INVESTIGATION OF THE SCHOOL DROPOUT PROBLEM
AT LEVEL OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN TURKEY

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Abstract:
The concept of education which is becoming more and more important in today's globalizing world cause the countries to undertake intense efforts to improve their education systems. It was also demonstrated by the studies aimed to improve the education systems that the duration of the students' stay within the existing school system was an important indicator of the quality of education. The international rankings on the prevalence of dropouts for Turkey seem to be bleak. Turkey ranks high in comparison to the countries compared in terms of its high dropout rate. This clearly shows that one of the problems that we have to deal with to improve the quality of the education system is the problem of dropouts. In the present study, the concept of dropout was examined in the light of previous studies. Initially in the study, the concept of dropout was defined, the dropout process and risk, and reasons for dropouts were addressed; and then the prevalence of dropout and its consequences in Turkey were explicated.

Keywords: Turkey, dropout, education level

1. Introduction

Education is one of the most important issues in the developed countries in order to have the power of economic development and sustainable competition in the world. Education contributes not only to economic progress, but also to the employment of qualified labor force, democratic society, to the decrease in crime-poverty-inequality-unemployment-violence rates. It is crucially important to improve education systems and identify their problems due to the contributions they provide. As far as Turkey is concerned, the problem of dropouts as one of the weaknesses of our education system draws attention (Ministry of Development, 2014).

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It is stated that in connection with the concept of dropout, the school age children (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001) who are unable to attend school or dropout is an important predictor of the current and future problems of the school system (Graeff-Martins et al., 2006). Nowadays, it is observed that many countries tend to deal with this problem with increasing efforts (Maya, 2013). The aim of this study is to examine the problem of dropouts at primary and secondary levels in Turkey within the framework of previous studies. For this purpose, it was tried to draw the boundaries of the concept of dropout, the dropout process, the risk factors, and the reasons for it were examined. Besides, the prevalence of dropout and its consequences in Turkey were addressed.

2. Definition of the Concept of Dropout

When literature review is conducted internationally on the subject, different concepts such as dropout and early school leaving, push-out, and pull-out are noticeable (Nielsen, 1986; as cited in Van Dorn, Bowen & Blau, 2006; Gözübüyük, 2014). In this study, since the criteria for early school leaving was not clear, the concept of dropout was used. However, with respect to the concept of dropout, it is not possible to obtain a general definition of the concept since there are differences in the content of countries' compulsory education systems and educational policies, the length of the student's stay away from the system, the differences in age and class levels (Yorğun, 2014; Ergün, 2014; Tatar, 2016). When the definitions given are examined, the concept of dropout can be defined as a departure from the educational program without a high school diploma when sometimes the school-aged individual fail to attend school regularly, sometimes unable to complete program due to the personal and social reasons, and some other times without obtaining a graduation certificate for the training program or being included into a general educational development (Garrison, 1985; Suh, 2001; Dekkers & Claassen,2001; Mc Whirter & McWhirter, 2004 as cited in Özer, Gençtarım & Ergene, 2011; Gökşen, Cemalcılar & Gürlesel, 2006). Dropout, unlike the fact that an individual has completed one stage of the education system (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001; Uysal et al., 2006; Tatar, 2016) and unable to continue to attend school regularly means that the individual first has to start to attend a certain stage of education and that s/he is completely disengaged from the school and that s/he cannot continue to attend another educational institution (Gökşen, Cemalcılar & Gürlesel, 2006; Şimşek, 2011).

When the literature and official sources about the school dropout problem in Turkey are reviewed, no common concept or definition has been encountered (Gözübüyük, 2014). The fact that the subject was addressed in the 10th National Education Act for the first time explains the fact that this concept has not been mentioned in the records before this date and it can be justified with 12 years of compulsory education enforced with the law in 2012. With the introductions of this law, an individual has to continue his or her education either through formal education or through open education system until s/he is granted the high school diploma. With the introduction of the 4 + 4 + 4 model, it was aimed to legally prevent the secondary school

and high school dropouts (Gökşen, Cemalcılar & Gürlesel, 2006; Önen, 2014; Tatar, 2016). With the e-school system that was developed, the concept of dropout has begun to be addressed more comprehensively. Consequently, all students who repeat a grade level two times, receive a disciplinary punishment to be excluded from the formal education system, continue to attend the open education system, unable to use his/her right for education, choosing to leave school voluntarily, moving abroad and the death of the student are all considered within the scope of dropout (MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Tatar, 2016). Within the framework of the relevant regulations, the right not to use the right of education was restricted to two semesters and the students who had difficulty in continuing the school due to their excuses, those who did not continue during the second semester, or students who did not pass their courses in two semesters were also included with the scope of the definition of dropout (MoNE & UNICEF, 2013). However, the concept of dropout at primary school level in Turkey is still not clear. The students who are absent continuously during compulsory education at this level of education, are not considered within the scope of dropout (Ergün, 2014).

