THE INFLUENCE OF CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND DROPOUT RISK IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MOGADISHU, SOMALIA

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Abstract:

The purpose of this research was to investigate the influence of curriculum and assessment policies and practices on student engagement and dropout risk in secondary schools in Mogadishu, Somalia. To combine the data from diverse sources, the research employed a literature review strategy. Dropout risk was defined as the possibility of students leaving school before finishing their secondary education, while student engagement was described as the degree of participation, interest, and excitement that students display in their learning process. Motivation, expectations, mental health, substance abuse, parental involvement, grade retention, IQ, learning difficulties, academic achievement, curriculum quality, relevance, consistency, alignment, teacher capacity, teaching materials, assessment system, governance, and management were identified as factors influencing student engagement and dropout risk at the individual, classroom, school, and system levels. The study found that the curriculum and assessment policies and practices in Mogadishu-Somalia were low in quality, inconsistent, irrelevant, and misaligned with the national standards and the needs of the learners and society. The study recommended improving and aligning the curriculum and assessment policies and practices in secondary education in Mogadishu-Somalia with the national standards, the needs of the learners and society, and the principles of student engagement and differentiation. To achieve this goal, the study suggested developing and sharing a clear vision and goals, involving all stakeholders in the curriculum and assessment processes, adapting the curriculum and assessment to the diverse needs of students, engaging and motivating students in the curriculum and assessment, and improving teacher capacity, curriculum framework, teaching and learning materials, assessment and certification system, and governance and management of the education sector.

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1. Introduction

Secondary education is an important stage in young people's development since it prepares them for further education, vocational training, or work. However, many Somali students encounter severe barriers to finishing their secondary education, including poverty, violence, relocation, gender discrimination, and a lack of quality and relevance in curriculum and assessment. These circumstances may have an impact on their academic engagement and raise their chance of dropping out.

Student engagement is a multifaceted concept that relates to students' participation, interest, and dedication to their studies. Attendance, participation, motivation, effort, and self-regulation are all behavioral, emotional, and cognitive variables that may be used to assess it. Individual, family, school, and community variables all affect student engagement, which has been found to improve academic success, retention, and well-being.

Dropping out is the consequence of a complicated and dynamic process involving various causes and interactions across time. It is described as quitting school before finishing the minimal secondary education requirements. Individuals and society suffer as a result of student dropout, which includes decreased income, lower social status, more unemployment, poorer health, and increased criminality.

Curriculum and assessment are critical components of the educational system that determine learning content, methods, and results. By influencing students' motivation, interest, self-efficacy, expectations, feedback, and recognition, they may have a major influence on student engagement and dropout risk. Curriculum and assessment policies and processes should be in line with students' and society's needs and ambitions, as well as educational standards and goals. They must also be adaptable, inclusive, relevant, and attentive to the different circumstances and issues that Somali students confront.

The goal of this study is to investigate the influence of curriculum and assessment policies and practices on student engagement and dropout risk in secondary schools in Mogadishu, Somalia. It conducted a literature study, examined the present state and issues in Somalia's education system, and provided suggestions for improvement.

2. Literature review

One of the main challenges that adolescents face is completing their education and staying in school. However, many factors can affect their school attendance and dropout behavior, such as their personal characteristics, family background, academic performance, and school environment. These factors can have positive or negative effects on students' motivation, engagement, expectations, and achievement, which in turn influence their decision to continue or quit their studies. Therefore, it is important to

examine these factors and their impacts on students' outcomes, as well as the implications for curriculum and assessment policies and practices. In this literature review, we will summarize some of the relevant studies that have investigated these issues.

Gubbels et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 75 papers that looked at 781 variables related to school attendance and 635 factors related to dropout. They divided the determinants into 44 domains for school attendance and 42 domains for dropout and used meta-analytic approaches to assess their impacts. They observed that 28 domains were significantly related to school attendance and 23 domains were significantly related to dropouts. Attitude toward school, drug misuse, mental health issues, parental participation, grade retention, IQ, learning challenges, and academic success were among the categories having the greatest benefits. According to the authors, this research gave a thorough picture of the causes and effects of school attendance and dropout, which might aid in the assessment, preventive, and intervention methods for at-risk adolescents.

