

School Dropouts: Review of Policies and Methods

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ABSTRACT

School dropout is a common issue, and many academicians have put their best efforts to understand this complex nature of the problem. Myriad literature has supported the existence of problem, but there is a shortage of the reliable solutions in this field. Therefore, this is an attempt to understand the causes of problem and analysis of various policies and method adopted to mitigate/minimize/eradicate the problem. Moreover, the study also focuses on multiple solutions suggested in dealing with the problem and how much success they were?

1. Introduction

Dropping out of school is a severe problem to an individual who dropped out, school and society at large (Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Rumberger, 1987). It is also considered anti-social behaviour. Authors like Archambault, Janosz, Fallu and Pagani (2009) described antisocial behaviour responsible for the breakdown of individual and social bond. They further argued that disengagement from school was the result of a weaker relationship between educational institutions and individual. The youths who discontinue/dropouts from high school, are expected to be depressed, use alcohol and drugs, feel alienated and may also join gangs (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002; Rumberger, 2004; U.S Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). It is evident from the previous studies that school dropouts are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour than those who complete high school. The dropout rates among developed countries are less as compared to developing countries. Lahey (2003) stated dropout rates among various developed countries. According to Lahey, Australia had 23% school dropout rate, United States of America and Canada had 12% and 9% school dropout rate simultaneously. The data used in the study was quite older. However, it was sufficient to describe the gravity of the problem even in developed countries. The condition of developing countries is considerably behind from developed countries. Kremer (2006) pointed out that around 80% of the world's children living in developing countries.

2. School Dropout's Definitions and Basic Flaws

Rumberger (1987) stated lack of consensus definition concerning high school dropouts and also, no standard method to calculate dropout rate. Barnet (2004) extended her opinion that previous studies lack a consensus about how to dropout be defined. She defined school dropouts those children who remained absent for 160 days out of 180 days in an academic year. In her study, 88% or more absent were considered as dropouts. In another study by Garcia-Garcia (2008) described that definitions of truancy might vary significantly from one district to another and even, from one state to another. The truancy has been used in myriad ways in the literature related

to the subject (Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2013). However, the Encyclopedia of Social Work (2016) defined "truancy as a certain number of unexcused absences". Rumberger (1987) proposed "Dropout" is generally defined as "a residual status, indicating someone who has not graduated from, or is not currently enrolled in, a full-time, state-approved education programme". The lack of proper definition brings many issues in deciding who dropout is? How much dropout rate? Richard (1996) raised concerns regarding the definition of school dropout and its effect. Richard pointed out about multiple definitions of dropout within states and school systems, which resulted in inaccurate reporting and created difficulty in understanding the actual situation.

Christle et al. (2007) pointed out that determining the real dropout rate in different states and school district remained complicated because of variation in data collection practices. They further argued that no national standardized dropout definition exists. Non-availability of proper definition results in different reporting for the same level of school dropouts. The definition of school dropout forwarded by Christle et al. (2007) included those individuals who were enrolled at school in the previous year but, did not appear at the beginning of the current year. Moreover, individuals should not have transferred or suspended from school.

3. Causes for School Dropouts

Many pieces of research have been undertaken to understand the school dropout phenomenon. Out of these researches, few studies focus that academic performance of student and school attendance has a close association (Borland & Howsen, 1998). Townsend, Flisher and King (2007) pointed out that no country in the world that does not experience individuals leaving school and becoming dropouts. Eminent scholar Rumberger (1987) mentioned that "No one really knows what causes students to drop out of high school. Dropouts themselves report a number of different reasons for leaving school, with marked differences reported by different social groups." This condition continues to affect the children of various age groups. Most of the researches conducted in this field, however, focused outsider perspective on dealing

dropouts' issue, there is a lack of proper studies where the direct solution was sought from school dropouts.

Bridgeland (2010) attempted to understand the perspective of major stakeholders (parents, teachers and dropout students) involved in the dropout process. In the direct conversation with dropout students, it was revealed that lack of opportunities outside the classroom was mainly disconnected them from school and they were interested in making curriculum practical that could correlate classroom learning with their real lives. The findings of the study suggested that disconnect among three important constituencies (parents, teachers and dropout students) was responsible for children's failure in school education and dialogue and cooperation between these important constituencies was considered a solution in children's interest. Another study includes disconnect from school as one of the significant findings.

