# Student Dropout: The Case of Government Schools in South Ethiopia Region

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**Abstract**

*Attainment of targets set to control dropout was by far behind in the government schools in Ethiopia. Thus, this study was designed in order to address student dropout experienced in the study area. The study employed mixed research method and parallel convergent design. Data were collected from students, teachers, parents and related stakeholders. The quantitative data were analyzed using mean, independent samples t-test and pearson's correlation, whereas the qualitative ones through narration. The study revealed that the overall dropout status was moderate yet varying with the types of the community's economic activity. Factors of dropout among the pastoralist community and that of agrarian and cash crop production areas also vary accordingly. Thus, developing community engagement project involving essential collaborators was suggested for intervening with the challenges identified. Further rigorous studies need also be conducted to intensify and scale up the impact.*

**Keywords:** *Dropout, Factor, Government School, Student*

## INTRODUCTION

Developing countries and their partner agencies recognized the contribution of education to enable them realize poverty reduction objectives, besides multiplicity of its benefits (Liu et al, 2021). In cognizant of the contribution of education in realizing poverty alleviation programs and socio-economic and technological transformation, the Government of Ethiopia, emphasized on working with education sector. However, it was reported that conspicuous dropout rates were evident in many schools(MoE, 2015). As a result, this study was designed to examine the status and factors of dropout rate in the public schools of Ethiopia with reference to South Ethiopia Region.

The study objective was coinciding with the government policies and the priority areas of universalizing primary education besides its connection with poverty reduction (Fredriksen, 2023). In this connection, studies revealed that education system, mainly in developing countries, including Ethiopia, has been trembled by wastage explained by internal inefficiency. Education sector evidences depicted that the expectations that all the pupils entering grade one should complete the cycle of primary education within the prescribed years was hampered by internal inefficiency(MoE, 2015). According to Ababa (2012) the number of out of school children in the grades 1 to 6 and in the lower-secondary age group (grades 7 to 10) is 5,017,181 and 2,522,319 respectively; drop-out rate is very high in the first grade of primary education and tends to decline consistently in the next higher grades with some exceptions that are observed in grades 5 and 8.

The attainment of the targets set by the education sector for improving internal efficiency was far behind leading huge amount of expenditure to re-educate great number of students in the same grade. In this regard, Ambaw (2019:269) argues *"Theoretically, emphasis was given to access, equity, relevance and quality of education during the Federal governance. However, practically, the level of the schools' internal efficiency was impoverished as quality was compromised."* Student dropout took the immense share of this wastage (Zehle, 2009). Although the Regional Education Bureau was working at all levels to ensure equitable access to quality education, the number of students who were experiencing dropout was so high (MoE, 2005). Evidently, the dropout rate for primary education in the region was 13.6%, in 2018, despite its plan to lower it to 2% at the end of 2020. Moreover, the Government of Ethiopia set targets regarding the primary school students' survival, completion, retention, and promotion rates to rise to 70%, 74%, 98% and 98% in 2020 respectively (MoE, 2019). The achievement progress of the targets in the region under consideration was below the expectation (SNNPREB, 2020) leading three important scenarios.

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First, the sector was expending much cost every year which would have, otherwise, been invested on other development activities. Secondly, education sector could not play its vital role in ensuring development. Third, the rate of return of investment on education was in position to decline.

As a result, this study was designed in order to explore the problems of student dropout and to forward mechanisms of alleviating them. Thus, it attempted to seek answers to the following basic questions:

What is the status of dropout rate in the selected schools of South Region of Ethiopia?

What are major factors for dropout in the study area?

Is there significant relationship between student dropout and its factors?