3. Dropout Process and the Risk Factors

Dropout is a process that usually begins at the secondary school level commencing with detachment from the school norms, continuing with gradual decrease in attachment to the school in the form of detachment form the school activities and values and eventually breaking away from the school environment (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004; Kaplan & Peck, 1997). In the decreasing process of student starting with the dimension of psychological attachment levels to the school, and ending up with the behavioral dimension; when the sunsets fail to associate the school with their future and when they feel they are not accepted at school, they gradually start to break away from the school (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu & Pagani, 2009). As one can understood from this statement, dropout is not an irrevocable problem that does not give any clues (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr & Godber, 2001). What leads an individual to the process of dropping out can also be the beginning of primary school period (Barcloy & Doll, 2001; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

Dropping out decision, one of the most important decisions that an individual can take in his or her life, is often impacted by the individual's circle of friends either through support or trying to talk him/her out this decision. According to one previous study, it was found that there were some people who tried to discourage 33% of young people who decided to leave the education system from their decision. It was revealed in the same study that those who tried to talk the dropping out students out of their decisions were their parents, school principals, friends, teachers, siblings, relatives and school counselors. It was found that the individuals who completed the dropout process spent time with their friends, looking for a job; following the completion of the dropout process, most of the individuals made no attempt to improve their personal development and a significant portion of them did not work (MoNE & UNICEF, 2013). The studies that focused on the dropouts' desire to start the school again found that a

significant proportion of the individuals who dropped out wanted to continue their education in some way. It was found that those who wanted to return to formal education presented the reasons such as the ease of finding a job and the desire to learn something new and thought and that their families could support them in this regard (Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013).

The dropout can be predicted according to the stages in the process, as well as by the risk factors revealed by research conducted in the risk group and dropout students. According to the studies done on this subject, the following are the characteristics that the individuals who are at risk of dropout possess; the lack of participation in the school activities, low sense of belongingness, discipline and attendance problems, truancy, low academic achievement, suicide tendency, poverty, domestic family problems, reactive behavior, problematic friendships, alcohol use and substance dependence, early pregnancy (Aydın, 2006; Şirin, Özdemir & Sezgin, 2009; Yüner & Özdemir, 2017), low self-esteem (Aydın, 2006; Yorğun, 2014), indifference to the school and the lessons, extreme absenteeism, frequent being late for lessons, cheating at examinations, all day absence from school, copying someone else's homework (Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Yüner & Özdemir, 2017), being a member of a family with socio-economic problems (Özer, 1991; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), cultural deprivation, ethnicity and emotional problems (Şirin, Özdemir & Sezgin, 2009), having been diagnosed with hyperactivity (Doğruyol, 2007), being registered in a common high school, low level of education of the family, having repeated a grade, and frequent involvement with quarrels at school (MoNE & UNICEF, 2013). At the level of primary school education, individuals drop out the most at 5th grade, at the level of secondary education at the 9th grade; the risk group is composed of girls at primary school and males at secondary school (Gökşen, Cemalciler & Gürlesel, 2006; Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; Şimşek, 2010; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013).

4. Reasons for Dropout

While it is commonly known that even though individuals with certain characteristics and the decision to drop out covers a certain period, it is stated in the literature that this decision, against student's will, is also related to the reasons for distracting the students from the school, socio-economic factors, cultural and individual perceptions (Mau, 1995; Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin & Royer, 2006). Therefore, instead of basing dropout on a single cause, it is commonly accepted that there is more than one cause (Taylı, 2008; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012). Previous studies revealed that more than one variable, rather than a single variable related to dropout could predict this problem (Suh & Suh, 2007). When the studies investigating dropout are examined, it is possible to collect the probable reasons under four headings:

