

The Problems of Secondary School Dropouts In East Gojjam

Tilaye Kassahun*

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Introduction

Background of the study

Graduating from high school is one of the most important events in life. It is a "rite of passage" (Garman & Brown, 1989: iii), which marks the successful completion of childhood and the onset of adulthood. The high school graduates are viewed as individuals who have achieved important goals and are therefore ready to take on new challenges such as job training, college, career, marriage, family, home, financial obligations, and other adult responsibilities (Brodelt, 1987; Garman and Brown, 1989).

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disseminate the knowledge necessary to improve agricultural techniques, health services, government policy reforms and other changes to the common people. In short, they can serve as important change agents sustained economic growth of the nation.

Moreover, access to jobs, especially in the modern sector, is largely determined by an individual's level of completion or schooling. According to Bishop (1989:4), "the man holding a pen can earn more than the man wielding a hoe." This is typically true in a country like Ethiopia whose economy permits only very limited opportunities for the employment. This is to say that an educated person be in a better status of competing for the limited number of employment opportunities available in the country's economy and could have a better chance of creating self-employment than does one without formal education. Thus, it is possible to say that the person who graduated from high school could have better opportunities in life than the person who graduated from primary school.

In this respect, many developing societies believe that an expanding economy and the increasingly perplexing problems facing their countries demand a sizable number of people who are literate with not only five years or six years of education, but also who have to go through secondary education and college training to solve the countries' multifarious problems. The great importance attached by political leaders, to these demands for a large number of middle-level and higher-level skilled manpower is reflected in the huge efforts made and the substantial portion of recurrent budgets allocated to expand secondary school systems and ultimately to raise the number of secondary school graduates.

It is ironic, however, that the accumulated evidence (from World Bank, 1988; Bishop, 1989; UNESCO, 1995) shows that the majority of the pupils who commence secondary education are not likely to complete the cycle. Such a problem is not limited only to the developing countries, but it has also been a

persistent problem of all developed countries albeit on a smaller scale (Curle, 1973; Rumberger, 1987). This is to say that both rich and poor countries have complained about school dropouts. Nevertheless, a hard look at various data (UNESCO, 1995; World Bank, 1988; Elleni, 1995) shows that the intensity of the problem tends to be very much pressing in schools of the least developed countries (LDCs).

Ethiopia as one of the LDCs is not by any means an exception to this phenomenon. Although the country's education system has been grappling with a number of problems, planners and policy makers in the country and regions (Genet, 1991; Tegegn, 1996; PHRD, 1996), consider dropout as a very critical problem. More specifically, MOE (1995:51) by calculating the flow rates for different cohorts of children (1976/77-1993/94), has well-documented that from those who entered grade one, the proportion of students who survived up to grade 12 was unlikely to exceed 12 percent. The observation from PHRD (1996:32) study also indicates that in all over the country, the attrition rates for senior secondary schools (grades 9-12) ranged from 13-17 percent in one academic year. Similarly, the apparent convergence of the findings (Tekeste, 1990 & 1996; Genet, 1991; Wanna & Tsion, 1994; Tegegn, 1995) confirms that the country's education system has considerable amount of student drain due to dropping out of high schools. The situation has also been known to vary significantly among regions or zones, among sexes and grades (Ayalew, 1989; Seyoum, 1986 & 91; Habtamu, 1992). In this regard, the day to day observation of school records in East Gojjam Zone indicates that there is an overwhelming number of student drain before graduating from secondary schools.

Nevertheless, dropping out of high school results in serious social and individual consequences. Students who drop out of high school may find many doors locked to them because they lack an important key of a high school diploma. They may have more trouble getting and keeping good jobs and may put

their lives in "jeopardy." (Graman & Brown, 1989; Natriello, McDill and Pallas, 1985). Furthermore, the fact that some of the dropouts are not engaged in productive works, may expose them to crimes. In this regard, although there are few empirical studies on the nature and magnitude of crimes committed by dropouts in the zone under study, localized assessments and sporadic reports through mass media indicate that there is an increasing indulgence in drugs, alcohol, smoking, delinquency and crimes. For instance, the extent of chewing chat, prostitution, theft and other crimes committed by school leavers are reported to increase from time to time. Among those groups of misbehaving youth, a sizable proportion constitutes of those who have quitted from secondary schools.

In the view of Brown (1991:303), "just as environmental crisis affects the natural resources on which life ultimately depends, so education crisis threatens the human resources of knowledge, skills and self-confidence." In other words, when students drop out of school sequential learning cannot occur, subject matter skills cannot be developed, and much student talent is wasted. As a result, gaps exist in terms of goal attainment in educational system. Furthermore, a high dropout at secondary level is an indicative of low productivity of the education system and wastage of both human and financial resources of staggering magnitude.

Despite the gravity and devastating effect of early school withdrawal by youth in the Zone, there is no systematic study that has been conducted so far to seriously tackle the problem. Therefore, this research has been conducted in such a way that it can rigorously diagnose the problem from its different angles.

Statement of the Problem

The study was aimed at investigating the magnitude of the problem in different schools of the zone. It also attempted to

pin-point those factors that drove students to quit secondary schooling. Moreover, the study has examined the comparative impact of those factors on boys and girls. More specifically, this aims to answer the following basic questions.

