

Prevalence, Causes and Prevention of Primary School Dropout in Gurage Zone, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the Prevalence, Causes and Prevention of Primary School Dropout in Gurage Zone, Ethiopia. To achieve this objective, the research used descriptive survey research design to gather data from 24 primary schools distributed in 6 districts and 2 City administrations in Gurage Zone. The samples consist of primary school principals, school teachers, district education officers, Parent-Teacher Association members (PTA), dropout students and Zonal education office experts. Questionnaire, interview and document analysis were the data collection tools. The data analysis, interpretation and discussion of the findings indicated the prevalence of school dropout is severe in the study area with average of 5.6% dropout rate, but ranging up to 13.59 % dropout rate. The factors that contributed to school dropout included students' low expectation on future success and benefits of education, migration to urban area, poor school environment and parents' need of child labor.

Keywords: Primary school dropouts, dropout factors, Ethiopia, Gurage Zone

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I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The causes and prevalence of school dropout varies from country to country and from place to place. It happens more frequently in certain age ranges and grades depending on the educational structure and patterns. In its broad definition, the concept of dropout is a failure of a student to complete the stage of education he or she is enrolled in for many reasons (Dekkers & Claassen, 2001). In the same vein, today school age children are enrolling at school in bigger numbers than the case in the earlier years; however, dropout rates are very high and lead to low levels of primary school completion in many countries (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook and Hunt, 2010). Such school dropout rates of students in a country are considered as an important condition that shows the quality of education in that country and this is considered as a significant predictor of the prevailing and upcoming difficulties of the education scheme (Graeff-Martins, Oswald, Comassetto, Kieling, Goncalves and Rohde, 2006). Hence, the tendency of students to turn their back on the education they have access to, might indicate perhaps that there is something wrong in the education and the school system we are providing them. Asking what is wrong in the education and school system that distracts students from education is obliging (Shute and Cooper, 2015). Answering such questions could give the chance to check our school systems and to make amendments if

there is anything that distracts students. On the other hand, personal and family level factors such as ill-health, malnutrition and poverty may also jeopardize meaningful access to education for many children. The inability to complete a basic education could be associated with multiple factors that need multiple solutions to keep the forthcoming chances of children in a safe hand and to address the substantial wastage of the meager resources that countries have for the delivery of basic education.

In contrast, regular attendance at school is vital for the students' academic successes, linguistic development and social growth. Students who attend school commonly can be fruitful in their forthcoming professional lives through achieving professional skills such as determination, the ability to work in team, and the ability to be focused to accomplish a goal (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

Nevertheless, like the case in many developing nation primary school dropout is still a challenging problem in Ethiopia and in Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples Regional State and Gurage zone in particular. To tackle this challenge, the government of Ethiopia launched a scheme named educational package. The package comprises: School improvement program, teacher development program, civics and ethical education, access to ICT, and improving schools leadership and administration of schools. The government also launched school feeding program in drought affected area schools as part of its effort to minimize school dropout caused by food insecurity. However, the challenge of school dropout continued throughout the country regardless of the efforts made. Therefore, studying the underlying causes of government primary school dropout in its context is helpful to guide the forthcoming action on dropouts.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is widely accepted fact that the most relevant indicator of educational efficiency is not just the number of students enrolled in the system but the number of graduates who have completed a given educational level within intended time and with required learning skills, attitude and knowledge. However, in developing countries, in particular in Ethiopia, a larger proportion of pupils enrolled in primary education dropout before completing a given grade level. This, in turn, surely diminishes the pupils' opportunity to learn as they leave school before completing an educational cycle. It is, therefore, the responsibility of teachers, parents, district education authorities, schools and other stakeholders to manage and reduce the high incidences of dropout in schools. In the case of Ethiopia, it has been observed that pupils in primary school are leaving school in spite of the role stakeholders take to reduce dropout rates. The same reality persists in Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Regional State and in Gurage Zone in particular. The researchers tried to look for literatures if the same or related problems have been addressed so far, but found no research conducted on the same problem in the study area. The reasons for dropout need to be identified and solutions to this problem need to be suggested. Thus, the researchers became inquisitive to assess the prevalence and causes of the primary school dropouts in government primary schools in Gurage Zone, Ethiopia.

