ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Case Study on School Dropout in Secondary Education: Causes and Solutions According to the Views of Administrators and Teachers

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No conflict of interest is present in the conduction or the reporting of this study.

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This study is part of the first author's master's thesis study, supervised by the second author.

ABSTRACT

In this study, according to the views of teachers and administrators, the reasons why students drop out of school and the measures to be taken for these reasons were revealed. Based on the data obtained, the reasons for students' dropout are divided into three groups as follows: individual reasons, family-related reasons, and reasons arising from the education system and Ministry of National Education policies. This study was conducted as a qualitative research and semi-structured interview method was used by the researcher to collect the data. In addition, "maximum diversity" sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was preferred in this study. This research was conducted with the participation of 20 administrators and teachers in Nilüfer district of Bursa province. The research was conducted in the 2022-2023 academic year and with this study, solutions were developed for the causes of the problem according to the opinions of administrators and teachers working in secondary education institutions on school dropout.Every step to be taken to find a solution to the secondary school dropout problem in secondary education institutions will be beneficial to solve the problem and that the decrease in dropout rates will contribute to a sustainable economy for our country and a generation that grows up physically and mentally healthy.

Keywords: Educational administration, educational policies, leaving school, school dropout.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, it is of great importance that educational institutions are organized in a way that supports the academic and physical development of the student in order to create a healthy educational environment. The failures that the person has experienced in his/her educational life have also prevented the system from functioning correctly. The most important factor in achieving success here is to keep the students' behaviors under control to a certain extent. In every new generation, there are individuals who experience problems arising from both their individual and social environment.

In schools, such negative situations appear before school administrators and teachers as some disciplinary problems. Today's education system is in an effort to raise individuals for the needs of society (Çelik, 2014). Disciplinary incidents in schools are based on many different reasons. These are listed as follows: The wrong attitude of the society towards education and the failure to meet the individual needs of the student. Apart from these situations, there are situations that are reflected in the behavior of students as a result of their emotional experiences. Individual differences that students were born with are also cited as one of the reasons for this situation. These are genetic characteristics (Erden, 2005).

According to the literature studies on school dropout, the term is defined as the student's inability to attend school due to individual and social reasons or his/her complete disconnection from school (Garrison, 1985, 1987). In our country, school dropout is defined as a situation that occurs due to the dropout of students who repeat the grade at the secondary education level, who want to continue their education in open education high schools, or who have no connection with education or who have died (Özer et al., 2011).

It has been emphasized that the theoretical dimension of students' reasons for dropping out of school must be addressed (Pearson et al., 2000). According to this theory, the 5-dimensional theoretical classification is as following:

- **General Deviance:** The negative situations that the student experiences in school, that is, the problems with his/her teachers and friends, damage his/her relationship with the school and the student cannot establish a bond with the school. As a result, they choose to leave school.
- **Deviant Affiliation:** According to this theory, it is defined as the negative relationships that the student has experienced in his/her circle of friends at school damaging his/her bond with the school.
- **School Socialization:** The structural features of the physical environment offered by the school to students cause students to have difficulty in lessons and as a result, they drop out of school.
- **Poor Family Socialization:** According to this theory, the concept of "family" plays a very important role in students' dropping out of school at an early age. For example, the educational background of the family and the separation of the parents accelerate this process.
- **Structural Strains:** Gender, inadequate economic conditions, and cultural structure also cause students to disconnect from education.

According to Pehlivan's study on the reasons for school dropout, abuse, separation of parents, deficiencies in educational activities, and inadequate communication between the school and the family are also cited as other reasons. The reasons for absenteeism are boredom with school education and educational activities as well as low expectations from education (2006).

According to the study conducted by Ballı and Kartal (2020), separation of students from the society, negative

experiences due to their parents, being financially dependent on the family, and having harmful habits also cause the students' educational life to end with the school dropout. In addition to the results of the research on minimizing school dropout, adaptation problems experienced in the 9th grades of secondary education are also addressed (Ballı & Kartal, 2020).

There are many discussions on instructional accountability in the field of education, which is of great importance in the world of education as it has positive implications for students' educational lives (Yıldırım & Yenipınar, 2019). When the dropout problem is considered from this point of view, the meticulousness of school stakeholders in addressing the problems that students may encounter during adaptation at the beginning of school makes a significant difference in the educational lives of the students.

According to the study conducted by Güler (2021), the teachers participating in the study emphasized that the disciplinary penalties that the student received at school negatively affected the educational process. In addition, punitive action to a disciplinary offense at school causes students to take it as a negative example (Güler, 2021). As a solution to this, a study emphasized that disciplinary rules should be explained to students at the beginning of the year (Akar, 2006).

Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to determine the views of administrators and teachers working in secondary education institutions on the reasons and solutions for dropout in their schools. The sub-questions for this title are as following:

RQ1. According to the opinions of administrators working in secondary education institutions,

    RQ1.A. what are the reasons for and solutions to school dropout?

    RQ1.B. what are the reasons for transition to open secondary education?

RQ2. According to the opinions of teachers working in secondary education institutions,

    RQ2.A. what are the reasons for and solutions to school dropout?

    RQ2.B. what are the reasons for transition to open secondary education?

METHOD

This study is a qualitative study conducted by following the inductive method, based on the views of the participants based on the evaluation of an ongoing problem from different perspectives. The main purpose of qualitative research is to reveal the existing situation as much as possible and to enable in-depth research on this problem (Büyüköztürk et al., 2013).

In this study, interview technique was applied. It is difficult to make a specific definition for qualitative research that covers all features in general terms. Qualitative research is an approach that enables social phenomena such as observation, interview, etc. to be examined and investigated in terms of their environment. The most important features of such a study are that it has a certain sensitivity rate in its natural environment, the researcher has a participatory role in the process and approaches the research in all aspects and in this way, and the perceptions are reflected in the research, which is carried out using the inductive method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

Research Design

A case study is a qualitative research design in which the researcher collects in-depth information about current events through audio-visual materials about multiple bounded systems in a specific period of time and presents a case

description or case themes (Creswell, 2015). The aim of this research is to reveal the similarities between different situations that come together and to try to make the existing problem understandable in line with various opinions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). An event or phenomenon with defined boundaries can be examined as a case study in the environment in which it occurred. When dealing with a situation within the school, dropout occurs within this situation. While explaining this situation, administrators, teachers and students, who are the elements of the school, can be discussed as cases to reveal the situation (Beycioğlu et al., 2018).

Setting and Participants

In this study, maximum diversity, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was applied. This type of sampling is to reveal the diversity of the existing situation with data and to ensure that the existing problem is addressed from different perspectives based on the similarities or differences of the facts within this diversity (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In the study, on the basis of maximum diversity, interviews were conducted with all of the administrators, the field supervisors (Marketing, Accounting and Front Office) since it is a vocational high school, and the school counselors. In line with the information provided by the field supervisors and school counselors, interviews were conducted with members of the school disciplinary board, mathematics teachers, and accounting teachers. In another school in the study, interviews were first conducted with school administrators, then with school counselors, and teachers of field courses. As a criterion for participation in the research group, teachers and school administrators were included in different branches working at the secondary education level in the 2022-2023 academic year in order to obtain rich and in-depth data.

During the research process, face-to-face interviews were conducted with four teachers, three school counselors, one school principal, six vice principals, three field supervisors, and three disciplinary board members. The schools that participated in the research were selected from regions with various socioeconomic levels. They were informed in advance by the researcher that they had sufficient knowledge about the interview questions, and attention was paid to selecting participants with more than five years of professional experience.

As to provide background information about the schools, from which data was gathered in the study during 2021-2022 academic year, one of the schools participating in the study had the highest dropout rates in Bursa province among the other schools having dropouts. According to the information obtained from the schools, the enrollment rate was 92% at the beginning of the year. Of the 32 students who took the 2021-2022 university exam, 24 students enrolled in 2-year faculties and 8 students enrolled in 4-year faculties. Absenteeism in the 2022-2023 academic year is around 15%. The total number of students who transferred to open high school is 266. These numbers are 88 male-28 female students in 9th grade, 66 male-15 female students in 10th grade, 25 male-19 female students in 11th grade, 20 male-5 female students in 12th grade. Students who drop out of school are mainly enrolled in open education high school and Vocational Education Center (MESEM) to complete 12 years of compulsory education. The total number of MESEM students were 117. The distribution by grades was as follows: the number of 40 students in the 9th grade, 64 students in the 10th grade, and 13 students in the 11th grade. According to data from asnother school, the school enrollment at the beginning of the year was 163 students. By the second semester, this ratio dropped to 118, out of which 98% went to open high school and 2% to vocational high school.

Preparing the Instrument

The two most important elements of the data obtained from a study are credibility and consistency (Arslan, 2022). Credibility and consistency measures were taken for the interview form of the data collection tool used for the study.