Princiotta and Reyna (2009) highlighted four leading causes of high school dropouts in American's schools. These causes were academic failure, problematic behaviour, life events and disinterest in school. The research further pointed out that there were no sudden dropouts rather it was a long time process of disconnect from school. It is evident from previous studies that there could not be a single factor for dropping out. Researchers like Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore and Friant (2010) reported that boredom was a predominant factor in school dropouts. Teachers, parents and students were agreed about the lack of relationship between classrooms learning to career interest, and therefore, disconnect begins at an early stage of life.

Moreover, lack of academic, social and emotional support significantly affect negatively the decision of dropping out. Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe and Carlson (2000) concluded that dropping out from school is influenced by the development history of individuals. Authors provided examples of development history like home environment, family experiences, personal characteristics, educational experiences and present circumstances. The study further highlighted that dropout is a process, not a sudden happening or event.

4. How effective were the policies and methods of dropouts' prevention?

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) suggested three strategies for school practitioners in dealing with school dropouts. They summarized communication to be initiated with families when dropout behaviour appears in a child. Secondly, parents' workshops should behold to discuss the various plans and proper implementation for their ward benefits. Finally, the home visit should be a part of the strategy, and it yielded positive results and also enhance parents' involvement in school education of their child. Kristof and Cabus (2013) analyzed the dropout prevention measures and their impact on individuals and schools in the Netherlands. This was an ambitious programme of the Netherlands government, and it included a successful strategy "mentoring and coaching". Where coaching comprises the provision of the coach from private or public organizations, and mentoring includes re-enter of school dropouts in school education. The result shows that strategy yielded a significant impact in bringing children back at schools.

It was observed that children face social, behavioural and emotional issues along with study. It is a well-known fact that study is not merely getting enrolment and attending schools, but many issues move hand in hand. Education is the product of individual capability, school environment and family support. Individual capability includes efforts made by a child in the study, his/her IQ level, which always essential in moving forward academically. School environment consists of teachers' interest in education, the behaviour of teachers' toward students and conducive atmosphere for studying. School is considered the second home to children and provides a critical social context for the development of children. Kelly (1993), in her research, analyzed two of California's high school-based practices and found out the relationship between school factors and students culture in producing dropouts.

Moreover, she also focuses on how these factors operate differently for boys and girls. She came up with a plan to tackle dropouts' problem and suggested to develop a curriculum involving teachers, parents and students. This strategy to tackle dropouts brought significant positive result in reducing the number of dropouts. Teachers, parents and children (who are on the verge of dropouts) contribute a vital role in dropping out of any student from school. However, we cannot ignore environment's factor which includes the neighbourhood of the child and relationship with other students in school and outside school, but concerned teachers and parents can still handle the situation as they also contribute in shaping the environment for the child.

Many methods have been adopted throughout the world for preventing school dropouts, but no method was utterly successful, as the problem of school dropouts is a complex phenomenon to comprehend. Moreover, the variation between countries and regions contributes to the situation too critical to solve. To find a solution, Sinclair and Evelo (1998) adopted school engagement and monitoring method of preventing school dropouts among students with learning and behavioural disabilities, was effective in minimizing dropouts' rate. Finn (1993) called dropping out was not an immediate decision rather, it was a process which starts way before actual dropouts.

Coleman (1987) has focused on social capital perspective to help students to stay at school. Coleman argued that better interaction between adult and child on personal and academic issues creates a positive mindset towards school education and eventually helps in reducing the number of dropouts. In this approach, family social support works as a tool in motivating school, going children and youths. This approach of dropouts' prevention includes society as a significant factor where different actors interact and create either a positive or negative environment with regards to decisions in life. Moving away from school or dropping out of school is one of such choices. Vallerand, Fbrier and Guay (1997) came up with a motivational model of education. They argued that teachers' parents' and the school administration's behaviour towards students affect his/her perception of autonomy and competence. "Low levels of self-determined motivation lead students to develop intentions to drop out of high school, which are later implemented, leading to actual dropout behaviour"

revealed in the findings of the study. The model was tested on high school dropouts with a sample size of 4,537 and result of this model were applicable for each student participated and equally fit for each gender.