The study was led by the following guiding questions:

1. What is the extent of dropout rate in government primary schools in Gurage zone?
2. What are the causes for government primary schools students' dropouts in Gurage Zone?
3. What strategies can be put in place to control dropouts from government primary schools in Gurage Zone?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

THE CONCEPT AND TRENDS OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

The term dropout is a word which has been defined by different researchers in different ways and to some extent it is an ambiguous concept (Momo et al, 2018). It is “a term used for the children, who for any reason other than death, discontinue schooling and leave their education uncompleted” (Jamil et.al, 2010). This definition includes students at all levels of studies. Similarly, Malik (2002) defined dropout as a student who left school before completing a course of study. It is a comprehensive definition covering all students leaving their study incomplete. Another definition was given by Umoh (1986). According to Umoh, dropout denotes to a student who quit schooling before completing the program for which they are enrolled in, for unknown causes. Similarly, Wegner et al. (2008) also defined dropout as children who quitschool before completing the grade level they enrolled in for a given academic year. This implies that dropouts are children who were enrolled in school but have left school before completion as a result of individual, family, school, and community related problems. In contrast, Lewin & Little (2011) defined dropout as a pupil who starts education very late and who is prevented from completing owing to repetition.

Considering all the above definitions, this study defined dropout operationally as a term which refers to a child who was once enrolled in school system but has left school for various reasons before the completion a certain grade level excluding those students who are repeaters and re-admitters in a certain grade level in the education system. The reason is that repeaters and re-admitters are not completely out of the school system. Plus to this, throughout this study the term ‘dropout’ and the phrase ‘early school leaving’ were used interchangeably.

The inability to successfully complete a basic primary level schooling limits prospects of Pupils. It also creates a substantial effect on the limited resources that countries have for the delivery of primary education. So dropout increases wastage of educational costs and could leads to waste human resources in general. And also, its negative impact on the economy of one country is immeasurable (Sabates et al., 2010).

In the global context, there has been an initiative to bring every school age child to school accepting as true that access to education is a right for every child. However, the number of children who quit school early has also increased dramatically with the increases in enrollment. According to UNESCO (2012), bringing back dropout children to school is by far costly and challenging than addressing the obstacles that causes dropout in school systems. The study by Sabates et al. (2010) has also shown that in Africa children are enrolling at school in greater number compared to the practices in earlier times, but dropout is also rising than ever before. Similarly, in the context of Ethiopia, dropout is very serious problem which is challenging the education system. In this regard, a study by Kassahun (2006) stated that the dropout rate in Ethiopian primary school is 11.8 percent, wide gap is observed between rural and urban areas with 13.3% and 5.0 % respectively. This implies that, both in the urban and rural areas the problem is huge. Even after the 2015 (the year for achieving the Education for All goals), primary school dropout is a very serious problem observed in government primary schools in Ethiopia. According to the 2016/17 Education Statistical Report of Gurage Zone Education department, primary school dropout remains as one of the leading challenges in the sector. This implies that the problem do not seem to have gone down over the years. A report by UNESCO (2012) also indicated that in many countries there are high rates of pupils leaving school, worse in the developing countries.

METHODS

This study was conducted in Gurage zone, which is part of the Southern Nation, Nationalities and People Regional State, located in the western part of central Ethiopia; and at the same time it is the northern tip of the region. It is bounded with Hadiya Zone and Yem Special Woreda in the south and southwest respectively. The northern, western and eastern portions are sharing boarder with Oromia Regional State.