4.1 School-related Reasons

The main dropout reasons identified in previous studies in Turkey are; repeating a grade, failure in classes, absenteeism (Şahin & Uysal, 2007; Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; Erktin, Okçabol & Ural, 2010; Tunç, 2011; Özbaş ,2010; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012; Taş, Selvitopu, Bora & Demirkaya, 2013, MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Ergün, 2014; Yorğun, 2014), dislike of school, unable to get sufficient support from the teachers, failure to get attention from the school (Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Özer, Gençtarım & Ergene, 2011; Şimşek, 2011; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Ergün, 2014), unable able to adapt to new school as a result of school change, feeling oneself unsafe in the school, being away from school, thinking that education provided at school will not contribute to finding a job, not having a good relationship with teachers, school rules being too strict and not being applied fairly, lack of experienced teachers (MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), relationship between the school principal and students (Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012), attitude towards absenteeism (Uysal, 2008); low grade average, state of satisfaction from the education system, school and teachers (Özer, 1991; Şimşek, 2010, 2011; Gömleksiz & Özdaş, 2013), the state in which the student perceives himself/herself as an important element of the school (Şimşek, 2011; Sarı, 2013), the settlement area where the school is situated (Koç & Hancıoğlu, 2004), the school attended not intentionally preferred, the quality of the school and its possibilities and opportunities offered by the school, the number of students in classes, the attitude of the students towards the students (Özer, 1991; Şirin, Matthew, Lisa, Gonsalves & Howell 2004; Şahin & Uysal, 2007; Aküzüm, Yavaş, Uçar & Tan, 2015), perception of the violence in the school environment (Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; Şimşek, 2011; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), disciplinary problems, applied disciplinary punishments (Tunç, 2011; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012; Ergün, 2014), attitude of the teacher in the class, the quality of the communication between the teacher and students, the level of expectations of the students from the teacher (Ataman, 2008), class size (Özer, 1991; Şimşek, 2011), the difficulty of the school curriculum, the distance of the school, the pressure of the teachers, the perception of the school environment as unreliable, the unfairness of the teachers and their academic inadequacy (Taş, Selvitopu, Bora & Demirkaya, 2013), teacher quality (Gökşen, Cemalciler & Gürlesel, 2006) class level (Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; Şimşek, 2011; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012), the type of school, the possibility of ensuring that the school help the individual's to demonstrate their abilities, participation in social activities in the school (Uysal, 2007 as cited in Uysal, 2008; Şimşek, 2011), school administrators and teachers' level of supportive attitude, safe, supportive, success-oriented and positive school climate, peer interaction, satisfaction from the academic program, determining the education problems (Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Aküzüm, Yavaş, Tan & Uçar, 2015).

4.2. Personal Reasons

The main personal reasons identified in previous studies in Turkey are; marriage, girl-boy relationships, having physical disability, friend influence, smoking behavior

(MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), health problems (Yıldız & Şanlı Kula, 2012; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012, MoNE &UNICEF, 2013), lack of education, financial situation (Şirin, Matthew, Lisa , Gonsalves, & Howell 2004; Şahin & Uysal, 2007; Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; MoNE & UNICEF,2013; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012), gender (Şahin & Uysal , 2007; Tunç, 2009; Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010; Şimşek, 2010, 2011; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Şimşek & Şahin, 2012), having disruptive attitudes and behaviors, unable to adapt to the school, resorting to violence (Şimşek & Şahin, 2012), feeling bored with the school and lessons, emotional attachment to the opposite gender, various habits (Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012), resorting to violence (Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012; Şimşek & Şahin, 2012), economic hardships, age difference between peers, (Şirin, Özdemir & Sezgin, 2009; Ergün, 2014; Yorğun, 2014), need to earn money as soon as possible (Tunç, 2011), feeling low social support, negative attitude towards school and education, lack of self-confidence, lack of openness to new experiences (MoNE& UNICEF, 2013; Yorğun, 2014), external control center, not performing duties, drug / alcohol use, drug addiction (Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Ergün,2014), reading books, studying time outside the school, frequency of internet cafe visits, television watching time (Şahin & Uysal, 2007).