- What is the magnitude of secondary schools dropout rate in East Gojjam Zone?
- What are the major causes of secondary school dropout?
- Is there any significance in the rate of dropping out and degree of influence of the casualties between boys and girls. In this regard, the statistical analysis have been conducted based on the null hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference on different variables between the two groups of dropouts (males and females).'

This study is delimited to secondary schools of the East Gojjam Zone only. The first reason for limiting the study to this zone is that the writer of this paper has some experience related to school operation in the zone and that the problem of high school dropouts is severe. The zone's statistical data also revealed that the rate of high school dropouts was distressingly high.

The second reason is that no systematic and thorough study has been conducted at this level to establish the magnitude of the dropout rates for various social groups in different grades of the cycle.

The results of this study are expected to have the following significance.

- They will contribute to the understanding of those factors that play major roles in students' dropping out of high schools and bring about relevant information inputs for designing viable and community based intervention measures for mitigating the problem.

- They will provide a necessary basis for policy-makers, planners, school directors, teachers, parents and other interested groups to realize the magnitude of the problem on gender-specific basis and attempt to solve it.
- The findings may also generate interest or serve as a stepping-stone for those who have an intention for further study in the field.

In order to secure pertinent and precise information concerning the current status of the phenomenon (high school dropouts) and to draw valid general conclusion from the facts discovered, a descriptive survey was employed for this study.

Sample

In this study, four high schools (Amanuel Sen. Secondary School, Belay Zeleke S.S.S., Debre Work S.S.S., Abreha Atsebeha S.S.S.) which constituted 50 percent of the zone total school population were investigated and 164 dropouts (boys and 79 girls) which account for about 31 percent of 1996/97 dropouts in the four schools were randomly selected from grades 9 to 12 to fill the questionnaire prepared for this purpose. Out of this, 152 questionnaire papers were returned and used for data analysis.

When one thinks of studying about the problems of school dropouts, the problem that comes at the forefront is the difficulty of getting the subjects. In a country like Ethiopia, where the spatial distribution of the country's population is very scattered and mobility of people from place to place is very high, locating dropouts in some specific places is very difficult. In this regard this research has also been faced with such difficulty. In the mean time, a modest effort was made to gather genuine data from the relevant sources. In other words, different mechanisms were employed to get the sample population such as consulting school files, homeroom

teachers, kebele documents, and their friends. Based on a thorough documentary analyses and consultation with different persons, the subjects were located some at schools, some in towns working as bus conductors, as waiters or waitresses in bars and liquor houses, and some others in countryside staying with their parents or relatives.

The study was conducted by using personal observation, questionnaire for dropouts, and documentary analyses (from schools, zonal education department, Regional Education Bureau, MOE, and CSA) as data gathering tools. The dropouts' questionnaire was constructed in two parts. The first part helped to obtain relevant background information for the dropouts. The second part (which is the core of this study) was intended to secure information regarding the reasons for their being dropouts. This part of the questionnaire consisted of items that were constructed in five-point scale alternative responses ranging from "5=extremely serious" to "1=not observed at all." This helped to gather relevant information on the significance of the influence of various factors in causing their leaving (quitting) school.

This study is measured by main dependent variable called dropout rate of high school students relative to their gender. On the other hand, the determinants of dropping out (in this case independent variables) were seen by grouping them into two major categories: those related to the student experiences in the school (school-related factors) and in his/her socio-economic environment (external-related factors).

The data gathered were analyzed using various statistical tools such as percentages, averages, standard deviation, cohort reconstructed method, the chi-square of association, the t-distribution, and the Spearman's rank difference correlation. The starting point of the statistical analysis was the hypothesis that 'there is no difference on the different variables between the two groups--male and female dropouts.' The .05 level of significance is used to reject the null hypothesis.

In this study the following terms/phrases have been used as defined below:

- **Cohort:** a group of pupils joining a grade of course in a given year (1996/97).
- **Cohort analysis:** the process that shows the flow rate of a given group of school youths means of a flow diagram on year -by -year and grade -by-grade basis.
- **Dropout:** Leaving school before completion of a program for a cycle.

Results and Discussions

This part of the paper deals with the analysis of the data gathered from sample school dropouts and from documents of the Zonal Education Department and the Ministry of Education. Most of the data gathered are organized using tables followed by discussions. The frequencies of items (school impediments) are displayed in a 2x5 contingency tables. In computing the results of the study, the writer has used different points for the responses that represent the extent of influence of each factor for dropping out of school. These include the following: 5=extremely serious, 4= very serious, 3=serious, 2=not serious, and 1=not observed at all.

For each factor, the significance of the chi-square result is indicated by the symbol*

It is well documented that all pupils admitted to the first grade of an educational cycle do not complete that cycle within a prescribed minimum period. Some of them drop out somewhere in the cycle. Moreover, certain groups of learners quit schooling more often than others. An immensely higher dropout rate may also occur in some grades than others. The tables below (1 and 2) indicate this fact.

In these tables, an attempt was made to show the flow of students through the secondary education system of East Gojjam by employing a mechanism called the reconstructed cohort method. The cohort reconstruction has been made based on two-years (1995/96 and 1996/97) statistical data about enrollment, promotion, repetition and dropout by grade and gender.