A study on School dropout is complicated due to the fact that there has been several and wide range of factors that have some direct and indirect association with students' dropout from school. Thus, this study used a survey research design for its investigation where both qualitative and quantitative data were sought. That means the study engaged both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the data collection and analysis processes. The mixed approach was chosen because it allows collecting different but harmonized data to best understand the situation.

SOURCE OF DATA

The research used both primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources of this study were teachers, school principals, Zonal and district education office personnel, members of the parent-teacher association (PTA) and dropout students. The secondary source was the education statistics database of the Zonal Education office, district education offices and the sample schools record. Accordingly, 24 school principals, 90 teachers, 30 PTA members and 16 district education officers were selected purposively from 6 districts and 2 City administrations. The study also considered 74 dropout students. Since it was difficult to access the dropout students, convenient sampling technique was used by the support of teachers and PTA members of each school. Hence the study addressed 3 dropout students on average from each school. Furthermore, the study selected 5 participants from the Zonal Education office. These are the head of the Zonal education department and four education department experts for they were expected to have firsthand information on the issue under investigation. In relation with this idea, Kombo and Tromp (2006) state that, the power of purposive sampling lies in selecting participants who will provide the riches information for in-depth analysis related to the central issue being studied.

Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data from the participants. The questionnaire and the semi-structured interview guide were developed by the researchers and were given to three senior colleagues to establish validity and reliability of the items. After considering the comments, the questionnaire designed for dropout students was translated into a local language. Moreover, the questionnaire for all participants had likert scale format, but the items were worded differently to relate it to the roles of each participant group and to find out their perspectives. When it comes to the interview, the researchers conducted the interview in different place and time based on the convenience of the participants and the interview was tap recorded based on the permission obtained from the participants. Data concerning enrollment and dropout rate were obtained from Gurage Zone education office database, district education offices and the sample schools records.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the magnitude of primary school dropout, the causes of primary school dropout and its preventions are discussed respectively under three broad themes on the bases of the data collected. The concept of dropout rate presented below refers to the proportion of students who dropout of a specific grade divided by the number of students enrolled in that specific grade at the start of the school year.

THEME-1: THE MAGNITUDE OF DROPOUT

Table 1: The Magnitude of Dropout Rates in Primary Schools (2 academic years Data)

District/City administration	Academic Year	Dropouts in numbers	Dropouts in (%)
Abeshge	2016-2018	1196	6.88
Eza	>>	384	2.36
Gumer	>>	806	5.43
Kebena	>>	613	6.32
Mareko	>>	2027	13.59
Sodo Bue	>>	3423	10.28
Wolkite City administration	>>	No dropout, 1822 additional students were found	0 (+26.55 extra)
Butajira City administration	>>	No dropout, 297 additional students were found	0 (+4.54 extra)

*Source: Gurage Zone education office database.

From table-1 above, the dropout rates for 2016-2018 academic years is very high and needs attention to call for the main causes. The dropouts were carefully identified excluding repeaters and re-admitted students. The Zonal level dropout rate on average is about 5.6%. The dropout rates for each districts under investigation were 13.59% in Mareko, 10.28% in Sodo Bue, 6.88 in Abeshge, 6.32% in Kebena, 5.43% in Gumer, 2.36% in Eza, respectively (see table-1). This discrepancy between districts in the dropout rate is attributed to socio economic realities of the districts. The highest dropout rate goes to cash crop producing area where students have better access to involve in business activities. However, the case in the two city administration (Wolkite and Butajira towns), is totally different. The data shows that there were 1822 (26.55 %) and 297 (4.54%) extra students registered in Wolkite and Butajira city administration schools respectively. There were over flow of students instead of dropouts. Such flows of students to urban area schools show the migration to urban area is very high. This means a student who is listed as a dropout from rural schools could be found in urban schools within the same zone probably in different district. This in turn implies the loose communication between districts and schools concerning migrating students. The student follow up system is weak. The migration to urban area again indicates the need for involvement in income generation activity on the side of the students in an early age. It also suggests the negligence of the dropout parents to follow up their children. However the dropouts' interview indicated that involving in business activities is not an option for them; it is a must for their livelihood. Making money to support themselves and their parents is priority in some cases.