Consequently, the general objective of the study was investigating the status of student dropout rate in the study area. It was designed in recognition of the fact that failure to address the problem might further endanger the achievement of the educational goals anticipated nationwide. Thus, this study was designed in order to address the problems of student dropout experienced in the study area.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Dropout as a barrier to the benefits of education, prevalence of dropout in developing countries and factors contributing to dropout were areas emphasized in the review of the literature. Irwin, et al (2022:III) state "Educational attainment is associated with economic outcomes, such as employment and earnings, as well as with changes in these outcomes during the pandemic." Many other scholars contend that various development goals were unlikely to be attained unless education plays its vital role in facilitating development (Ambaw & Meher, 2019; Avelar, et al; 2019; McCowan, 2019; UNESCO, 2003). Others, in this regard, concurred that it was the human resource of a nation that ultimately determines the pace of its economic and social development(Galor & Moav, 2004; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Nsubuga, 2008). Thus, governments and the community used to exert unreserved effort to promote the contribution of education to development through ensuring effectiveness of education system(Agba, Ikoh & Ashibi, 2010; Sterling, 2016).

Despite the efforts made, the contribution of education to the benefits of human beings was hampered by different factors among which the foremost was failure to attain the prescribed educational goals impaired by internal inefficiency (Barro & Lee, 1996; Yang, 2014). Dropout is one of the salient components of internal inefficiency. School dropout is failure of a student in completing the current stage of education for several reasons which contributes to wastage of meager resources (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001). The worst scenario observed was that student dropout led to problems of personal, social and financial dimensions (Heers et al., 2014). Studies showed that individuals who drop out of school have an increased risk of involvement in crime, and are obliged to work at a job with a low wage (Cabus & Witte, 2015). In this regard, there are large number of street children who flow to towns in search of job opportunity before school completion (Anangisye, 2022; Heers et al., 2014). Thus, school dropout is widely recognized as a negative life event which is often followed by further problems.

Although efforts made to improve educational service led to improved access in many developing countries, millions of children mostly girls, the poor, and other disadvantaged ones were experiencing dropout before completing primary education. In this regard, Vieira (2019) argues that while developing countries have done remarkably well in terms of expanding educational access to a large percentage of their school going population, school performance as measured by dropout rates, progression rates and examination results were quite discouraging. Thus, scholars concurred that increased dropout rate was exacerbating educational wastage. It was argued that wastage is an unprofitable and uneconomical utilization of time and resources (Caplan, 2018). Accordingly, Matthew (2015) stated that the analysis of efficiency in education is necessary to ensure optimal uses of meager resources allocated to education in order to eliminate wastage.Hence, policies should be reviewed and properly implemented to ensure that the critical problem of educational wastage in the African context would be reduced.

Scholars identified different factors for school dropout of which effects vary with the context in which the schools or the community exists. In this regard, a number of scholars indicated that the reasons for dropping out of school are multiple, complex and depend on a country's level of development (Karacabey & Boyaci, 2019; Nabugoomu, 2019; UNESCO, 2008). As to these authors, some of these reasons are unsafe, overcrowded and poorly equipped schools and inadequately trained teachers. Rumberger (1983) identified four broad categories of reasons for school dropout: *school related, economic, personal and other factors*. Gisore (2005), on the other hand, proposes four groups of factors namely, socio-economic background, socio-cultural level, the pedagogical conditions and psychological development of the child. Other authors categorize factors of dropout into economic, school related, cultural and others including geographical factors (Bukhari, Tahir, & Shah, 2019; Chaudhury, et al., 2006; Gitterand Barham, 2007; Kim, Joo, & Lee, 2018; Kiriikua, 2010; Rumberger, 1983).

