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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL DROPOUT WITH THE PERSPECTIVE OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Okul Yöneticilerinin Bakış Açısıyla Okul Terki Algısı

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ABSTRACT

In today's society, school dropout is a widespread problem in every country, regardless of whether it is a developed, developing or underdeveloped country. It is a social as well as an educational problem with multiple causes, although the dropout situation of each child differs from each other. The aim of this study is to evaluate the causes of school dropout from the perspective of school administrators and to present a description of this problem from the perspective of administrators. According to the results and evaluations obtained, the problem will be addressed comprehensively and suggestions will be made to fill the literature gap. The data obtained in the study were analyzed qualitatively using an inductive approach. School administrators working in Sakarya province participated in the study. According to the results obtained, these administrators mostly emphasized that the family factor is the main cause of the existing problems, as well as the compulsory education process, i.e. the forced attendance of the child to school, financial difficulties, academic failures of the child have significant effects on the dropout and absenteeism of the student.

Keywords: Adolescent, dropout, absenteeism, school administrator.

ÖZET

Okul terki günümüz toplumunda gelişmiş, gelişmekte olan veya gelişmemiş ülkeler fark etmeksizin her ülkede görülen kapsamlı oldukça geniş olan bir sorun durumudur. Her çocuğun göstermiş olduğu okul terki durumu birbirinden farklılık göstermekle birlikte birden çok sebebi olan sosyal ve aynı zamanda eğitsel bir problemdir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, okul terkinin nedenlerinin okul idarecileri gözüyle değerlendirilmesini sağlamak ve bu sorunun idarecilerin gözünden betimlenmesini ortaya koymaktır. Elde edilen sonuçlara ve değerlendirmelere göre sorunun kapsamlı ele alınması sağlanacak, literatürel boşluğun doldurulması için gereken önerilere yer verilecektir. Çalışmada elde edilen veriler, tümevarım yaklaşımı kullanılarak, nitel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmaya Sakarya ilinde görev yapan okul idarecileri katılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlara göre söz konusu idareciler çoğunlukla var olan sorunların temel sebebinin aile faktörü olduğunu vurgulamışlardır, bunun yanı sıra zorunlu eğitim sürecinin yani çocuğun okula zorla gelmesinin, maddi olanaksızlıkların, çocuğun akademik başarısızlıklarının öğrencinin okul terki ve devamsızlığı noktası önemli etkileri söz konusudur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yaşlılar, huzurevi, kognisyon, teknoloji, sosyal hizmet.

INTRODUCTION

School dropout is defined as a student's premature departure from the school where he/she is studying and the emergence of situations of non-attendance or inability to attend the current level of education. School is an environment where the individual not only undergoes the education and training process but also engages in social activities and events. When the school environment is considered in this context, it contains many elements, it is a mixed place where both the emergence of dropout, the education and training process and socialization are seen. When the concept of school dropout is examined in the literature, it is associated with the concepts of dropping out of school, dropping out and leaving school in Turkey. Until the 18th Ministry of National Education Council, there was no literary definition and content in the literature (Özdemir et al., 2010).

Two types of definitions are emphasized in the concept of school dropout: formal and functional. In its functional meaning, it is seen as a problem in which the effects it will have on the future life of the student and the reasons that lead to the problem are investigated. In the official sense, it is considered as a compulsory education process in terms of the time that the student should spend in education and training activities in terms of age and population age (Santibanez & Guarino, 2021).

According to the researches, it has been observed that individuals who drop out of school are unemployed or even if they get a job, they do not work in this job for many years and work with low salaries. They are more prone to crime and feel serious anxiety about the future (Karapür, 2017). When school dropout is analyzed in terms of gender, it is at a higher level in females compared to males, and considering OECD data, this rate is 41% for males and 46% for females in Turkey. At the same time, Turkey is the 6th country with the highest rate among OECD countries (OECD, 2015).

Multiple reasons for school dropout are emphasized. According to the general maladjustment theory, students drop out of school due to different behaviors observed in themselves, and not feeling belonging to school and alienation from school over time are among these factors. The maladaptive group membership theory, on the other hand, looks at school dropout and peer relationships, and if

there are problems in peer relationships, these people are more likely to drop out of school. School socialization theory, on the other hand, emphasizes the structural features of the school in school dropout.

If the principal or other employees working in the school have an apathetic structure, it becomes possible for school dropout to occur.

According to the Family Inadequate Socialization Theory, the educational level and background of the family are influential on students' dropping out of school.