Fan and Wolters (2014) performed another research that investigated the influence of motivation and expectations on students' dropout behavior. They employed a broad and varied sample of children from the United States to assess their math and English aptitude, beliefs, and intrinsic worth as indications of motivation. They also evaluated their educational expectations as a moderator of motivation and dropout status. They discovered that students who were more motivated and had greater expectations were less likely to drop out of high school. They came to the conclusion that motivation was a key aspect of completing school and that treatments should try to improve students' talents, beliefs, intrinsic worth, and educational expectations. The study suggested three important implications for curriculum and assessment policies and practices: providing students with challenging, meaningful, and relevant learning opportunities; providing students with clear, realistic, and supportive feedback and guidance; and tailoring the curriculum and assessment to students' specific needs and interests in various domains of learning.

A different approach to enhancing students' motivation and engagement in school was examined by Orthner et al. (2013). They investigated how educating students about occupations relevant to their studies affected their engagement and involvement in school. They analyzed data from 3,493 students in 14 middle schools, seven of which participated in the CareerStart program and seven of which did not. They took into account other characteristics that potentially influence students' participation and value of education, such as past engagement, history, income, and grades. They discovered that students in CareerStart schools were more involved and valued school than students in other schools, and students who reported more career-relevant education were more engaged and valued school. According to the research, career-related information and activities should be included in curriculum and assessment policies and procedures to boost students' motivation and engagement.

Another group of students that may benefit from a more engaging and relevant curriculum and assessment are gifted students, who are at risk of underachievement and dropout due to boredom, frustration, or alienation from school. Landis and Reschly

(2013) conducted a literature review on student involvement and its relationship to gifted underachievement and dropout. They described student involvement as a multifaceted entity including academic, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components. They investigated the factors that impact student engagement in gifted literature and presented their results as well as the implications for research and practice. They contended that understanding, predicting, and avoiding dropout behavior among talented students requires a knowledge of student engagement. They proposed that curriculum and assessment policies and procedures be linked with student engagement principles and differentiated to accommodate the unique needs of students.

A different aspect of avoiding dropouts and raising completion rates is assessing the effectiveness of various policy and practice interventions aimed at addressing academic, behavioral, social, and systemic issues that impact students' results. In their literature review, Freeman and Simonsen (2015) present a complete summary of these interventions and their common components. They examined studies on policy and practice interventions in four domains: academic, behavioral, social, and systemic. They discussed the numerous sorts of interventions, such as enrichment, acceleration, differentiation, mentorship, counseling, or school reform, as well as the research techniques and findings. They also highlighted the aspects that are common to successful interventions, such as target population, intervention components, delivery style, length, intensity, and faithfulness. They discovered that most research at the high school level focused on single-component, individual, or small-group interventions and that there was a need for more research on policy interventions, early and multilevel interventions, and the integration of dropout efforts with other school initiatives. They proposed that multidimensional support frameworks might offer a basis for conducting effective interventions.

Another difficulty with student achievement and retention is how to comprehend the student experience from a cultural standpoint. This insight is provided by Kahu and Nelson (2018), who refined a recent framework of student participation that integrates the idea of the instructional interface. They contend that the first-year transition metaphor is restricted because it believes that discrepancies between students and institutions are transient and can be resolved. Instead, they use a cultural perspective to establish the educational interface as a metaphor for the individual psychosocial environment in which student and institutional elements interact and impact student learning engagement. They claim that the educational interface consists of four psychological constructs: self-efficacy, emotions, belonging, and well-being, which operate as mediators between student and institutional characteristics and student engagement and achievement. They contend that the improved framework of student involvement helps explain why certain students with demographic factors linked to lower completion rates are maintained and succeed while others are not. They also suggest that the improved framework may be used to influence the design and assessment of curricula and co-curricular programs aimed at improving student

achievement and retention by addressing the educational interface and its major elements.

Finally, how to define and quantify student engagement and its consequences on student outcomes is important for student success and retention. Wang and Degol (2014) present a detailed analysis of student engagement research's current condition and future goals. They describe how academics define and analyze student participation at various levels, settings, and dimensions. They also outline how many elements impact student involvement and how it affects student outcomes. They then propose person-centered techniques to investigate individual variations in student involvement. They conclude by acknowledging limitations and giving suggestions for further study. They underline the need for further research into the impact of emotions, personality, past experiences, shared values, and nonacademic activities on student involvement. They also advocate for further longitudinal studies, intervention trials, emotional neuroscience research, and relationships between student engagement levels and dimensions.