Accordingly, the work and procedures carried out in the preparation of the data collection tool are as shown in Figure 1 below.
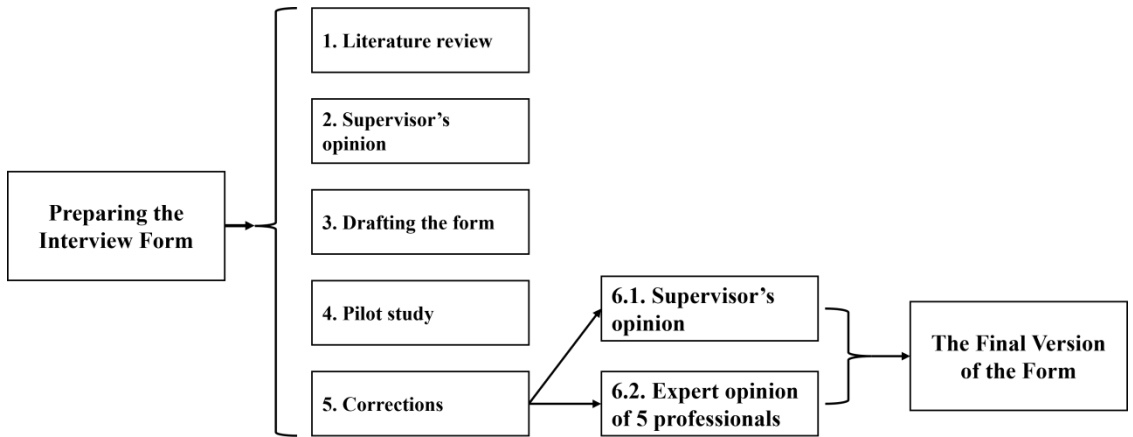

Figure 1. Preparation of the interview form

Data Analysis

While analyzing the data, content analysis method was used. The procedure followed in content analysis is to gather similar data in a framework in the dimension of certain concepts and themes and to interpret them by organizing them in a more understandable way for the readers (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Accordingly, the data analysis process is as shown in Figure 2. Research questions are accepted themes of the research while analyzing.
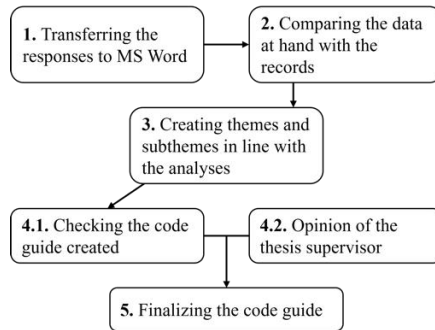

Figure 2. Data analysis process

FINDINGS

Findings Related to RQ1.A

According to the content analysis, school administrators' views on secondary school students' dropping out of school are divided into three groups: individual reasons, family-related reasons, and reasons stemming from the education system

and Ministry of National Education (MoNE) policies. Individual reasons are categorized as Psychological Characteristics, Cognitive Characteristics and Emotional Characteristics. According to the opinions of school administrators, psychological characteristics were identified as violence tendency and addiction. In Cognitive Characteristics, academic failure was identified. In Emotional Characteristics, there are subcategories such as lack of commitment to school and lack of future anxiety in students. Under the second theme, family-related reasons were identified as socioeconomic level of the family, fragmented family, inadequate family participation in education, and gender disparity in participating education. Finally, the reasons for dropout stemming from the education system and policies include the intensity of the curriculum, long school hours, the lack of basics from primary education, and the lack of social activities. A summary of these can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. School dropout reasons according to administrators

	Categories	Code
Theme 1: Individual Reasons	Psychological characteristics	Violence tendency
		Addiction
	Cognitive characteristics	Academic failure
	Emotional characteristics	Lack of commitment to school
		Lack of future anxiety in students
Theme 2: Family-related Reasons	Socioeconomic level of the family	
	Fragmented family	
	Inadequate family participation	
	Gender disparity in participating education	
Theme 3: Reasons Related to Education System and MoNE Policies	Intensity of the curriculum	
	Long school hours	
	The lack of basics from primary education	
	The lack of social activities	

The statement of one of the field supervisors regarding the tendency towards violence is as follows: "*Recently, the number of students who have been subjected to peer bullying is quite high. They have also started to do this kind of behavior to quiet teachers. We try not to keep silent about this, but what happens when we keep silent is not encouraging at all. There are quite a lot of problems in our school due to substance abuse or fights.*" (Administrator 7)

Findings Related to RQ1.B

According to the opinions of the administrators, the reasons for the dropout of students who dropped out of secondary education and transferred to open education high schools are categorized as follows in Figure 3.