Failure of the family to support the child's education leads to increased dropout.

According to the structural characteristics theory, the fact that an individual belongs to a different religion, ethnicity, gender and demographic characteristics in a school causes dropout (Taylı, 2008:91; Zorbaz, 2018:25-26; Küçükarslan, 2019:228).

There are certain risk factors related to the causes of school dropout and these are expressed in three different ways: social risk factors, academic risk factors and risk factors arising from behaviors related to academic status.

- Social risk factors are risk factors arising from an individual's race, gender, ethnicity, family structure and the city and socio-economic structure in which they live.
- Academic risk factors include an individual's innate talent, test scores on exams, or a history of grade repetition.
- Risk factors arising from behaviors related to academic status; school grades, failures, communication and interaction with the school are included in this scope (Lee & Burkam, 2000:4).

At the same time, in another study, it is mentioned that it is difficult to determine the causes of school dropout and that there are two different risks for students to drop out of school. The first one is individual factors, which are related to students' characteristics, attitudes, behaviors and experiences, and contextual factors, which are related to students' relationships with their families, schools, communities and peers (Rumberger (2019:7).

METHOD

The research is a qualitative study in which the data obtained through a semi-structured form were used to determine the views of school principals working in different school types in Sakarya province on school dropout and absenteeism.

Semi-structured interview technique was used to collect the data. The main purpose of qualitative research is to reach the emotional depth of the inner worlds related to the subject by examining the

sample in more depth (Merriam, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Interviews were conducted in line with this purpose.

Working Group

This study was conducted with 30 school administrators from different school types in Sakarya province. The administrators participating in the study were informed about the purpose and content of the study. Of the participants, 21 were male and 9 were female administrators who have been working as administrators in educational institutions for many years.

Data Collection Tool

In order to collect the data, a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers based on the opinions of field experts was used.

Data Collection

30 school administrators in Sakarya province were asked to answer questions about the reasons for student absenteeism and dropout, their awareness of absenteeism and dropout, the effects of school administration, teachers, friends, families, social environment, academic achievement anxiety on absenteeism, and the strategies used by administrators and teachers to reduce dropout and absenteeism. They were also asked for their opinions and suggestions on how to reduce dropout and absenteeism. The interviews lasted approximately 40-50 minutes and data collection was conducted at the institutions where the principals worked.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the permission of school principals. The data obtained were coded line by line on a special form. The coded pages were read one by one and the main concepts were extracted and written on the analysis pages (Cohen & Manion, 2007). Considering the reliability of the research, "direct quotations" were used in the opinions of the principals. In this way, the necessary concepts and relationships will be reached to explain the collected data. The initials of the high schools where they work were written in parentheses.

Ethical Consideration

Necessary permissions (ethical, administrative, etc.) were obtained before starting the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study. After a detailed explanation, informed consent was obtained from the participants.

FINDINGS

The qualitative data obtained as a result of the analysis are given below in codes, themes and categories by making direct quotations from the content of the interviews with school principals.

Findings on the Reasons for Students' Absenteeism and Dropout

As a result of the interviews with school administrators, factors such as insufficient financial means, academic failures, inadequate readiness levels of students, lack of importance attached to education by the family and indifference of the environment constitute the main reasons for school dropout. In addition, some administrators emphasized that the obligation to attend school, the increase in the number of foreign students, the high number of courses and heavy courses, and the misguidance of students in secondary school were important in school dropout.

"Financial inadequacies, academic failure, foreign nationals, lack of expectations and goals for education, wrong circle of friends outside school (ADL).

Dislike of school and reading, lack of readiness, obligation to contribute to the family, technology addiction (SAL). Family disintegration, economic inadequacies, low cultural level (ŞEOAL), absenteeism and dropouts increase as course failure increases in students who choose the wrong school from middle school and attend Anatolian high school (SERAL), economic conditions, environment and family conditions have an impact (SEAL), negative social interactions at school, problems in classroom interactions, some parents demand that their students continue the high school part of compulsory education in a formal way (KAL)."

Findings Related to Awareness of Students' Absenteeism and Dropout Tendencies (Student-Family-Administrator Awareness)

In response to the question 'awareness of students' absenteeism and dropout tendencies', school administrators tried to look at the question from the perspective of parents and students in a multidimensional way. While some administrators stated that both students and parents were not aware of absenteeism and dropping out of school, that is, they did not care about this situation, others stated that they were aware and cared about it.

