.21	576	-1.765	.078
	Male	298	19.47	6.66			
Quiet Behaviour	Female	280	22.58	8.41	576	-.032	.975
	Male	298	22.61	7.76			
Antisocial Behaviour	Female	280	28.19	11.91	576	-5.306	.000*
	Male	298	33.86	13.63			
Total	Female	280	67.74	19.33	576	-3.60	.000*
	Male	298	73.99	22.22			

As seen in Table 6, high school students' perception of school-related dropout risk perception of failure sub-dimension [$t(576) = -1.765, p > .05$] and acting quietly [$t(576) = -.032, p > .05$] sub-dimension. While there is no statistically significant difference in dimensions; Differentiation in antisocial behaviour sub-dimension [$t(576) = -5.306, p < .05$] and total score [$t(576) = -3.60, p < .05$] is significant.

Findings Regarding the Grade Level Variable

The results of the ANOVA test conducted to determine whether the opinions of high school students regarding the risk of school dropout differ in terms of the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade variable are given in Table 7.

Table 7 ANOVA Results of the Opinions of High School 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th Grade students regarding dropout

Dimensions	Class Level	N	\bar{x}	sd	F	p	(LSD) Differ
Failure Perception	9 th grade	233	18.85	6.51	.623	.600	
	10 th grade	160	18.76	6.01			
	11 th grade	114	19.75	6.64			
	12 th grade	71	19.00	7.01			
	Total	578	19.02	19.01			
Quiet Behaviour	9 th grade	233	22.62	7.45	2.766	.041*	2-3
	10 th grade	160	23.89	8.70			
	11 th grade	114	21.78	8.03			2-4
	12 th grade	71	20.94	8.36			
	Total	578	22.60	8.07			
Antisocial Behaviour	9 th grade	233	29.53	12.01	3.768	.011*	1-3
	10 th grade	160	30.65	13.94			
	11 th grade	114	34.41	13.58			2-3
	12 th grade	71	32.05	12.99			
	Total	578	31.11	13.12			
Total	9 th grade	233	69.48	20.39	1.214	.304	
	10 th grade	160	71.60	21.40			
	11 th grade	114	73.83	21.95			
	12 th grade	71	69.77	21.15			
	Total	578	70.96	21.09			

As can be seen from the table, as a result of the one-way ANOVA performed to determine whether the mean scores of the school drop-out risk scale show a significant difference according to the level of education variable, the difference between the mean scores of the class level groups in terms of silent behaviour, antisocial behaviour and total score was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). After this process, complementary comparison techniques were used to determine which groups caused the significant difference after one-way ANOVA. LSD, one of the Post-Hoc paired comparison tests used for this purpose, was applied.

Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

The aim of this article is to determine the risk level of high school students for dropout. When the results of the study are examined, it is seen that students express their opinions at the level of “medium and low” in the sub-dimension of failure perception. In the literature, the finding that academic achievement is one of the variables that trigger school dropout is available in many studies (Aydm, 2006; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012; Bergeson & Heuschel 2003; Haley, 2006; Hunt et al., 2002; Martin et al., 2002; Shannon & Bylsma, 2006; Sütçü, 2015; Tunç, 2011; Yorgün, 2014). In other words, they found that the lower the academic achievement, the higher the risk of school dropout. There is a negative relationship.

According to Finn (1989), academic failure is the driving force behind self-esteem frustration that often results in school dropout. According to the opinions of the participants, it can be said that the students have academic difficulties. On the other hand, it is seen that the students stated “low” level of opinions on the statements they agreed with the least. Based on the opinions, it can be said that the students came prepared for the lessons, they were aware of the course schedule, and they did not have the idea of working in a job. It was stated by Gökşen, Cemalcılar, Gürlesel (2006) that working in a job outside of school is a factor that increases the risk of dropping out of school.

Students stated an “medium” level of opinion in the sub-dimension of acting silently. Quiet and introverted students are shy ones who do not participate in extracurricular activities at school, hesitating to express their feelings and thoughts. Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found that among students at risk, the rate of dropout was significantly lower among students who had previously participated in extracurricular activities than those who did not. In this study, it is seen that there are students in the risk group. In the study, it was found that the students stated “less” level of the statements they agreed with the least in this sub-dimension. Based on the opinions, it can be said that teachers encourage students to ask questions and that students are not excluded from their peers. In their research, Dunn, Chambers, and Rabren (2004) found that students who thought they could not get enough help from their friends were more likely to drop out of school. Brewster and Bowen (2004) found in their research that parent and teacher support is more important than peer support in creating positive school results among students at risk. French and Conrad (2010) stated in their study that both antisocial and rejected youth are more likely to be absent and have a higher risk of dropping out of school.