Sinclair and Evelo (1998) reported schools informing system regarding the failure of students. They raised suspicion about the suitability of this approach of information. Instead, they suggested a proactive approach in solving the dropouts/failure in the education system could have been a better option in dealing with the dropout effectively. Researches linkage school dropouts as process and it starts with prolonged disengagement with school (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Godber, 2001). A researcher like Christenson and Thurlow (2015) mentioned that school dropouts start with withdrawal symptoms like shortage of attendance and also behaviour and academic performances of dropouts tend to deteriorate. Here, the teacher's role becomes essential to understand the gravity of the problem and if necessary, provide counselling to such students.

Few studies also examine the effect of personality traits on school dropouts. Authors like Eckstein and Wolpin (1999) highlighted personality traits as an essential factor in the decision of dropout. They came up with a model for high school dropouts, in which they revealed different features that dropped out of school. Traits like lower motivation, preference for leisure time and lower expectations in life etc. constitute the personality of school dropouts. Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, and Gibson (2004) have examined the Big Five personality traits of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion, and Openness, as well as four narrower traits of Aggression, Optimism, Tough-Mindedness, and work drive about absences from school for middle- and high-school students. The result described aggression, work drive and optimism were significantly related to absences.

An interesting finding by Haveman and Wolfe (1995) which have a lifelong effect and plays a significant role in decision making. The study discussed the Socialization/Role Model Perspective, where they argued that most children see a role model in their parents and older siblings. The behaviour of older siblings and parents directly affect the lifestyle of the children. Work, aspirations and values of role model help in developing the children's pattern of behaviour. In this direction, the work of Seltzer (1994) provided useful insight and highlighted psychological perspective 'Stress and Coping Strategies' that focused childhood's stressful events that may divert the individual from normal path of development. It is clear from both the perspective (Haveman and Wolfe, 1995; Seltzer, 1994) that success in life significantly dependent on the role model and stress coping strategies perspective.

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5. Role of social worker in dealing with dropout problem

The role of school social worker is important and challenging as the children in the current atmosphere are increasingly in contact with many social forces which harm children's educational outcomes. School social workers are trained personnel who undertake well-planned training to solve problems related to social, emotional and psychological needs of the students. In this approach, the social worker provides a bridge between school, home and community of the student. This method is successful in dealing with various backgrounds of children. Thus, the success of this approach can be understood as more and more schools are appointing social worker or counsellor to fight against the needs of the child. Elsherbiny (2017) had come up with the solution to school refusal children. The preventive method was adopted, which includes raising the awareness level of parents, school staff and social worker. The qualitative study depicted an increase in school attendance and participation in activities conducted in schools. "Prevention refers to strategies or programmes that prevent or delay the onset of health and behaviour problems. It also refers to strategies that reduce the harms and health consequences of behaviours that have been initiated" (Walker, 2005, p. 8).

According to the National Association of Social Workers [NASW] (2017) pointed out that social workers engage children through counselling and crisis intervention. Moreover, they also guide children through an intervention programme specially designed to solve young people's problems. As the social work profession is a strength-based approach to solve problems so that equality can be maintained for a better chance in succeeding school. The skill of the social worker makes him/her competent enough to understand the issue at onset. In a study, Alvarez, Bye, Bryant and Mumm (2013) reported the number of school social workers were responsible for more number of high school completer. The social workers' skills and competency help school children to perform better in academic as well as other fields like games, behaviour etc.

6. Sum Up

Throughout the world, especially in third world countries, school dropouts is a significant concern, and many studies have suggested potential solutions to minimize or eradicate the problem, but no standard solution ever made to deal with the issue of school dropouts. It is evident from the studies around the world that solutions will be different for different countries. Though, there are noticeable socio-economic, cultural and other differences among countries and even within the country. If we look deeper inside the problem, we find, most of the time, the issue itself contains the solution, the right strategy is needed to deal with it.

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