School administrators also noted that some parents develop moods based on the period after their child starts school. *"Some of the students drop out of school out of necessity and some consciously (SAPAL), Parents are aware of the situation by saying let's get him started, let's give him one last try, but this process can sometimes turn into a painful process between the school and the parents (AIHL), It doesn't make much difference for divided families (SERAL), Students are aware of their absenteeism, they think they can go to open education and finish high school (SiHL), Those who are absent to help with family chores are generally uncomfortable with absenteeism (SAPAL), They are definitely*

not aware. School environment, achievement status, etc. (ADL), Students are aware of absenteeism, classes are informed by branch teachers in advance (FSL)" at the same time, there were also administrators who expressed opinions about students' awareness "Students' awareness of absenteeism is generally low. Many students are not aware of the seriousness of issues such as absenteeism and dropping out of school and do not know about the long-term consequences of these issues. The fact that our parents stand behind their students' absenteeism is seen as a major negative (KAL)".

Findings on the Effects of School Administration on Students' Absenteeism and Dropout

In response to the question about the effects of school administration on students' absenteeism, some school administrators emphasized that school administration had little effect, that absenteeism over 5 days and not being able to get a document reduced absenteeism, and that a few students could be brought to school through home and parent visits. Lack of interest in students and too many rules and regulations also lead to absenteeism. School management should also control absenteeism.

"Positive attitude of the school administration and strong communication decreases dropout, while harsh, rude and hurtful approach increases dropout (ADL); Failure to take care of students sufficiently, not treating students as adults, lack of a culture of forgiveness (EİHL); The school administration's very strict work on issues such as dress code and etc., apart from the regulations, may be effective, this may have little effect (SAPAL); A few students can be won through home and parent visits (SIHL); The issue of not being able to get a document in case of absenteeism of 5 days or more has reduced absenteeism (SEPAL)";

there is also a view that school administrators have no influence on school absenteeism;

"Maybe it's 1% (FSL)"; Those who care about tracking absenteeism are concerned "Regular follow-up of absenteeism reduces dropout (ŞEOA)".

In addition, some administrators emphasized the early intervention processes of the administration in absenteeism, "By monitoring students' absenteeism and academic performance, school management aims to intervene early in students' problems and keep students in school. In this way, it can improve students' academic achievement, make students happier and more successful at school, and increase students' future job opportunities. Therefore, it is extremely important for school management to work seriously on students' absenteeism and dropouts and develop various strategies to ensure that students stay in school (KAL)".

Findings on the Effects of Teachers on Students' Absenteeism and School Dropout

According to the data obtained from school administrators to determine what kind of effect teachers have on school absenteeism, teachers' ignorance of students' problems and speaking in a demoraliz-

ing and insulting way; teachers' inability to make students like the lessons, teachers' inability to give self-confidence to students, teachers' inability to get down to the level of students, and teachers' inability to produce solutions for the negative climate that develops in the classroom environment affects them. In addition, there are also opinions that teachers have little or no responsibility for student absenteeism and school dropout. When all opinions are evaluated, it is seen that although teachers' indifference is the main reason for dropout, teachers' teaching style at the beginning and end of the semester is also effective in absenteeism. *"Teachers' ignorance of students' problems and their humiliating and demoralizing attitudes in class increase dropout rates (AIHL); Having zero-performing teachers, teachers' failure to get down to the level of the students' achievements, the negative climate in the classroom environment (SAPAL); Teachers are indifferent towards students who are absent and likely to drop out (SIHL); Regular follow-up of teachers can reduce parental indifference (SERAL); No effect is seen (ŞEOAL); It is around 5 percent due to ownership (FSL)".* In addition to these views, the psychological (motivating) effect of teachers was also mentioned; *"Teachers can also track students' absences and intervene early in students' problems. Thus, they can find solutions to improve students' achievement by keeping them in school. In this way, teachers can also increase students' self-confidence, make them more self-reliant and contribute more to students' plans for the future. Therefore, it is extremely important for teachers to work seriously on students' dropout and absenteeism and to develop various strategies to ensure that students stay in school (KAL)".*

Findings on the Effects of Peers, Friends and Social Environment on Students' Absenteeism and School Dropout