In his study, Rumberger (1983) indicated that school related factors accounted for 44 percent of the total dropout as compared to other three categories of factors. School related factors comprise quality of school such as teachers' qualifications, availability of textbooks and classroom facilities upon which returns to schooling in terms of child's acquisition of skills and knowledge dependent. Horng (2005), in this relation, contend that the students of the current era want to have enthusiastic teachers helping them to be passionate with their work, and who are aware of what the students like and what they dislike. If the teacher makes effort to understand the students and their background, a good relationship is likely to develop. This is important because if students have problems they can speak freely with their teachers to find a solution (Pajares, 2014). If the student-teacher relationship is maintained in good faith and the communication between them is effective, students will have more respect for the teacher and pay more attention in his/her classes. However, if the relationship is bad and trust is not maintained, then students will lose interest in school and their teachers. The relationships that students have with their peers also play a role in influencing a student's likelihood of dropping out. Battin-Peason (2000) indicated that building relationships with anti-social peers was found to be a strong and direct predictor of dropout. Students who had deviant friends weremore likely to drop out of school regardless of their achievement in school.

Moreover, other studies have pointed out that school related factors leading to dropout include low grade attainment, corporal punishment, overloaded curriculum, poor curriculum delivery, inadequate infrastructure and learning materials, bullying by colleagues, peer pressure, understaffing, lack of effective guidance and counseling, bad school rules, bad policies and forced repetition(Kiriikua, 2010).

Another category of causes of dropout is economic factor. Some authors indicated that economic factors contribute to dropout in three ways: through the effect of cost and return of education, inability of parents to afford schooling expenditure and opportunity cost of the students(Mutuma, 2005; Kiriikua, 2010).

In the first case, parents and students decide to terminate schooling due to their perceptions of high costs and low returns of education. If the household perceives that schools cannot provide children with basic skills, they may decide that an investment in education is not worth the small return (World Bank, 2004). Poor school quality may thus discourage parents and they may withdraw their children from school and engage them in income generating activities. Kiriikua (2010) observed that poor families who cannot afford labor withdraw their childrenfrom school to work on their farm or look after the cattle. In the second case, dropout occurs due to parents' inability to afford the necessary educational expenditure. According to UNESCO (2001), many people are unable to send their children to school and sustain them because they cannot afford the various levies charged by the school. Abagi and Odipo (1997) also stated that poor families withdraw their children from school due to critical resource limitation. Decreasing the cost of school expenses increases school attendance. The third argument was that children dropout with the parents' and/or their own intention to engage in different income generating activities. Mutuma(2005) and Kiriikua(2010) concurred that children were lured to paid employment hence dropping out of school. Anker, (2000) asserts that the combination of work and schooling in rural areas increases with increase in schooling expenses. Tonkei (2008) argues that the opportunity cost of sending a child to school is usually viewed as greater for girls than boys as girls are often called upon to assist their mothers with household tasks.

The next group of causes for the rise of dropout rate is cultural component of factors. Limangura(2008) defined cultural factors as those that are expressed throughthe community's attitudes, beliefs, values and extended from generation to generation via their socialization systems. Thus, they influence pupils' decision to enroll and withdraw from school. Cultural factors include the traditional division of labor and unequal training opportunities based on masculine and feminine attitudes(Colclough, 2000; De Witte, & Csillag, 2014; Kiarie, 2010). Odaga and Heneveld(1995) suggest that in some societies there are beliefs that educated girls become unfaithful to their husbands and never come back to rural life and neglect their parents.

School characteristics such as distance, geographical factors, etc form another category of factors of dropout. Distance to the nearest schoolfrom the homestead negatively affects attendance and increases dropout rate (Chaudhury, et al., 2006; Gitterand Barham, 2007). According to Abebaw, et al. (2007), school availability and its distance determine child's age at starting schooling in Ethiopia.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Mixed research method along with parallel convergent design was employed in this study so as it would enable the investigators to triangulate the data and to overcome time limitation (Creswell & Clark, 2003). Thus, interpretive theoretical framework was chosen in order to reveal the factors of dropout in the schools as it uncovers how participants construct their experiences through the processes of their actions, intentions, beliefs, and feelings (Henning, et al, 2004; Wilson, 2004). According to Creswell, et al.(2006), Interpretative Theoretical Framework borne important implications for mixed methods particularly in the field of education. It provides clear perspective for this study because it explores the participants' feelings, actions, intentions, experiences and their views with regard to economic, cultural, geographical and in-school factors of dropout.