As shown in Table 1, the pattern of dropout rate varies from 1.4 percent to 17.57 percent for boys, from 5.1 percent to 23.96 percent for girls, and from 6.22 percent to 20.89 percent for both sexes. In the given academic year (1996/97), the highest rates of dropout for both sexes occurred in grade 9, while the least dropout rate for boys and girls occurred in grades 11 and 12, respectively.

Table 1: Pupils Flow Rate by Grade and Gender

	9			10			11			12		
	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B
Enrollment 1995/96	1809	1949	3758	1241	1008	2249	1068	793	1861	773	351	1124
Enrollment 1996/97	2002	2173	4175	1340	1141	2481	1302	792	2094	790	373	1163
Repeaters 1996/97	304	752	1056	411	564	263	286	549	-	-	-	10.4
Promotion Rate	.8562	.3746	.5101	.8372	.502	.887	.7397	.4704	.6249	-	-	-
Repetition Rate	.1681	.3858	.281	.0008	.4077	.2508	.2463	.3607	.295	-	-	-
Drop out rate	.1757	.2396	.2089	.162	.0603	.0622	.014	.1689	.0801	.074	.051	.066

Source: Calculated from the documents of East Gojjam Zonal Education Department

To see the overall trend for the flow rate of pupils by gender, a cohort analyses was made as shown in Table 2. The cohort computation has given a room for a maximum of two repetitions and has been reconstructed based on the assumption that 1000 pupils (for each sex) have joined the cohort history. Consequently, the estimated result shows that from 1000 pupils entering first year class (joining grade 9) only 625 boys, 267 girls and 497 both sexes reached the final grade of the cycle (grade 12). This shows that the over-all dropout rate was found to be 37.5 percent for the boys, 73.3 percent for the girls, and 50.3 percent for both sexes. This, in

turn, entails the dropout rate of a high magnitude among the secondary schools of the zone under study.

When the dropout data were further broken down according to the gender of the pupils and the grades, altogether different results emerged. Of the total cohort youths 21.6 percent of boys and 42.7 percent of girls had left school from grade 9; 12.7 percent of boys and 14.9 percent girls quitted school from grade 10, while 3.2 percent of boys and 15.7 percent of girls had withdrawn from grade 11. This implies that the highest rates of dropouts (for both sexes) occurred in grade 9. The striking feature of the data is that, in each grade level, the dropout rate is consistently higher for the girls than that of the boys. This in turn shows that the problem of student dropouts in the zone under study is more acute for the girls than for the boys.

Table 2: Dropout Rates among the Cohort Children (1000- Students) in the Zone, 1996/97-2001/2

Ac. Year.	Dropouts by Grade and Sex									Graduating Students (Grade 12)		
	9			10			11			M	F	B
	M	F	B	M	F	B	M	F	B			
1996/97	176	241	209	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1997/98	30	93	59	106	34	32	-	-	-	-	-	-
1998/99	10	93	39	18	28	17	9	32	29	-	-	-
1999/00	-	-	-	3	87	34	4	37	24	405	88	218
2000/1	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	88	60	168	101	180
2001/2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52	78	99
1996/97-2001/2	216	427	307	127	149	83	32	157	113	625	267	497

Source: Computed from the documents of East Gojjam Zonal Education Department

The results of this study are in conformity with the findings of Wanna and Tsion (1994), Genet (1991), and World Bank (1988). All of these researchers have invariably documented that the incidence of dropping out was more severe among girls than among boys. However, the results of the present study seem to contradict with the findings of Rumberger (1987)

which asserted that the dropout rate was more severe among boys than among girls.

As a whole, in the East Gojjam zone, out of 1000 pupils who entered grade 9, barely half reached the 12th grade. Surprisingly enough, even from those who reached grade 12 a good number of them left school before completing the course given for the grade level. Such a high rate of dropouts may result in serious societal or personal crises. For instance, it results in little or no private or social benefits. It increases the size of school leavers who could swell the ranks of the educated unemployment. It could also result in increased crimes or delinquent acts in the society.

Causes of Dropouts

Students may quit school due to various reasons that could either emanate from their school system or from their socio-economic environment. In this study, an attempt was made to discuss some of the factors that led students to drop out of school. The impact of these factors is discussed hereunder.

Extraneous (Socio-Economic) Factors

The teaching-learning process requires an individual student who is ready to follow up classes attentively. Attentive listening in class requires a healthy student; otherwise the whole business of learning could be obstructed. As indicated in Table 3, a considerable number of high school students (48.3% of boys and 50.8% of girls) had withdrawn from school due to ill-health (of themselves or their parents). The cumulative averages (2.62 for boys and 2.95 for girls) indicate that the health crises had seriously affected the schooling of both sexes. The critical look into its effect shows that the problem was more severe among girls than among boys. According to the chi-square result ($X^2_{(4)} = 17.21, P < .05$), the existing difference between the opinions of males and females is also found to be statistically significant.

Since Ethiopia is the poorest country, the provision of health care and food is very low.