4.3 Familial Reasons

The main familial reasons identified in previous studies in Turkey are; high number of children in the families (Güler, 2002; Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Şimşek, 2011; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Ergün, 2014), income level of the family (Güler, 2002; Tansel, 2002; Uysal, 2008; Tunç, 2009; Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Özbaş, 2012; Taş, Selvitopu, Bora & Demirkaya, 2013; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Aküzüm, Yavaş, Tan & Uçar, 2015) low education level of the family and lack of knowledge (Güler, 2002; Tansel, 2002; Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Şimşek, 2011; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Ergün, 2014), women as the head of the family (Şahabettinoğlu, Uyanık, Ayhan, Bakır, & Ataöv, 2002), satisfaction with the family environment, attitudes of the family towards the education of the family members, being able to talk happily with the children about the school, ethnic differences (Gökşen, Cemalciler & Gürlesel, 2006; Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Şimşek, 2010, 2011; Katıtaş, 2012; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Şimşek & Şahin, 2012), father's profession (Tansel, 2002; Şimşek,2011; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), crowded family environment (Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Ergün, 2014), sensitivity of the family to their children (Aküzüm, Yavaş, Tan & Uçar, 2015), the feeling of insecure environment by the family, supporting the family economy by working in a job; the family' inability to afford school expenses (Taylı, 2008; Şirin, Özdemir & Sezgin, 2009; Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Haberli & Güvenç, 2012; Taş, Selvitopu, Bora & Demirkaya, 2013; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), parents' being a former dropout, parents' being under arrest (Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Ergün, 2014), at least one employee under the age of 15 in the family (Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010), views of the family about education, sociocultural structure of the family, expectation of family about their

children's education, inter-family communication, family pressure, violence, quality of life, cost of educational expenses for the family (Alat & Alat, 2011; Adıgüzel, 2013; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013; Şimşek & Şahin, 2012).

4.4 Environmental Reasons

The main individual-related reasons identified in previous studies in Turkey are; wrong friend choice (Taş, Selvitopu, Bora & Demirkaya, 2013), social support (Özer, Gençtarım & Ergene, 2011), gender role patterns, social value judgments (Dilli, 2006; Tunç, 2009), the cultural and religious pressures experienced in the place of residence, migration, the characteristics of the friends and peers of the individual and their effect on the individual (Özdemir Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; MoNE & UNICEF, 2013, Yorğun, 2014), the presence of someone who discourages the dropout decision, low socioeconomic level of the environment in which the individual lives, the society's perspective of education, girls' schooling or the social obstacles in front of girl's continuing education, the necessity of having to work at a young age, relations with neighbors (MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), social exclusion, having a friend who is a dropout or has a tendency to drop out, the academic success of a close friend (Özbaş, 2010; Şimşek & Şahin, 2012).

5. Prevalence of Dropping out in Turkey

With the increase of compulsory education to 12 years in 2012 in Turkey, the increase in school enrollment rate was targeted. However, international studies and reports proved that the increase in question did not materialize for various reasons and standards of developed countries could not be reached yet. According to the 2011 EU Progress Report, it was reported that Turkey failed to reach the EU standards in dropout rates; especially there was a serious inequality in the rate of schooling between the sexes (European Commission Press Releases, 2011a). In the 2012 Turkey Progress Report, it was reported that there was an increase in secondary school enrollment rates and a decrease in terms of inequity between the sexes (European Commission Press Releases, 2012). In another study, it was reported that the rate of 15- 19 year-olds who neither worked nor was attended school in 2009 in Turkey much higher than the average of other OECD countries (Boğaziçi University Social Policy Forum, 2010). It was stated in 2012 that when the same data was reconsidered, they were some improvements in the last three years, but the ratio of the young people outside the formal education system was still much higher than the EU average (Eurostat, 2012).

In the report prepared by the European Union Commission titled "Towards a Common European Goals in Education and Training 2010-2011", it was reported that the proportion of individuals aged 18-24 those who did not attending high school after they completed their primary education in Turkey was 44.3%. When this rate in the report is compared with the other countries, it was proved that serious measures should be taken regarding the issue of dropout (European Commission Press Releases, 2011b).

When we look at the studies done in Turkey; according to Altay's study (2005), the schooling rate in primary education was 94.4% in 2002-2003 academic year, 93.5% in 2003-2004 academic year and 93.3% in 2004-2005 academic year. When we consider the decline in schooling rates over the years, it appears that nearly one million children dropped out of formal education (Altay, 2005 as cited in Özdemir, Erkan, Karip, Sezgin & Şirin, 2010). In another study that aimed to reveal the dropout tendencies of the second stage primary school students, it was found that 16.1% of the students thought to leave the school (Şimşek & Şahin, 2012). In a similar study by Şimşek (2010) in which high school students were examined, it was found that the dropout tendency rate of the students was 17%.