THEME-2: MAJOR CAUSES OF STUDENTS DROPOUT

The second major objective of this study was to investigate causes of students' dropout in government primary schools. Thus, attempt was made to identify causes of dropouts as: *student related factors, school related factors, economic factors, cultural factors and social factors* that may have contribution to pupils' dropout from educational system in the study area. Here the study followed the argument of Lamb & Markussen (2011) that stresses students who leave school early are mostly from the disadvantaged background in the society. However, the causes of school dropout are different from place to place and country to country (Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Penny, Burge & Driscoll, 2010; Prevatt, & Kelly,

2003;Alfonso et al., 2018). Accordingly, the following discussion presents the data collected on the extent of the contribution of each of the above factors to student early school leaving on the bases of ‘Pull-out’ theories that assume the tendency of cost-benefit analysis of their economic interest to remain in or leave school on the part of students and parents (McNeal, 1997; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997) and ‘Push-out’ theories that focus on the school factors that discourage students from continuing with their education. This theory argues that students leave school not only because of their individual attributes but also because of school structure (Fine, 1991).

THEME 2.1: STUDENT RELATED FACTOR

Under this topic, dropout factors that are directly associated with students themselves were explored. These include illness; academic performance, expectation on future success, migration, absenteeism; repetition and motivation of students were critically examined. Details of respondents reply is presented in the following table.

Table-2 Reply on Student Related Factor

No	Items	No.Res p.	Responses in Frequency and Percentage										Media
			Very Low		Low		Undecided		High		Very High		
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	Illness of students	239	84	35.1	9	41.9	2	8.4	31	13	5	2.1	2
2	Academic performance	239	37	15.5	8	33.0	2	11.8	82	34.3	1	5.0	3
3	Expectation on future success	239	1	0.4	1	7.5	4	17.2	12	51.4	5	23.5	4
4	Migration to urban	239	3	1.3	1	5.9	4	19.7	89	37.2	8	36.6	4
5	Absenteeism	239	45	18.8	7	29.0	3	16.3	72	30.1	1	5.4	3
6	Repetition	239	54	22.6	8	34.2	3	15.9	51	21.3	1	5.9	2
7	Low level of motivation	239	25	10.5	6	26.4	2	10.5	95	39.7	3	12.0	4

Among the various student related factors contributing for early school leaving, low expectation on future success, migration to urban area and low motivation are the leading pull-factors that many of students share. 74.2% of the respondents believed that the wrong perception of students on future benefits of education definitely pulls back students from school. In other words, the students begin to look for other short cuts of life. In addition to this, 73% of the respondents agreed that a migration of students to urban areas is causing dropouts. In line with notion of migration, Create (2011) stated that students migrate with their parent and children migrate independently on seasonal bases. This attributes to increased students dropout from the school or regular school attendance. The interview data also confirmed that seasonal migration following the harvesting season is a recurring factor for early school leaving of children. One dropout, in the interview motioned that survival is very difficult for him without making business himself. He mentioned that he live with his mother and younger sister. His father passed away. His mother is a house wife. He feels responsible for the survival and livelihood of the family although he is only 12. There is no way for him to continue his education with all this problems. Such problems are the true

stories of thousands of children in different places and have to be mediated by stakeholders including local education authorities.

THEME 2.2: SCHOOL RELATED FACTORS

With regard to the school related factors, reviews of related literature revealed that the school infrastructures, school distance from the students’ home, class size, school facilities like water, toilet, text books, chairs and table, the school leadership, the coordination between school and parents are the main causes of dropout at primary schools.