3. The present state and issues in Somalia's education system

The school system in Somalia has been seriously harmed by decades of violence, insecurity, and poverty. Many obstacles beset the system, including a lack of infrastructure, resources, security, public education, regulation, funding, educated instructors, language policy, and curriculum. As a consequence of these issues, many Somali children and teenagers have limited access, quality, and equality in education. Several studies have assessed the present state and difficulties of Somalia's education system, identifying some of the most pressing concerns that must be addressed:

One of the most significant difficulties is the limited access and retention of students, particularly females, underprivileged groups, and children impacted by disasters. Only 30% of primary school-aged children and 26% of secondary school-aged children are enrolled in Somalia, according to UNICEF (2020). Poverty, distance, instability, societal norms, disability, and relocation are all issues that impede children from enrolling or remaining in school. Girls, for example, suffer higher educational challenges than males owing to gender discrimination, early marriage, domestic obligations, and safety concerns. Similarly, owing to marginalization, exclusion, violence, and relocation, children from minority clans, nomadic groups, urban poor neighborhoods, and conflict-affected regions have less access to school than their peers.

Another issue is education's poor quality and relevance since many schools lack the necessary facilities, supplies, and competent instructors. According to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (2020), just 42% of primary schools and 36% of secondary schools in Somalia have permanent buildings. Furthermore, just 15% of elementary schools and 18% of secondary schools provide all students with textbooks. Furthermore, just 58% of primary and 50% of secondary school instructors have had formal education. Curriculum and assessment policies and practices are not standardized or harmonized among areas and authorities, and data and monitoring

mechanisms to measure student learning results are lacking. As a consequence, many students fail to gain the fundamental skills and competencies required for their future lives and occupations.

A third concern is the education system's poor administration and management since federal and regional education ministries have little institutional capability, coordination, cooperation, resources, accountability, openness, and evidence-based decision-making. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the education system in Somalia is plagued by political intervention, corruption, fragmentation, and insecurity. The federal government has minimal jurisdiction and influence over regional governments and other entities in Somalia that offer educational services. Regional governments have diverse education plans and goals that are not in line with the national vision and standards. Education also needs enough finance from both local and foreign sources. Furthermore, the education sector is subject to assaults by armed groups on schools, teachers, and students.

These challenges have resulted in low student engagement and high dropout risk in secondary education in Mogadishu, Somalia. Both student engagement and dropout risk are influenced by various factors at the individual, classroom, school, and system levels (Kahu, 2018).

4. Conclusions

The study's key conclusion was that the quality and relevance of the curriculum, as well as assessment policy and practices, had a significant impact on student engagement and dropout risk in secondary schools in Mogadishu and Somalia. The analysis found that present policies and practices are out of step with national standards and learner and societal expectations. According to the research, these variables limit student engagement and increase dropout risk, particularly for females, underprivileged groups, and conflict-affected youth. The research emphasized the importance of student engagement as a critical indicator for assessing, predicting, and mitigating student dropout behavior. The research also discovered that emotions, personality, past experiences, shared beliefs, and nonacademic activities all had an influence on student engagement. The research contributes to the current body of information about the link between curriculum and assessment policies and procedures, student involvement, and dropout risk in Somali secondary schools.

5. Recommendations

To increase student engagement and reduce dropout risk, the study recommends the following steps to make the curriculum and assessment policies and practices more aligned with the principles of student engagement and differentiation, and more responsive to the diverse needs of students:

- Create and express a clear vision and objectives that represent the students', society's, and nation's values, ambitions, and needs.
- Using a participatory and collaborative approach, include all stakeholders in the planning, development, review, evaluation, and improvement phases of the curriculum and assessment policies and procedures.
- Customize the curriculum and assessment policies and procedures to meet the various needs of students by providing a diversity of learning experiences, activities, resources, and opportunities, as well as using numerous assessment methods, styles, and criteria.
- In the curriculum and assessment policies and practices, stimulate and motivate students by arousing their curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, connecting to their prior knowledge, experiences, cultures, values, and aspirations, and providing constructive feedback, recognition, and support for their learning progress and achievements.
- Prepare students for their future academic, personal, social, and professional growth by making the curriculum and assessment policies and processes relevant and meaningful to them.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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