Administrator 5 stated that students switched to open high school because they did not want to be academically challenged in formal education, but they still had difficulties here as follows "*There were many people who turned to open high school. MESEM was opened this year. That's why new referrals have just started. I would definitely not recommend open high school to any level. I taught the Computer Accounting course in an open high school. In the open high school, for example, we explained the invoicing subject many times, but it still hasn't settled yet. If someone is not going to study, I direct them to MESEM [instead of] open high school [as] there is not much benefit.*"
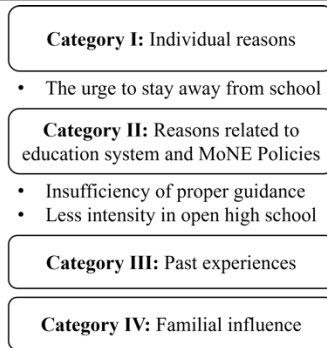
Figure 3. Reasons of transition to open education according to administrators

Findings Related to RQ2.A

According to the content analysis, teachers' views on secondary school students' dropping out of school are divided into three groups: individual reasons, family-related reasons, and reasons stemming from the education system and MoNE policies. Individual reasons are categorized as Psychological Characteristics, Cognitive Characteristics and Emotional Characteristics. According to the opinions of school administrators, psychological characteristics were identified as tendency to violence, addiction and inability to adapt to school after the pandemic. In Cognitive Characteristics, it was determined as academic failure. In Emotional Characteristics, there are subcategories such as lack of commitment to school and lack of future anxiety in students. Family-related reasons were identified as socioeconomic level of the family, family breakdown and inadequate family participation in education. Finally, the reasons for dropout stemming from the education system and policies were the intensity of the curriculum, long school hours, basic deficiency from primary education, and lack of social activities.

Table 2. School dropout reasons according to teachers

	Categories	Code
Theme 1: Individual Reasons	Psychological characteristics	Violence tendency
		Addiction
		Inability to adapt to school after the COVID-19 pandemic
	Cognitive characteristics	Academic failure
	Emotional characteristics	Lack of commitment to school
Theme 2: Family-related Reasons	Fragmented family	
	Inadequate family participation	
Theme 3: Reasons Related to Education System and MoNE Policies	Intensity of the curriculum	
	Long school hours	
	The lack of basics from primary education	

Teacher 5 expressed her views on students' academic deficiencies as follows: "*Students who do not even know the multiplication tables are trying to get an education in high school. Students who do not get a good foundation in primary school have serious problems, later on, if they do not like the teacher of the course. This reveals some problems in high school education. Students who do not do the homework, who do not listen to the lesson and have attendance problems, move away from the lesson and school as they do not understand. But the biggest problem stems from the foundation. We, teachers, see that many students do not have a good foundation*."

Findings Related to RQ2.B

As shown in Figure 4, the reasons for students' transition to open high school are categorized into four categories: Individual and Education System, Reasons stemming from MoNE Policies, Past Experiences and Family Influence.

Teacher 8 emphasized the importance of internal discipline in the transition to open high school as follows *"During the process, I realized that no matter how many students I meet, some of them are so determined that it can be a bit troublesome to tell them their problems. These children do what they set their minds to a little more. In 11th and 12th grades, we may need to do something about homework as a school. University studies can be emphasized during this period. Especially in the 12th grade, we can act with the logic of a cram school. Perhaps this will discourage students from switching to open high school. It is easier to graduate from open high school. They can graduate if they complete their credit courses. In Grade 12, if more test solving activities are done, students will not have any problems."*
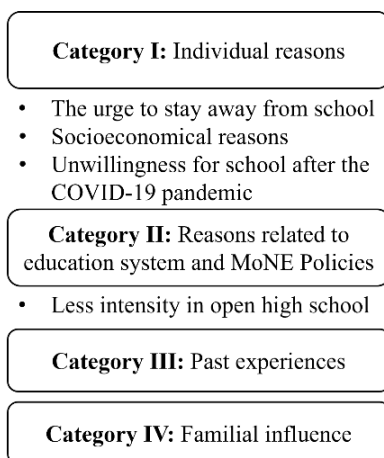
Category I: Individual reasons

- The urge to stay away from school
- Socioeconomical reasons
- Unwillingness for school after the COVID-19 pandemic

Category II: Reasons related to education system and MoNE Policies

- Less intensity in open high school

Category III: Past experiences

Category IV: Familial influence

Figure 4. Reasons of transition to open education secondary according to teachers

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When the opinions of both groups about the reasons for school dropout were evaluated at the same level, it was determined that they reached similar opinions about individual reasons and the use of tobacco products. In addition to low academic achievement, the administrators and teachers who participated in the interviews believed that the students in secondary education have a high course load, the intensity of the curriculum, basic deficiencies from primary education and few social activities. As a result of this finding, according to the literature studies, it is stated that the low performance of the student in academic achievement and the problems experienced by the student in adapting to the level of the student are also among the reasons for school dropout (Batsche, 1985).