Pertaining the study area, Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region was selected based on purposive sampling technique as the region comprises all the clusters eligible for the study. The region was sub-divided into 16 zones and 7 special woredas. It embraced a total of 6,521 government schools composed of 5,793 primary and 728 secondary levels. In effect, a sample of 5 zones (42%), 5 woredas, and 20 schools (13 primary and 7 secondary) were considered proportionally for this study. The sample sites were Geta Woreda of Gu* rague Zone, Duguna Fango of Wolayta Zone, Decha of Kefa Zone, Andracha of Sheka Zone and Dasenech of South Omo Zone which were purposively taken to represent the communities of various economic activities and income status. Thus, the schools were selected by clustered random sampling techniques, which were based on the economic activities of the community; hence, 4 schools from pastoralists and 16 from those which serve the agrarian community, which in its turn is divided into 3 sub-categories (cash crop area, low rainfall area and land scarcity area), were included in the study.

The study participants for the quantitative data were students who ever experienced dropout and home room teachers who were randomly selected, whereby the sample size was determined by Yamane Formula (Yamane, 1967). The qualitative data, on the other hand, were gathered from purposively selected facilitators of pre-primary schools, members of Back-to-School Committee, Kebele Education and Training Boards, and Parent-Teacher-Student Association, and cluster supervisors. Accordingly, 288 students who experienced dropout, and 242 homeroom teachers a total of 530 participants were taken as respondents of the quantitative data. Besides, 6 members of Back-To-School Committee, 6 members of KETB, 6 Members of PTSA, 6 facilitators of pre-primary schools and 5 cluster supervisors in addition to 5 students who were unable to return to school, a total of 34 informants were included as respondents for the qualitative data.

The quantitative data were gathered using descriptive survey questionnaire, whereas the qualitative data were obtained by using semi-structured interview. The items for the quantitative data were pilot tested for reliability and passed through validity check process. The analysis of the quantitative data were performed using mean, independent samples t-test and correlation, whereas the qualitative data via narration. The mean values were used to examine the prevalence of the students' dropout rate and to identify factors contributing to the prevalence of the student dropout rate. Independent samples t-test was employed to discover the significance of difference of opinions between the two groups of respondents on the variables investigated, whereas

correlation model was used to investigate the relationship between student dropout and different dimensions of factors contributing to dropout.

## RESULTS

## Dropout Status

Records at schools and woreda education offices were reviewed to investigate dropout status at pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels. As depicted in Table1, the overall pre-primary, primary and secondary school dropout rate for the sample woreds were 1.7%, 4.9% and 4.6% respectively. The woreda level investigation revealed that the overall average status of student dropout was low at pre-primary, and it was moderate at primary and secondary school levels. However, dropout prevalence at primary and secondary levels was high in some schools. In this regard, 13.6% of primary and 5.8% secondary school students experienced dropout in Dasenech Woreda, whereas 7.3% of secondary school students dropped-out in Andracha Woreda.

**Table 1: Woreda Level Dropout status**

| S. No | Woreda | Dropout Status at Secondary Schools | | | | | | Dropout Status at Primary Schools | | | | | | Dropout Status at Pre-Primary Schools | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Frequency | | | % | | | Frequency | | | % | | | Frequency | | | % | | |
| | | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| 1 | Andracha | 68 | 71 | 138 | 6.8 | 7.8 | 7.3 | 97 | 69 | 166 | 3.1 | 2.3 | 2.7 | 6 | 4 | 10 | 1.6 | 1.1 | 1.3 |
| 2 | Dasenech | 16 | 2 | 18 | 8.2 | 1.8 | 5.8 | 366 | 509 | 875 | 10.0 | 18.2 | 13.6 | 33 | - | 33 | 3.3 | - | 1.7 |
| 3 | Decha | 58 | 49 | 107 | 4.1 | 3.6 | 3.8 | 193 | 154 | 347 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 1.4 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 4 | DugunaFango | 73 | 44 | 117 | 2.1 | 1.5 | 1.8 | 359 | 278 | 632 | 2.2 | 1.9 | 2.0 | 65 | 71 | 136 | 1.9 | 2.1 | 2.0 |
| 5 | Geta | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Overall Average** | | *53* | *42* | *95* | *5.3* | *3.7* | *4.6* | *254* | *252* | *506* | *4.2* | *5.9* | *4.9* | *35* | *25* | *60* | *2.3* | *1.0* | *1.7* |