Table-3:Reply on School Related Factors

No	Items	No. Resp.	Responses in Percentage and Frequency										Media n
			Very Low		Low		Undecided		High		Very High		
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	
1	Distance the student covers to school	239	76	31.8	84	35.1	22	9.2	40	16.7	17	7.1	2
2	Large Class Size	239	27	11.3	69	28.9	22	9.2	74	31.0	47	19.7	4
3	Beating/harassment at school	239	81	33.9	73	30.5	32	13.4	40	16.7	13	5.4	2
4	Inadequacy of educational facilities (chair, table, books, toilet)	239	25	10.5	41	17.2	22	9.2	84	35.1	67	28.0	4
5	Irrelevance of curriculum to the students life	239	57	23.8	70	29.3	43	18.0	51	21.3	18	7.5	2
6	Poor school environment and infrastructure	239	28	11.7	59	24.7	30	12.6	87	36.4	35	14.6	4
7	Poor school Management	239	66	27.6	78	32.6	33	13.8	49	20.5	12	5.0	2
8	Loose coordination between parents and school	239	49	20.5	68	28.5	23	9.6	77	32.2	22	9.2	3
9	Less qualified teachers	239	81	33.9	90	37.7	33	13.8	31	13.0	4	1.7	2

The findings have shown that schools distance to students home is not a significant factor for dropout according to the response from the majority of the respondents. That means 66.9% (160) of the respondents are of the opinion that distance is not a cause for school dropout. By implication, the primary school coverage and access to school in the study area is good relatively. Every school age child has access to primary school education in his/her home area. In this regard, Swada and Lokshin (2001) sited in (Shadreck M, 2013) also maintained that accessibility to school within the village contributes to an increase in a school entry and a decline in school dropout. However, the large class sizes were seen as factors for early school leaving in this study. The data indicated the majority (50.7%) of the respondents are of the

opinion that large class size is one factor for student’s early school leaving. This finding is in line with the study by Woldehanna, et al. (2006) who also found large class size as one of the determinant factors for dropout. Inadequacy of educational facilities (chair, table, books, toilet, water), are also found to be persistent causes of school dropout. About 151 (63.1%) respondents testified that these facilities are in poor condition in the schools under investigation. It is clear from the data that limitation of these school facilities is discouraging for learners. Similarly, poor and unpleasant school environment and unfortunate infrastructure including not having pleasant playground and classrooms influence the students’ interest for schooling. In this regard, 122 (50.4%) of the respondents believed that the poor school environment and infrastructure is one of the causes for school dropout. 87 (36.4%) respondents, on the other hand, indicated that poor school environment is not a cause for school dropout. The remaining 30 (12.6%) were not able to decide on this item as it can be inferred from the table above. The coordination between parents and schools is also found to be one of the reasons for early school leaving according to the respondents of this study. In contrast, the curriculum content, school management and qualification of teachers are not considered as causes of school dropout in the study area according to the data gathered from the respondents.

THEME 2.3: ECONOMIC FACTORS

The economic status of each parent has its own negative impact on the schooling of children. Parents are responsible to provide uniform, exercise book, pencil, and (transportation cost if any) for their school age children. Inability to cover these expenses forces the students to leave schooling early. Therefore, economic difficulty and conditions are the main causes of early school leaving for a greater percentage of pupils for it results in inability to invest in the education of children on the part of parents (Brown, 2010).