Table 3: The Impact of External-Related Factors in Aggravating Dropping Out

Factors	Sex	Responses in %					Mean X	Chi- square X ²
		1	2	3	4	5		
Pupils' (or parental)	M	30.4	21.5	20.3	11.4	16.5	2.62	
Health problem	F	30.1	19.2	1.4	24.7	24.7	2.95	17.21*
Family breakdown	M	43.0	21.5	7.6	7.6	20.3	2.41	
(parental disunity)	F	56.2	5.5	5.5	13.7	19.2	2.34	10.01*
Gloomy employment	M	32.9	10.1	19.0	15.2	22.8	2.85	
Prospect for educated	F	28.8	12.3	5.5	12.3	41.1	3.04	10.17*
Parental withholding	M	31.6	16.5	8.9	19.0	24.1	2.87	
Because of hatred of	F	31.5	9.6	17.8	13.7	27.4	2.96	4.48
formal education								
Parental inability to	M	16.5	5.1	7.6	30.4	40.5	3.73	
Afford educational	F	32.9	6.8	12.3	12.3	35.6	3.11	11.20*
expense								
Pupils' involvement in	M	19.0	10.1	22.8	20.3	27.8	3.28	
Income generating	F	28.8	5.5	13.7	26.0	26.0	3.15	4.87
tasks								
Excessive	M	17.7	8.9	19.0	22.8	31.6	3.42	
involvement in Family	F	26.0	12.3	9.6	19.2	32.9	3.21	4.21
work								
Peer group influence	M	49.4	16.5	11.4	11.4	11.4	2.19	
	F	49.6	20.5	4.1	13.7	15.1	2.30	3.51
Marriage	M	62.0	13.9	7.6	3.8	12.7	1.91	
	F	54.8	9.6	11.0	12.3	12.3	2.18	4.91

In line with this, Bishop (1989) points out that malnutrition is usually associated with a high rate of dropout among school children. Other researchers (e.g. Zenebework, 1976; Elleni, 1995; Tilaye, 1997) concur with the view that in most developing countries school children often suffer from parasites, fever, recurring headaches, stomach pains, gastritis, kidney problem, liver problem, anemia, and asthmatic problems. Such ill-health problems usually lead students to discontinue their schooling.

As shown in Table 3, the data reveal that 35.5 percent of boys and 38.4 percent of girls had withdrawn from school because

of parental disunity influence or because of maladjustment created due to quarrels at home. Although the cumulative averages (2.41 for males and 2.34 for females) indicate the problem has not seriously influenced the majority of dropouts, for some students (for 20.3% boys and 19.2% of girls) it had appeared as an extremely serious. In this regard, the computed value of the chi-square ($X^2_{(4)} = 10.01$, $P < .05$) has also shown that the difference is statistically significant and is not due to chance.

The results of this study reveal that the family structure of the ex-students had a considerable effect in exasperating their dropping out. Brimer and Pauli (1971), Tadesse (1974), Zimiles and Lee (1991) also reported similar results. They asserted that disunity in the family due to abandoning of home by either parents, (or one of the parents left for a distant work, death or divorce) was found to be a contributory factor for a child's withdrawal from school. The quarrelsomeness of the home environment (e.g. between father and mother, between father and child, etc.) could also create a serious emotional disturbance among school children in the form of tension, anxiety, fear or instability in their lives which in turn are hindrances to their concentration in classes or school work in general. Furthermore, the rate of dropping out is believed to be higher among single-parent or step-parent family students than intact family students (Tadesse, 1974; Zimiles & Lee, 1991). This may be due to the fact that children who are living with a single-parent or step-parents may be pressed to support in domestic work. Such children may be less sheltered, and ill-treated in many aspects more than those who are living with their both parents.

The other major factor that can deter the schooling of children is private or economic problems. This is to say that low employment opportunities for the educated, parental inability to afford educational expenses for the children and excessive involvement of children in domestic work as well as in income generating tasks are usually known to cause major dropouts.

Low employment opportunities for the educated had 57 percent of the boys and 59 percent of the girls to abandon schooling before completing the secondary cycle. 78.1 percent of males and 60.2 percent of females dropout and because of parented inability to cover their children's educational expenses. Students' excessive involvement in family work (domestic chores) had made 73.4 percent of boys and 61.7 percent of girls discontinue their schooling while 68.9 percent of boys and 60.2 percent of girls discontinued their schooling because of their involvement in income-generating activities (or preferred working to win bread for the family or for themselves). When the mean scores are taken as the measures of the influence of the factors, the gloomy employment for educated accounted for 2.85 for the males and 3.04 for the females, while parental reluctance to pay children's educational expenses accounted for 3.73 for boys and 3.11 for girls. Pupils' involvement in income generating activities accounted for 3.28 for boys and 3.15 for girls, while the youths' excessive involvement in family work made up 3.4 for the boys and 3.21 for the girls.

As to the chi-square test result, of these four economic factors, the opinions of the males and females were found to be significantly different only for low employment opportunities for the educated and parental inability to afford educational expenses for their school children. Besides, for these school impediment factors, the extent of the severity of the influence was found to be slightly higher for the boys than for the girls (see Table 3). However, the effect of the other two factors was found to be more or less the same for the two sexes as the chi-square results do not ascertain the significance of their differences.