**Source:** *Review of Education Statistics*

Besides, the document review conducted on zonal level dropout rate in 2020 revealed that double-digit dropout rate was recorded in the primary schools of four zones and in the secondary school of two zones among the five where this study was conducted. As depicted in Table2 below, the primary school double-digit dropout rates recorded were 22.6%, 22.1%, 21.6% and 20.2% in South Omo, Kefa, Sheka and Gurague, whereas the secondary school double-digit dropout rates were 13.7% and 13.3% in Kefa and Gurague Zones respectively. Thus, dropout status in these schools was extremely high.

**Table 2: Zonal Level Student dropout status, 2020**

| S.N | Zone | Dropout Rate in Primary Schools | | | Dropout Rate in Secondary Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| 1 | Gurague | 21.7 | 18.6 | 20.2 | 12.7 | 14.1 | 13.3 |
| 2 | Kefa | 22.5 | 21.7 | 22.1 | 13.9 | 13.5 | 13.7 |
| 3 | Sheka | 21.9 | 21.3 | 21.6 | 3.0 | 4.3 | 3.6 |
| 4 | South Omo | 23.1 | 22.1 | 22.6 | 8.3 | 6.2 | 7.3 |
| 5 | Wolayita | 7.3 | 9.1 | 8.1 | 3.6 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| **Overall Sample Zone Dropout Rate** | | **19.3** | **18.5** | **18.9** | **8.3** | **8.3** | **8.3** |

**Source:** *Review of Education Statistics*

Moreover, Table 3 born that the overall mean perception of the respondents on student dropout status was 3.18 while it was 3.30 and 3.07 for student and teacher respondents respectively. Besides, the independent samples t-test value revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean perceptions between the student and teacher respondents regarding the status of studentdropout as $t(528) = .942$, $p = .346 > .05$. The mean value was found to take position within moderate level of dropout status. Therefore, the status of dropout in the selected schools of SNNPR was moderate.

**Table 3: Respondents' perceptions regarding student dropout status**

| Variables | Students | | Teachers | | WM | T | Sig | N | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | X | SD | X | SD | | | | | |
| Some students repetitively experience drop-out | 2.78 | 1.47 | 2.78 | 1.35 | 2.78 | .03 | .976 | 530 | 528 |
| Many students experience dropout at a time | 2.61 | 1.44 | 2.58 | 1.28 | 2.60 | .24 | .808 | 530 | 528 |
| Some students remain dropped-out of school | 3.15 | 1.45 | 2.76 | 1.36 | 2.95 | 3.21 | .001 | 530 | 528 |
| Back to School Committee contributes to return students dropping-out* | 3.31 | 1.51 | 3.48 | 1.38 | 3.40 | -1.31 | .190 | 530 | 528 |
| KETB contributes to return students dropping-out* | 3.37 | 1.50 | 3.31 | 1.40 | 3.34 | .42 | .671 | 530 | 528 |
| PTSA contributes to return students dropping-out* | 3.26 | 1.48 | 3.31 | 1.39 | 3.28 | -.36 | .719 | 530 | 528 |
| Collaborators like UNICEF contribute to return students dropping-out* | 3.30 | 1.57 | 3.07 | 1.54 | 3.18 | 1.65 | .100 | 530 | 528 |
| Overall Perception on Dropout Status | 3.10 | .932 | 3.04 | .767 | 3.07 | .942 | .346 | 530 | 528 |