As a result of the findings, it was determined that there were some differences of opinion between administrators and teachers about students' violent tendency behaviors when evaluated within the framework of psychological reasons. For administrators, it was emphasized that the tendency towards violence among students occurs among students themselves, while teachers stated that the tendency towards violence occurs both among students and in the dimension of disrespect towards teachers from time to time. In the literature study conducted on the subject, it was stated that a student's bond with the school may be severed due to the violence experienced at school and as a result, school dropout may occur. As a result, the groupings that develop and the inability to meet the students' search for safety and protection

at school result in school dropout (Aktan, 2015).

When the family-related reasons were analyzed, administrators and teachers shared the same opinion and stated that the socioeconomic level of the family and their inadequate participation in education were also effective in students' dropping out of school. The inability of families experiencing financial difficulties to meet the needs of their children throughout their education life and the child's having to work because of this causes the problem of school dropout (Diyu, 2001).

In this study, when the opinions of teachers on the problem of school dropout were evaluated, it was emphasized by both administrators and teachers that studies to increase school-family communication have a very important place in preventing school dropout. In the literature studies on this subject, it is stated that the communication established by the family with the school is a factor in the student's bonding with the school, and thanks to this bond established, there is no problem in the school attendance rates of the students (Pehlivan, 2006). In addition, the research findings revealed that there were differences of opinion between teachers and administrators regarding the transition from formal education to open education. Teachers and administrators divided the reasons for students' transition to open high school into two categories: individual reasons and reasons stemming from the education system. Teachers stated socioeconomic reasons, the desire to get away from school, reluctance to school after the pandemic, and the curriculum being lighter in open high schools compared to formal education, while administrators, unlike teachers, mentioned the inadequacy of the guidance provided during the process. In addition, confirming the findings, a study conducted by Şahin and Uysal (2017) states that some of the students want to leave formal education in order to prepare for the university exam and to go to course centers for the exam. On the other hand, the fact that the course and curriculum contents of formal education are described as heavy by the students has caused students who must earn money at an early age to prefer this program (Şahin & Uysal, 2017).

This study on school dropout is important in terms of drawing attention to the problems experienced by administrators and teachers in the process. With this research, awareness of the issue was created among the participants and solution suggestions were put forward. On the other hand, collecting data on the subject from individuals who are experiencing the same problem and bringing it to the field is also an important development.

Suggestions

As a result of the data obtained, according to the opinions of both groups, the school should be turned into a center of attraction with social activities. For social activities, support should be obtained from parent-teacher associations, or a share should be allocated from school revolving funds in vocational high schools. Students should be consulted for the activities to be organized and plans should be made to organize them once a week. In parallel to this, according to teachers' views, school clubs should be made more effective and the school administration should arrange the necessary timing.

According to the views of administrators and teachers, it was emphasized that boys drop out of school due to economic reasons because of gender inequality. If necessary, municipalities and governorships should be in contact with parents in this situation, and joint efforts should be made to overcome economic problems and ensure that these students continue to attend school. In addition, parent-teacher associations should be made more functional and parents should be encouraged to join parent-teacher associations. In addition, both groups stated that it should be

ensured that the field selection in vocational high schools is made again in the 10th grade and that this arrangement should be realized in appropriate ways by taking the opinions of administrators and guidance counselors.

According to the views of the administrators, the "Early Warning System" established by the ministry for students who drop out of school should be made more functional and not only the absenteeism of the student should be monitored, but also all the developmental stages of the student should be processed and meticulously monitored through the units to be established in schools accordingly. The administrators also stated that the ministry should also close transitions to open high schools without the permission of the school and ensure that students are not allowed to transfer from formal education to open high schools except for reasonable reasons.

In conclusion, it is thought that every step to be taken to find a solution to the secondary school dropout problem in secondary education institutions will be beneficial to solve the problem and that the decrease in dropout rates will contribute to a sustainable economy for our country and a generation that grows up physically and mentally healthier.

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