The question of appropriate relationship between education and the world of work has been a matter of concern for everybody (i.e., for students, parents, policy-makers, politicians, etc.). For those who manage to complete secondary or tertiary school, the availability of employment opportunities increases the survival rates among school

children and more than that it will facilitate the efficiency of the country's education system. If the labor market gives more and better jobs for school graduates, the value of education will be given higher importance and parents may be initiated to make sacrifices in order to keep their children at school. However, in situations where there is chronic problem of unemployment among school leavers, there may be disillusionment with the rewards offered by the school. In such cases, the school is taken as an institution which produces social menace; the type of education provided is viewed as irrelevant to the society's needs and more than that the value of education comes into question. In such cases, parents may wonder, why so much time is wasted for such a very low rate of return for their children's education. As a result, they may be reluctant to send their children to school and the students may develop negative attitude towards schooling and resort to early school leaving.

Further, for the school children, especially in the poorest family there are a number of other push-and-pull factors that determine the future of their education. Among them lack of money comes at the forefront. Money is an imperative for an individual to learn. It is needed for covering the direct costs of schooling such as the cost of instructional materials, transportation, tuition, clothing, boarding facilities and health. Parental reluctance to afford all this or their inability to cover such expenses may predispose their children to dropout. It appears also vital to mention at this point that schooling of the youth of this study was also deterred by their excessive involvement in family work and by their overriding demand to win bread for their family.

In many cultures in Ethiopia including the East Gojjam zone, the high school age (15-18 on average) is taken as a very demanding one. In this age bound, the youth are required to accept a number of social, economic and political responsibilities. For example, in the zone understudy, the young of this age range are expected to feed their family either

by working at home (i.e., son--in place of father or older brother, and daughter--in place of mother, older sister or helping with them), by selling services to other families, and/or by participating in odd jobs for generating little income for the family. Further, at this age level some parents are reluctant to supply school facilities thinking that the child is old enough to help himself/herself. What is more, by sending children of this age to school and keeping them there, the family may sacrifice their potential earning power. In poor families, such a loss can threaten their survival. Consequently, the school children are forced to discontinue their schooling before completing the courses for the cycle.

In addition to economic factors, there are social factors that could contain the schooling of youth understudy. These include parental withholding because of hatred of formal education, peer group influence, and marriage (teenage pregnancy) cases. A close look at the data reveals that parental negative attitude towards modern education affected 52 percent of the boys and 58.9 percent of the girls from their schooling. Moreover, 34.2 percent of the boys and 32.9 percent of the girls had discontinued their schooling due to their peer group influence, while 23.5 percent of the boys and 35.6 percent of the girls had left school because of marriage case. When the mean scores are taken to be the measures of the influence, out of the three factors the impact of parental opposition for children's schooling has appeared as a serious problem of dropouts (see Table 3).

Although the degree of the influence of the other factors (peer group initiation and marriage) was not impressive, their effects should not be undermined as they had made a good number of students abandon their schooling. Both groups of youth (males and females) have been affected in more or less equally by the three school impediment factors as the chi-square results show the insignificance of the differences in their opinions (see Table 3).

The value attached to modern education by parents greatly affects the children's progress at school. These days, most parents are expected to be aware of the advantages that their children could gain from education. Nevertheless there are times that some parents become lukewarm towards modern education and do not let their children attend school and this puts hindrances on the way of pupils' schooling activities. It is well-documented that little or no support of parents towards the school from homes would lead students to disrupt schooling (Maglad, 1994; Adane, 1993; Rumberger, 1987; Tadesse, 1974). Traditionally causal or negative attitude of parents comes from lack of their exposition to formal education (Bishop, 1989; Maglad, 1994). In this respect, since a vast majority (about 90%) of the people in the East Gojjam zone live in rural areas, most of them (about 85%) are illiterate (CSA, 1995) and they are not quite aware of advantages gained from modern education in which case they may not be able to appreciate the value of modern education in front of their children. However, the incapacity of parents to appreciate the value of modern education in front of their children and to initiate or motivate their children to pursue their education might lead their children to drop out of school.

Besides, in certain settings, education itself is viewed as a negative factor because it instills "nonconformist" behavior especially in women. Consequently, education beyond the acquisition of literacy is considered to be contrary to the social pressure for women to become wives and mothers, and threatens women's chances of marriage. In this regard, particularly by considering the rural situation of the zone under study, the respondents expressed the viewpoint that parents are usually keen to arrange marriage partners for their children at the age of 15 or less. Often they value their children's marriage more than education. They have also pointed out that oral traditions and songs stress the necessity of marrying and unmarried youth, especially girls' are subject to mockery or criticism. For the unmarried youths, the word "Kumoker" is the expression in the zone that humiliates or harasses their

personality. Consequently, a vast majority of high school youth are tempted to disrupt their schooling because of the pressure to marry from parents or other relatives. Similar results were also reported by other researchers (like Yelfign, 1990; Dirrisa, 1993; Elleni, 1995; Tilaye, 1997). What is more, in the zone understudy as data reveal, most parents encourage early marriage of their daughters so as to avoid unexpected pregnancy or forced marriage or "telefa" that could happen as girls stay longer in schools.