**Source:** *Survey Data;* **Note:** *t-critical or table value = 4.303 (Kothari & Garg, 2014). Key: x < 2.75 – Low; x = 2.75 – 3.50 – moderate; x > 3.50 - High.*

Investigation into the respondents' perceptions revealed that the number of students' dropout at a time was low (average perception of the respondents was 2.60). However, the interview discussion revealed that some students repetitively dropout and the probability of returning some other students back to school was low. On the other hand, the respondents' perceptions indicated that the contribution of the stakeholders in returning students-dropout was encouraging. In this regard, the average perception on the contribution of Back to School Committee, Kebele Education and Training Board, Parent Teacher Student Association and collaborators including UNICEF was 3.40, 3.34, 3.28 and 3.18 respectively which were all within the range of moderate label.

## Factors Affecting Dropout

Four dimensions of factors contributing to student dropout were considered in this study. They were cultural, economic, geographical and in-school factors. Thus, it was depicted in Table4 that the mean perceptions of the respondents on cultural, economic, geographical and school related factors of student dropout were 2.80, 3.06, 2.67 and 2.78respectively while grand weighted mean of all the categories of factors was 2.80. The independent samples t-test values for each of the variables revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean perceptions between the student and teacher respondents regarding each of the factors. They were t(528) = -.792, p = .429 > .05, t(528) = -.592, p = .553 > .05, t(528) = -.282, p = .778 > .05, and t(528) = 1.580, p = .115 > .05 for cultural, economic, geographical and school related factors respectively. Therefore, the mean values were statistically acceptable for the interpretation of the result. Hence, geographical factors have low influence as its mean perception was below 2.75, while all other factors have moderate influence on student dropout in the selected schools of SNNPR.

**Table 4: Respondents' perceptions regarding determinants of student dropout**

| Variables | Students | | Teachers | | WM | T | sig | N | Df |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | X | SD | X | SD | | | | | |
| Cultural Factors of Student Drop-out | 2.77 | 1.011 | 2.83 | .913 | 2.80 | -.792 | .429 | 530 | 528 |
| Factors of Student Drop-out | 3.04 | 1.033 | 3.08 | .953 | 3.06 | -.592 | .554 | 530 | 528 |
| Geographical Factors of Student Drop-out | 2.66 | 1.135 | 2.68 | 1.137 | 2.67 | -.282 | .778 | 530 | 528 |
| In-School Factors of Student Drop-out | 2.80 | 1.048 | 2.76 | .962 | 2.78 | 1.580 | .115 | 530 | 528 |
| Overall Perceptions on the Factors of Student Dropout | 2.81 | .806 | 2.80 | .733 | 2.80 | .086 | .932 | 530 | 528 |

**Source:** *Survey Data;* **Note:** *t-critical or table value = 4.303 (Kothari & Garg, 2014). Key: x < 2.75 – Low; x = 2.75 – 3.50 – moderate; x > 3.50 - High.*

## Relationship of Dropout and Its Factors

In this case, either .05 or .01 was considered as a criterion to measure the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, whereas the coefficient *r* was used as an indicator of the magnitude of the relationship. The coefficient (*r*) obtained from the correlation analysis was interpreted as an effect size(*r* = .10, *r* = .30, and *r* = .50 represent a small, medium and large effect sizerespectively as to Borrego, Douglas, & Amelink (2009).

Accordingly, the result of the correlation analysis in Table5 indicated that the status of dropout hadstatistically significant relationship (p = .000 < .01) with each of the dimensions of the factors of dropout. Besides, the positive coefficient of the correlation indicated that improvement of the factors was accompanied by improvement in the students' dropout rate. Moreover, the magnitude .404 for the overall factors indicated that the relationship existing between student dropout andits factors, as perceived by the respondents, was found to range between medium and high (Borrego et al., 2009).