Table 4: Reply on Economic Factors

No	Items	No. Resp.	Responses in Percentage and Frequency										Median
			Very Low		Low		Undecided		High		Very High		
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	Inability to pay school expenses (uniform, stationary, transport, etc)	239	24	10	68	28.5	26	10.9	78	32.6	43	18	4
2	Parents need for child labor/ income generation activity	239	1	0.4	6	2.5	14	5.9	95	39.7	123	51.5	5
3	Parents lack of perceived benefits of education	239	1	0.4	12	5.0	9	3.8	131	54.8	86	36	4
4	Food security	239	6	2.5	28	11.7	46	19.2	95	39.7	64	26.8	4

Accordingly, 121 (50.6%) of respondents of this study are of the opinion that inability to cover the school expenses is a significant cause of school dropout. 92 (38.5%) of them opposed the idea and 26 (10.9%) remain neutral on this point. Following the claims of the

majority, it is possible to say that inability of the parents to cover basic educational expenses is found as one major cause of school dropout in the study area regardless of the free education policy that the country has lunched. The interview with the parents of dropout students also informed the study that one of the reasons behind children’s early school leaving is largely economic problem. Sending a child to school requires fulfilling the educational materials and uniform of the child. This, however, is challenging for many parents especially where there are more than one child within a family. Similarly, the need for child labor is mentioned as a major factor influencing school dropout in this study. It is claimed that some students leave school to engage in income generation activities to support themselves and their parents. About 218 (91.2%) respondents proofed that parents have high demand for child labor. Some of the dropouts interviewed gave the impression that it was better to engage in income generation activities instead of going to school. This finding is similar with the study by Melese B. (2015) who reported that the parents need for child labor is limitless in rural area. Parallel to this, perception of parents about the prospective benefits of education is very important to face the challenges of dropout. However, according to the respondents of this study, it is discouraging that majority of the parents have low perception on the future benefits of education as shown in table above. 217 (90.8%) respondents are of the opinion that parents have very limited understanding on the potential benefits of education in the long run. As a result, they prefer to send children into the labor market for timely income generation. This finding concurs with the argument of (Ersado, 2005 & Hunt, 2008) who emphasized the importance of family members’ education on children schooling. These kinds of problem are common among uneducated families.

THEME 2.5: SOCIAL FACTORS

The study also explored social factors that could attribute for dropout rate in the study area. These are parental illness, parental death, divorce, and peer influence. The table below presents the responses given by the study participants.

Table-5: Reply given on Social Factors

No	Items	No. Resp	Responses in Percentage and Frequency										Media n
			Very Low		Low		Undecided		High		Very High		
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	Parental illness	239	35	15.1	75	31.4	2	9.2	5	24.9	4	19.7	3
2	Parental death	239	13	5.4	90	37.7	1	7.9	6	25.2	5	23.0	3
3	Family breakdown/divorce	239	36	15.1	11	4.7	4	19.2	4	16.0	3	1.3	2
4	Peer influence	239	48	20.1	92	38.5	2	10.9	6	28.7	6	2.5	2

The results in table-5 above shows that 46.5% (110) respondents were of the opinion that parental illness has low contribution to school dropouts, 44.4% (106) believed that it has contribution to students dropout, whereas the remaining 9.2% (22) respondents were not able to take position on this item. This implies that it is hard to generalize parental illness as a significant dropout factor in the context of this study; however, Rupon (2012) points that health of the parent is an important determining factor of school dropout. Similar to that of

parental illness, respondents reply on the rest of the social factors-parental death, divorce and peer influence could not lead to conclude that these are significant reasons for school dropout in the context of this study.

THEME-3: PREVENTION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL DROPOUTS

The last objective of this study was to identify the possible prevention mechanisms put in place by stakeholders' to minimize dropout among the primary school pupils in the Gurage Zone. Thus, this section presented what stakeholders (parents, PTA, schools, districts education leaders, and zonal education office) made to avoid school dropout.