Institutional factors

A brief look at the data in Table 4 depicts the following results: about 73 percent of the boys and about 67 percent of the girls had dropped out because they were fedup of traveling long distance from home to school; about 37 percent of the males and about 49 percent of the females were dropouts because they hated the irrelevant nature of the existing curriculum that was ill-adapted to their learning needs; about 39 percent of the boys and about 58 percent of the girls dropped out because of the difficulty they had encountered in the language of instruction; about 46 percent of the boys and about 37 percent of the girls had dropped out due to shortage of qualified (trained) teachers in their respective schools; about 65 percent of the boys and about 75 percent of the girls dropped out because of lack of guidance or psychological assistance given to them at the time of personal crises in schools; about 66 percent of the boys and about 58 percent of the girls had left school due to inadequate supply of instructional materials or other facilities in schools; inadequate library service also appeared as another main reason for dropping out for about 57 and 58 percent of the boys and the girls respectively; about 45 percent of the boys and about 49 percent of the girls were subject to the phenomenon of dropping out due to discouragement as a result of poor scholastic achievement in some subjects or frequent repetitions and about 48 percent of the boys and about 52 percent of the girls had dropped due to

too much absenteeism recorded on them during the school days.

Table 4: The Impact of Institutional Factors in Aggravating Dropping Out

Factors	Sex	Responses in %					Mean X	Chi-square X ²
		1	2	3	4	5		
Traveling long distance from Home to school (dispersed school zoning)	M	17.7	8.9	11.4	13.9	48.1	3.66	2.40
	F	23.3	9.6	16.4	13.7	37.0	3.32	
Curriculum irrelevance	M	44.3	19.0	21.5	10.1	5.1	2.13	10.46*
	F	26.0	24.7	16.4	16.4	16.4	2.73	
Difficulty in the language of Instruction	M	41.8	19.0	17.7	8.9	12.7	2.32	7.63
	F	23.3	19.2	19.2	15.1	23.3	2.96	
Shortage of qualify Trained teachers	M	35.4	19.0	21.5	11.4	12.7	2.47	2.82
	F	43.8	19.2	20.5	11.0	5.5	2.15	
Lack of guidance counseling Service	M	25.3	10.1	13.9	16.5	34.2	3.24	3.44
	F	20.5	4.1	19.2	15.1	41.1	3.52	
Inadequate supply of Instructional materials or other facilities	M	19.0	15.2	8.9	30.4	26.6	3.30	7.50
	F	23.3	16.4	12.3	12.3	35.6	3.21	
Inadequate Library Service	M	26.6	16.5	25.3	21.5	10.1	2.72	4.24
	F	31.5	11.0	16.4	23.3	17.3	2.85	
Frequent repetition (or low Erratic attendance	M	36.7	17.7	21.5	10.1	13.9	2.47	6.10
	F	28.8	11.0	17.8	17.8	24.7	2.99	
	M	31.6	20.3	11.4	19.0	17.7	2.71	0.94
	F	31.5	16.4	13.7	16.4	21.9	2.81	

The calculated averages for each of the above institutional factors (with the exception of curriculum irrelevance and difficulty in the language of instruction for the males, and shortage of trained teachers for the females) confirmed that they were crucial for dropping out. Particularly, the impact of traveling long distance to school, lack of educational guidance, and inadequate supply of instructional materials were very serious. Among those nine factors seen above, the chi-square tests showed that the differences between the opinions of male and female dropouts were found to be statistically significant only for the irrelevant nature of the curriculum that was ill-adapted to their learning needs (as $\chi^2_{(4)} = 10.46$,

$p < .05$). However, for the other factors the existing differences in responses of the male and the female dropouts were found to be statistically insignificant (see Table 4). This implies that both groups of dropouts were equally influenced by the factors that are intrinsic to their school systems other than by curriculum irrelevance.

In this study, traveling long distance from home to school happened to be the main cause of dropping out from secondary schools. The magnitude of the influence tends to be more severe for the boys than for the girls. The study has attempted to dig for somewhat deep information as regards the length of the time that was required by most students to come and attend secondary schools in the zone. The data revealed that there were a good number of students who used to attend schooling by walking for about one to two hours a day. Where they have to use public transport, economic problems have usually put up the cost. Moreover, due to the dispersed nature of secondary schools' placement in the zone, a vast number of students are forced to attend schools in other localities (or Woredas) by leaving their homes for a week, two weeks or even for a semester. Some of them visit their families on weekends to collect their foodstuff such as grains or cereals, loafs of bread or "injera" depending on the economic status of parents. It should also be noted that there are a number of students attending high schools by selling their services to other families in the vicinity of schools. Boys look after the cattle and shops of the urban rich people, while girls often serve as housemaids, as care takers of babies and aged people. Often times these do not go as smoothly as expected—rather a break off may appear somewhere sometime in which the dependents could be thrown out of houses.