**Table5: Correlation of student dropout and its perceived factors**

| | The Three Dimensions of Perceived Factors of Dropout | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | **Cultural Fs** | **Economic Fs** | **Geo. Fs** | **School Fs** | **Overall F** |
| Student dropout | .346** | .236** | .286** | .328** | .404** |
| Sig(2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 |

***Source:*** *Survey Data;* **Note:** „**\*\***" is meant c*orrelation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed);*

## DISCUSSION

Data secured through literature review, document analysis, questionnaire and interview regarding the status of dropout, factors contributing to dropout and the relationship between them were integrated to investigate alignment of the evidences generated pertaining the study facts. Review of woreda level records for the academic years 2020 and 2021 in the study areas confirmed thatoverall average status of student dropout was low (1.7 %) at pre-primary, and moderate (4.9%) and (4.6%) at primary and secondary schools respectively. However, it varied at both primary and secondary levels with woredas ranging from low to high. Accordingly, high primary school dropout(13.6%) was recorded in Dasenech Woreda, and high secondary school dropout was recorded in Andracha, Dasenech and Decha Woredas. Moreover, the document review conducted on the dropout rate at zonal level and compiled by education bureau for the year 2020 revealed that double-digit dropout rate was recorded in the four of five studied primary schools and two of five studied secondary schools. It was 22.6%, 22.1%, 21.6% and 20.2% in the primary schools of South Omo, Kefa, Sheka and Gurague zones, whereas 13.7%, and 13.3% in the secondary schools of Kefa, and Gurague zones respectively. Thus, dropout status in some schools of the zones studied was extremely high. It went on worsening in the study area; the dropout rate for primary education in the region was 13.6% in 2018; however, it was above 20% in four of the studied zones in 2020 despite its plan to lower it to 2%.

These findings from document analysis were in line with the respondents' perceptions regarding dropout rate in the study area with the overall mean perception value of 3.18. Likewise, the interview conducted with the participants in the sample schools confirmed what was discovered through the quantitative methods. In line with this, previous studies asserted that schools are facing serious student dropout problems in the study area (Heers et al., 2014). Accordingly, conspicuous dropout rate was evident in the study area (SNNPREB, 2020). According to Ambaw (2019), student dropout which was inherent in schools' internal inefficiency was a major problem of the study area.

On the other hand, the investigation made through both quantitative and qualitative methods revealed that economic dimension of the factors was common to the entire study sites and influential in most of them. However, other factors existed with significant variation of influence among the study sites. The children's engagement in harvesting and production of cash crops and early marriage were influential factors of student dropout among cash crop producing community witnessed in Decha and Andracha woredas. Children's involvement in cultural practices, lack of wisdom of wealth management to school children, dictating children to engage in economic activity and denial of the children's education, besides poor in-school conditions

including teacher incompetence were influential factors of student dropout among pastoral community explained by the reality in Dasenech Woreda of South Omo Zone. Moreover, child trafficking caused by parents' low income status which in its turn caused by low agricultural productivity was influential factors of student dropout among the community facing scarcity of rainfall and land plot manifested in Duguna Fango Woreda of Wolayita Zone and Geta Woreda of Gurague Zone.

In relation to these findings, previous studies asserted that causes of dropout in primary schools may vary from school to school and from region to region stemming from a number of factors. Rumberger (1983) identifies four broad categories of reasons for dropping out of school: school related factors, economic factors, personal factors and others. He indicated that school related factors accounted for 44 percent of the total dropout as compared to other three factors including sex and family background. According to Sabates, & Westbrook (2010), De Witte, & Csillag (2014) and Bukhari, Tahir, & Shah (2019), the reasons for dropping out of school were multiple, complex and depend on a country's level of development. According to the report, these include unsafe, overcrowded and poorly equipped schools and inadequately trained teachers. Irwin et al (2022) contended that economic factors were prominent in determining student retention.