Gurage Zone education office, the body responsible for running the entire education affair in all the districts under its administration, recognized that school dropout is a continuing challenge in the study area and explained the attempts made by mobilizing the district education leaders, education experts, school principals, teachers and the community at large. For example, schools are organizing tutorial classes for law performing students so as to retain them in the school system, but it was not quite enough to address the needs of the students and to take the learners to the next level in the education system. District education offices are organizing discussion forums with the community, but the situation is not changed to the desired level. For instance, one interviewee said, "When the schools were under construction, the community in general was active participant, but after the schools started functioning, I haven't seen anyone working with schools. I just send my kid believing that the school can take care of his study". This interviewee implies believes developed among the rural community that once after the school is built, a school is responsible for children's education and not the parent. The respondent has no idea in what way the community could support the school to maximize students' learning beyond registering children once in the start of every year. The problem basically is because the parents, especially in rural areas, are not educated and don't know how to follow-up their kids. It is not a matter of willingness and interest; it is a problem of not knowing to how to contribute for the best performance of the schools and children. On the other hand, as it has been discussed in the preceding section, the parents' flawed perception about the benefits of education is one of the factors contributing to students' dropout. Therefore, stakeholders have to work on creating awareness on the values of education. Stakeholders' effort on awareness creation has to be preplanned and launched in an organized manner to reach every family so that they can manage at least the challenges facing schools because of perception gaps.

There was also an attempt to send classroom teachers in search of the missing students up to their home in some cases, but it didn't work as planned by the office. In addition to this, there are schools that provide learning materials like exercise book, pen and pencils for the students from most unable family; however, the support is not systemic. It depends on individual schools' effort and teachers' determination. It has no permanent financial source. Thus further effort is expected from the stakeholders in this regard. Similarly, the interview data underlined the poor school infrastructures and facilities within each school that are negatively affecting learners' motivation. This finding concurs with a study by Sahin, Arseven and Kilic (2016) that concludes schools failure to provide basic school infrastructures and facilities affect students' motivation to go to school for it not interesting place. Providing children with learning environments where they play and enjoy themselves is helpful in attracting students to schools. This is intuitive reality for children; they go to school not only to learn but also to play and socialize. Thus school infrastructures and facilities have to support this.

The other main cause of school dropout, which the stakeholders need to work on, is student migration to urban area. The migration is attributed mainly by the Gurage community, which is estimated over 800,000 and whose livelihood depends on running businesses in the urban areas throughout the country (Danver, 2015). In this community, the Christian population celebrates ‘Meskel’ and the Muslim celebrates ‘Arefa’ as their local festive season. During these festive periods everyone living outside the home village comes home to visit family and to spend the celebration with family members. This is very common practice, and after a week of celebration, when going back almost everyone takes a child with him/her as a traditional responsibility to bring up that child. However, this was found as one the main reason for children’s migration and school dropout as mentioned by the interviewees of this study repeatedly. In most cases these children leave school and involve in business activities following the footsteps of the person who has taken them.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to investigate what contributes to student dropout among government primary schools in the Gurage Zone. The study was guided by three specific objectives. The first was to examine the prevalence of dropout rate in government primary schools in Gurage Zone. The second one was to identify the causes of government primary school dropout in Gurage Zone and third one was to explore strategies that were put in place to control dropouts in government primary schools by stakeholders.

The general picture of the data indicated a remarkable increment in the overall enrollment rate in primary schools. However, a significant number of students dropout before the end of the academic year. The dropout ranges up to 13.59% compared to the number of students who started the academic year. The study identified the factors that caused the dropout and classified them as *student related factors, school related factors, economic factors, social factors and cultural factors*. Among these the *economic* and *student* related factors are taking the lion’s share in pushing students out of the school system immediately after registration. Precisely speaking, the migration of students to urban area, the low perception of students and parents on the benefits of education and the parents’ demand for child labor are the main reasons. The school related factors are also serious. The poor school infrastructures and facilities were found as the prominent causes behind children’s early school leaving. The argument that asserts poor parental education and awareness as determining factor of child education was also apparent in the study. Therefore, the dropout problem is not as such simple to overcome without taking steps on the multiple factors that impeded children’s schooling. Therefore, it is suggested that stakeholders and local education authorities have to take step by step action that is compatible with the underlying factors of early school leaving.

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