In general, the location of secondary schools has a considerable impact on the survival of students in schools. The findings of researchers (Tadesse, 1974; Dirrirsas, 1993; Adane, 1993) indicated that school zoning had a direct relationship with the dropout rate. It is unfair to expect that a

student who walks for one to two hours a day will follow his/her lesson regularly and actively. Fatigue, boredom, thirst and hunger are dominant and these deter his/her active attendance in classes. Besides, long distance to school is associated with a number of safety problems which include exposure to wild (forest) animals, river dangers, retaliation cases, raping or kidnapping, and others. Such conditions would also make parents feel uneasy when sending their children to school that are far from their localities. Consequently, the school youth will be forced to discontinue their schooling.

The nature of the curriculum, the language of instruction, the quality of the teachers and the didactic elements of the courses offered at school are found to be significant determinants of the students' progress and success in their schooling. In line with this, Elleni (1995) and Tadesse (1974) confirmed that the curriculum which did not reflect the needs and interests of the society in general and the learners in particular was found to be a major cause for poor attendance and withdrawal from school. In most developing countries including Ethiopia (World Bank, 1988; Elleni, 1995), most secondary school curricula have been designed in such a way that they could equip students with smatterings of dry subjects (like mathematics, history, geography, foreign languages, etc.) the intention of preparing them ready for higher institutions even though only a limited number of high school graduates join the universities and colleges. However, the school curriculum needs to be relevant or suitable to the society's needs. It should be designed in such a way that it can solve the country's multifarious problems. Knowing this fact, the current government of Ethiopia has designed a new Education and Training Policy which is expected to respond to the society's training demands when it is fully actualized in all cycles of the education system.

Closely tied with the curriculum and course of study at school is the language of instruction. English has been the main

language of instruction in secondary schools (grades' 7-12) of Ethiopia. Since, however, nobody uses English to communicate in daily life, many of the country's school child to have been faced with problems in school learning ; of developed a negative attitude towards school learn Pedagogically speaking, when a child learns subjects with language he/she understands, he/she can grasp or assimilate ideas easily, comprehend lessons clearly, and can apply knowledge and skills learned. On the contrary, when the child is forced to follow lessons through unfamiliar languages, he/she cannot manage to grasp subjects, cannot use his/her environmental experiences directly to organize the acquired knowledge and more than that he/she may develop negative attitude towards schooling and may dropout.

The other factor that holds a direct key for students' survival at school is the quality of teachers. The teachers who know their subject matter well, stimulate interests of students, explain difficult ideas clearly, and who are enthusiastic towards their teaching profession, well-organized in their classes, fair in testing and punishment, and in treating both sexes, and helpful in all aspects contribute a lot to the success and retention of students. Such qualities of good teachers could be developed through practice and in-service training. In line with this, Adane (1993) pointed out that the training level of teachers had an inverse relationship with the dropout rates. This implies that poorly trained teachers cannot hold students at school. Despite this fact, however, most developing countries including Ethiopia keep a large number of unqualified teachers not suitable to the educational level they are assigned to (World Bank, 1988; Tekeste, 1990). Such a practice has made a good number of students run away from schools.

Like schools in other parts of the nation, schools of the East Gojjam zone follow strict promotion policies established by the zone. The guidelines state that promotion of a student from one grade to the next is based upon a successful completion of rigid examinations (whose appropriateness is not

guaranteed) for each subject. Students are supposed to score at least 50 percent in all subject tests. Those who scored below 50 percent in two or more subjects are obliged to repeat the grade. Allowing repetition is believed to be an appropriate investment in pupils' recovery. However, such assumption fails to justify the mechanisms of compensation for a risk of wastage brought by repetition such as reduction of intake capacities for schools, causing overcrowded classrooms, causing psychological problems (inferiority complex) among repeaters, and aggravating early school leaving. As Bishop (1989; 127) puts it, "The schools educative functions are swamped and overshadowed by examinations; instead of moulding people, the education merely sorts them." It is worthwhile to mention at this juncture that the students who fail to qualify in examinations and fail to meet the requirements become frustrated, as a result they seek to leave the environment that provides them negative feedback.

In this study, the other institutional factor that made a good number of students to abandon their schooling was too much absenteeism. It seems logical that once the pupil has been admitted to high school, attending classes becomes a matter for primary concern. However, it is usually recorded that a vast majority of students are absent from schools due to various reasons which include personal health problems, family illness, lack of transportation, failure to do homework, conflict with school community, involvement in family work and petty-trade, attendance in religious holidays or Saints' days, conflict created around home, and others. However, in one way or another, a high rate of students' absence is damaging to the school program and to their potential of development or progress at school. When students miss classes, their school work suffers much. The more classes are missed, the more likely that the students fall behind and the harder it becomes for them to return to class. Consequently, they will leave school prematurely.

Aggregate Impacts of External and Internal Factors

Having seen the impact of individual factors in aggravating dropping out, an attempt was also made to look into the combined effects of those factors by grouping them into two major categories (external-related and internal-related factors). In this case, the t-test, rank-order correlation and cumulative percentages have been computed.

When the t-test was applied to check whether or not there was a significant difference between the means of the two populations with respect to the cumulative effects of the external-related and the institutional factors, the results (for external-related factors, $t_{(150)}=0.65, p>.05$; for institutional factors, $t_{(150)}=-1.22, P>.05$) show the insignificance of the differences between the opinions of the two groups of respondents. This shows that both groups were equally influenced by both groups of factors considered in this study.