In order to be able to examine the current situation regarding dropping out in Turkey, primarily the difference between school enrollment and graduation rates can be compared. While the number of students who completed 8th grade in 2015-2016 academic year was 1,161,901, the number of students enrolled in the secondary education at the beginning of 2016-2017 academic year was 1,040,124. Accordingly, 121,177 students did not enroll in any high school for formal education in the new term. In the 2016-2017 academic year, the number of students enrolled in the open secondary school was 198.869, the number of students enrolled in the common open education high school was 1,196.644, the number of students enrolled in the open vocational high school was 219.492 and the number of students enrolled in the open religious vocational high school was 138.802 (MoNE, 2017).

When we look at the other schooling rates, which is another important indicator of dropouts, the schooling rate at primary school level in the 2012-2013 academic year was 98.86% in total net, 93.09% at secondary school level, and 70.06% at high school level. When we look at the values of 2016-2017 academic year, on the other hand, the net schooling rate at primary school level was 91.16%, 95.68% at secondary school level and 82.54% at high school level. Except for the decline in the schooling rate at the primary school level over the past five years, the increase at the other two education levels was satisfactory, (MoNE, 2017).

As far as at the expenditures made between 2011 and 2016 are concerned, while it was 2,445 dollars per student in 2011, it increased to 2,461 in 2016. In terms of education levels, on the other hand, the highest increase in the expenditure per student in five years was at primary school level with an increase of 541$ (Turkish Statistical Institute, Education Expenditure Statistics, 2016).

6. Results of Dropping out of School

Consequences of the factors revealed by dropping out of school such as being multidimensional and diverse affect both the individual and the society in various ways. Dropping out of school, which is a multifaceted loss, has a social dimension since it causes personal due to the development, adaptation and future of the individual, economic and cultural losses (Kronick, 1994; as cited in Şimşek & Şahin, 2012; Özer, Gençtarım & Ergene, 2011). Studies done on individuals dropping out of school

demonstrated that these individuals in question experienced more health problems, had higher risks of crime involvement and suicidal tendencies, were forced to work at lower income jobs requiring less training, had lower living standards, and experienced social incompatibility (Taylı, 2008; Taş, Selvitopu, Bora & Demirkaya, 2013; Şimşek & Şahin, 2012).

As far as the results of the social dimension of dropping out of school are concerned, previous studies revealed that school dropout lowered the quality of education, damaged the country's economy, increased social service expenditure, caused more taxes to be collected from the citizens (MoNE & UNICEF, 2013), that the investments made in education were wasted and had a negative effect on the financing of education(Serin, 1979; Uysal, 2008; Şimşek & Şahin, 2012), and caused a waste of national resources, and possessed a risk in terms of social consciousness and prosperity (Uysal, 2008).

According to the OECD Education Expenditure report, education spending per student studying at secondary education level in Turkey in 2014 was 3286$ (Boyacı, Karacabey & Öz, 2018). According to the Ministry of National Education's 2017 Performance Program, on the other hand, 5.47% of the students in secondary education moved out of formal education system (Boyacı, Karacabey & Öz, 2018). Since the total number of students in secondary education in the 2016-2017 academic year was 5849970 (MoNE, 2017), 319993 students were out of the formal education. When we make calculation based on the last OEDC data, over 1 $ billion education spending was wasted in 2017 (Boyacı, Karacabey & Öz, 2018).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study attempted to draw a general framework regarding the issue of school dropouts in Turkey's education system. As far as the results of the previous studies mentioned above are concerned, since there was no clear formal designation of school dropout in Turkey, it is not possible to reach clear definitions and percentages concerning the subject. Therefore, it is not possible to address the problem comprehensively. Besides, when the studies conducted nationally are compared with those available in the relevant international literature, national ones prove to be inadequate. Different researches can be planned in term of different ages, educational levels and educational stakeholders related to the subject, and longitudinal studies can be carried out by linking them with the previous studies.

While there internationally exists many preventive studies regarding the solution of school dropout problem, there are currently no such studies encountered in Turkey. The policy proposal prepared by the Ministry of National Education together with the UNICEF in 2013 for school dropout in secondary education is promising. The fact that the proposed proposals are not left only within the framework of the school dimension and that it involves cooperation with different stakeholders demonstrate that permanent solutions to the problem are targeted. Carrying out similar studies within the level of primary education, which are not considered within the scope of school

dropout due to higher education and the current education system, but which will lead to serious consequences, will be beneficial for the collective quality of our education system.

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