The result of analysis of correlation between student dropout and the four dimensions of factors contributing to student dropout revealed that there was strong positive relationship between the two variables. Dropout had similar relationship with all the dimensions of its factors namely economic, cultural, in-school and geographical factors. The positive coefficient of the correlation indicated that improvement of the factors was accompanied by improvement in the students' dropout rate. Moreover, the magnitude .404 for the overall factors indicated that there was strong relationship between dropout rate and the perceived determinants.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the findings regarding the status of student dropout, the following conclusions were drawn. Dropout rate exacerbated despite efforts made to meet the government's target set to lower it. Regardless of the government's efforts to reduce dropout rate to 2% in 2020, it strikingly rose to above 20% in four of the studied five zones in the specified year. There was varying dropout rates with school levels and woredas studied: overall dropout rate was low in pre-primary and moderate in primary & secondary schools over the study sites; and dropout was the highest in primary schools of Dasenech Woreda, high in secondary school of Andracha, Dasenech and Decha woredas and moderate in Duguna Fango and Geta Woredas.

The degree of influence of economic, cultural, in-school factors, and that of sparse settlement component of geographical factors on dropout vary with the communities' economic activity Influential factors of dropout among the pastoralist community in the studied areas were ignoring schooling for the sake of engagement of school age children in cultural practices and economic activities, and distance from schools due to sparse settlement. The prominent factor of dropout among the community having low agricultural productivity due to scarcity of rainfall & land plot was prevalence of child trafficking due to parents' inability to afford schooling their children. Dominant factors of dropout among the community in the studied cash crop areas were engagement of school age children in the production and harvesting of cash crops and early marriage.

**T**he study result is of great significance deserving the involvement of decision makers, planners and implementers within and beyond education sector under the oversight of government agents. Thus, the following suggestions are ideal to alleviate the problem. The research output need be converted into comprehensive community engagement project to respond to the respective problems associated with the communities' economic activities. It should be designed so that it would be funded multilaterally through the involvement of government, the community and other collaborators to address the respective needs of the students in the pastoral community, in the community with scarcity of rainfall and land plot, and that of the community in the cash crop areas. Thus, it need focus on the following implementation components:

Regional government is expected to mobilize the stakeholders to address the factors of children's mobility from their home villages to towns due to parents' low income status arising from scarcity of rain fall and land plot. This can be realized through introducing adaptable crop varieties or alternative job to the community in order to promote their income level so that they could afford to school their children;

Regional government is also expected to coordinate the partners to address home-to-school distance factors associated with sparse population and mobility of the community through working on school expansion, or initiating school feeding or boarding schools for identified areas of the pastoralist community based on their interest. Besides encouraging the ongoing initiatives of permanent settlement to realize sustainability through time need also be strengthened;

The local government need facilitate addressing gaps in awareness of the benefits of education through providing short term trainings to the parents and influential community members in order to motivate parents in the pastoralist community to enable them establish constant residential places and send their children to school, whereas to encourage the community of cash crop areas to influence their children to attend schools.

Local government need also facilitate to address the parents' skill gaps through introducing integrated functional adult education program based on the gaps, needs and interests of the community with special attention to skillful and effective career, planned life style, saving, family planning, etc. which would contribute to schooling their children.

Regional government is expected to address shortage of school inputs including teaching materials, facilities, competent teachers, etc. In this regard, the education sector of the regional government is expected to arrange special teacher training program in collaboration with sponsoring agencies and accessible HEIs in the areas where there is shortage of competent teachers.

## LIMITATIONS AND STUDY FORWARD

One of the limitations of this study was its confinement to SNNPR besides its limitation with generalization of its results. Therefore, further studies need be conducted to rigorously investigate the effects of each of the categories of factors of dropout and for the purpose of cascading the findings to other areas.

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