Table 4: Rank-order Correlation for External-Related Factors by Gender

Factors	Boys		Girls		D (R ₁ , R ₂)	D ²
	X ₁	R ₁	X ₂	R ₂		
Pupils' (parental) health problem	2.62	6	2.95	6	-	-
Parental disunity (quarrelsomeness at home)	2.41	7	2.34	7	-	-
Gloomy employment prospect for the educated	2.85	5	3.25	1	4	16
Parental withholding because of hatred of formal education	2.87	4	2.96	5	-1	1
Parental inability to afford educational expenses	3.73	1	3.11	4	-3	9
Pupils' involvement in income-generating tasks	3.28	3	3.15	3	-	-
Pupils' excessive involvement in family work	3.42	2	3.21	2	-	-
Peer-group influence	2.19	8	2.30	8	-	-
Marriage	1.19	9	2.18	9	-	-

$P=0.78, P<.05$.

Further, the study has attempted to compare the impact of the socio-economic factors and the institutional factors with respect to the rankings of the mean scores (See Tables 4 and 5). As a result, among the nine external-related factors the first three main factors (with mean scores 3.0 or more) for

aggravating dropping out for the boys include parental inability to afford educational expenses, pupils' excessive involvement in family work and their engagement in income generating tasks in that order of rankings (From 1-3). In case of girls, they are raised to four which include low employment opportunities for educated females, their excessive involvement in domestic chores, their engagement in income generating tasks, and parental reluctance to afford daughters' educational expenses in that order of rankings (from 1-4).

Table 5: Rank-Order Correlation for Institutional Factors by Gender

Factors	Boys		Girls		D	
	X ₁	R ₁	X ₂	R ₂	(R ₁ -R ₂)	D2
Traveling long distance to school	3.66	1	3.32	2	-1	1
Curriculum irrelevance	2.13	9	2.73	8	1	1
Difficulty in the language of instruction	2.32	8	2.96	5	3	9
Shortage of qualified teachers	2.47	6.5	2.15	9	-2.5	6.25
Lack of guidance and counseling service	3.24	3	3.52	1	2	4
Inadequate supply of instructional services	3.30	2	3.21	3	-1	1
Inadequate library service	2.72	4	2.85	6	-2	4
Frequent repetition	2.47	6.5	2.99	4	2.5	6.25
Erratic attendance	2.71	5	2.81	7	-2	4

$P=0.70, P<.05$

Among the nine institutional factors, the first three main deterrents of schooling (whose mean scores are 3.0 and above) for boys and girls include traveling long distance from home to school, inadequate supply of instructional materials, and lack of guidance service or psychological assistance provided to students during the time of personal crises. The estimated correlation coefficients for the two sets of mean scores are found to be 0.78 for the external-related factors and 0.70 for the school-related factors. These values are also found to be statistically significant beyond .05 level of significance. This implies that the selected reasons exhibited a strong relationship for the selection by male and female dropouts. Moreover, the grand means (2.81 and 2.83 for boys and girls respectively in case of external-related factors; and 2.78 and 2.95 for boys and girls respectively in case of school-related factors) show that both groups of factors influenced both groups of dropouts in more or less similar degrees. What

is more, when the cumulative percentage of influence for each of the factors is computed, external-related factors accounted for 49.6 percent of the total influence, while the school-related factors accounted for 50.4 percent of the total influence.

CONCLUSION

The study was concerned with the problems of high school dropouts in the East Gojjam zone. It aimed at investigating the intensity of the problem in secondary schools of the zone, in reference to grade levels and the gender of the student population. It also attempted to probe into the factors that caused the students subject to dropping out of schools.

The findings from data analyses confirmed that the rate of drop out in secondary schools of the zone understudy was of an immense magnitude as an overwhelming number of the youth (about 73.3% of the girls, 37.5% of the boys, and 50.3% of both sexes) left school without completing their secondary school studies.

The incidence of the problem was found to be more acute for girls than for boys; it was found to be the highest in grade 9 in cases of both sex groups. A hard look at the various data taken indicates the problem of student dropouts was a function of an interaction of a multitude of factors which emanated from both what the students experienced in schools and in their socio-economic environment. It still remains true that each factor affected the schooling of some youth.

From the total of 18 factors considered in this study, the chi-square tests proved that the differences between the opinions of the male and female dropouts were found to be statistically significant for five factors only (four external-related and one institutional). However, for the remaining factors the strength of the evidence did not prove the significance of the differences that appeared in the opinions of the two gender

groups. When the dropout data were further treated with the t-test, it revealed that both groups of dropouts had similarly been influenced by the two major groups of factors. It has also been evident that there existed a marked relationship or a high degree of agreement between the two groups of respondents in choosing the causative factors for dropouts (as shown by Spearman's rank difference correlation coefficients). This was also assured by the computed cumulative percentages.

In closing, it is interesting to note that the responsible bodies should strive to address the problem of high school dropouts before it leads to loss of credibility. Particularly, schools should provide a pleasant school environment, improved services, and directly attack the causes of student dropouts and conducting rigorous research in the field. Besides, the educational leaders in different levels should try to discuss with the students' parents and sensitize them on the importance of modern education for their children's future.

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