In the antisocial behaviour sub-dimension of the study, the students stated “less” level of opinion. Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) stated that “the concept of antisocial is a concept that results in low school engagement and dropout”. Antisocial behaviours are behaviours that include irresponsible and aggressive behaviour by not obeying social and social rules.

These unwanted behaviours that students exhibit, which are psychological tension, can also be considered as the first signs of dropping out of school. Unwanted student behaviours are defined as “all kinds of behaviours that hinder educational efforts at school” (Başar, 2008). There are also studies on the symptoms of school dropout risk in the literature (Aydın, 2006; Hunt et al., 2002; Özdemir, 2005). In their research on unwanted student behaviours, Göker and Doğan (2016) stated that students display many undesirable behaviours; for example, they came unprepared for the lesson, said abusive words, prevented the lesson from being taught, damaged school equipment, did not wear school uniforms, brought cell phones, lighters and knives to school.

While the differentiation was significant in terms of gender variable, antisocial behaviour sub-dimension and total score, the differentiation was not statistically significant in failure and silence sub-dimensions. In the perception of failure sub-dimension, it can be said that male students ($\bar{x}=19.47$) felt more unsuccessful than female students ($\bar{x}=18.52$), they had difficulty understanding the lesson, that is, they were generally unsuccessful. However, although it is relatively higher, this difference is not statistically significant ($p>.05$). In the sub-dimension of acting quietly, it can be said that male students ($\bar{x}=22.61$) have difficulty expressing their feelings and thoughts compared to female students ($\bar{x}=22.58$), they are shy and withdrawn, and they hesitate to take responsibility for their school work. However, this difference is also not statistically significant ($p>.05$). In the study conducted by Sütçü (2015), it is seen that males get higher scores than female students in the sub-dimensions of perception of failure, acting quietly and antisocial behaviour. Similarly, Yorğun (2014) and Şimşek (2011) found in their research that male students have a higher risk of dropping out of school than female students. Eliminate these barriers by determining the enrolment of female students in Turkey, works are carried out to ensure the access to school and continue. For this reason, it can be shown as the reason for the lower scores of girls compared to boys in the study. There are also similar studies that obtained this finding regarding the gender variable (Janosz et al., 1997; Şimşek, 2011; Yorğun, 2014).

According to the results of the research, it is seen that in the antisocial behaviour sub-dimension, male students ($\bar{x}=33.86$) exhibit more unwanted student behaviours in the classroom and at school than female students ($\bar{x}=28.19$). It can be said that students exhibit profanity, peer bullying (mocking, forceful doing what they want, physical violence), lying, theft, violation of school rules, being late and running away from school, preventing teaching, bringing cutting tools to school, and repeating criminal behaviour. Looking at the total score, it can be said that male students ($\bar{x}=73.99$) are at risk of dropping out of school compared to female students ($\bar{x}=67.74$). This difference is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Finally, as a result of the one-way ANOVA made according to the class level variable, the difference between the average rankings of the class level groups in terms of silent behaviour, antisocial behaviour and total score was found to be statistically significant ($p < .05$). As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the difference in the sub-dimension of acting silent was between the 10th and 11th grade and the groups with the 10th and 12th grade ($p < .05$). It can be said that 10th grade students ($\bar{x} = 23.89$) are shy, introverted, afraid of making mistakes and they have a higher risk of dropping out of school. In the antisocial behaviour sub-dimension, it has been observed that there are groups whose grade level is between 9th and 11th grade and between 10th and 11th grade ($p < .05$). It can be said that 11th grade students ($\bar{x} = 34.41$) are more likely to exhibit undesirable behaviours in the classroom and at school. In the study of Yorğun (2014), it was stated that the grade level at which the decision to drop out of school is made most frequently is the ninth grade, while Bayhan and Dalgıç (2012) also stated that students make the decision whether to attend school or not in the 9th grade.

According to the results of the study, it was found that the risk of dropping out of school and antisocial tendency of male students is higher than female students, and there are silent types in the risk group who do not show that they will leave school with a perception of failure. All students should be given the opportunity to participate in social, cultural and sports activities organized at the school.

It is important to conduct educational activities for male students to develop belief in the importance and necessity of education. In this context, before reaching this point, students should be followed up and provided with individual counselling and guidance services. There are many variables that cause school dropout. Comprehensive studies can be conducted in which these variables are included. Considering the negativities it may cause both individually and socially, it is necessary to develop strategies to prevent school dropout. The research was conducted in high schools. Determinations can be made at a young age by making them in earlier education levels.

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