According to the data obtained from the school administrators to determine what kind of effect friends and peer relations have on school absenteeism, school administrators emphasized that they have a great effect at this point, that this effect is less in primary school, that the family should play a role in following up friends, and that friends have an incentive for absenteeism. In some views, its impact is mentioned but not emphasized as the most important role. *"The wrong environment of friends increases school dropout and even negatively affects the efforts to ensure student attendance. (ADL); Wrong choice of friends, dilemmas with the desire to get along with friends, Socialization in virtual environments (FSL); The social environment of the student and the school has a great impact on school dropout. Sometimes students drop out even if they do not want to (AIHL); they may be absent due to motivations such as proving themselves, hanging out with their friends (SAPAL); Negativities, bad examples, etc. in the environment where the student is suddenly in, the abundance of negative activities in the environment, the desire to spend free time (SEAL); The high number of school courses and the fact that in schools without exams, friends may influence each other and drop out of school (SIHL); It negatively affects school attendance by creating role models (SERAL)." Some school administrators have influence, but not completely *"It has an impact but it is not among the most important reasons, around 20% are influenced by their friends (ŞEOAL); Students are often under the influence**

of their peer groups and these groups can influence students' behavior and decisions. Friend groups can influence whether students stay in school or drop out. For this reason, the choice of a student's peer group is something that students should pay close attention to, as the peer group can influence the student in good and bad ways. Students can make more informed decisions about peer and friend influences and increase their tendency to stay in school (KAL)".

Findings on Family Influence on Absenteeism and School Dropout in Students

According to the data obtained from the school administrators in determining what kind of effect the family has on school absenteeism, school administrators emphasize that the family has a great influence on this point compared to other variables. Factors such as socio-economic structure, cultural variables, the family's status as a model, the family's expectations from the student, etc. directly affect this. At the same time, the educational and socio-economic level of the family has a direct impact. In addition, the lack of interest of families with children in vocational high schools also affects this situation.

"The family has the greatest influence on student success and absenteeism. With close attention and follow-up, there is no absenteeism (ADL). The culture of poverty, divorced and dispersed families, unnecessary and too much tolerance, family businesses (FSL), Indifference, economic and division affect a lot (AIHL), Family's indifference is very effective as they do not face any negative consequences in case of absenteeism (SAPAL), The family expects success above the student's capacity, the student whose academic level is not sufficient prefers absenteeism and dropout (SIHL), Family and the economic and cultural level of the family are the most important factors (SERAL)".

In addition, the fact that the family has a seasonal worker structure also affects this situation. For example, according to one administrator, *"Families' livelihoods or being agricultural workers (SEO-AL)"* covers this. Some administrators also emphasized school-family cooperation; *"The family has a great influence on students' absenteeism and dropout rates. Families can motivate students to stay in school, direct students to activities that are in line with their interests, and ensure that students participate in out-of-school activities. In addition, by providing academic support to students, families can help students succeed in school (KAL)."*

Findings on Academic Achievement Anxiety and Its Effect on Absenteeism and School Dropout in Students

When school administrators were asked to determine what kind of an effect academic achievement has on absenteeism, the data revealed that school administrators think that absenteeism increases especially in students for whom the goal of academic achievement causes intense anxiety. They also

believe that those who do not achieve academically tend to be absent. Fear of being unemployed after school can also lead to absenteeism.

"Having academic success and the goal of academic success have a positive effect on students' attendance and success (FSL); Expecting academic success from students who do not have academic success leads to absenteeism (AIHL); Students do not want to follow a course they do not like (SAPAL); Academic success anxiety can help students succeed in school, but it can also increase their tendency to drop out of school. Students may experience anxiety as a result of failing in some subjects or comparing themselves with successful students. This anxiety can make it difficult for students to stay in school and may strengthen their thoughts of dropping out (KAL)". Apart from this, the opinions of school administrators from schools where there is no academic anxiety are that this situation does not affect the students too much. "I don't think it has much effect (SIHL), They don't think about it much (SERAL)"

Findings on the Strategies Applied by Administrators and Teachers to Reduce Absenteeism and Dropout among Students

When we look at the strategies implemented by administrators and teachers to reduce absenteeism and dropout rates, we see that they emphasized the following main topics: intensive activation of the counselling service, development of projects, healthy interactions with parents, and special attention to follow-up by the administration.

"Notifying the parents of absences on the same day and at the end of the day, trying to solve the student's family environment and problems through home visits (ADL); First of all, the school administration makes efforts to communicate and inform the parents. When parents are informed in a timely manner, they can intervene in absenteeism and the situation of abandonment decreases (FSL); Visiting families, guidance of students by the counseling service, improvement of environmental and economic conditions (AIHL); Notifying parents of absences via SMS, one-to-one interviews with absent students (SAPAL); Parent communication, following up and taking care of students, sending absenteeism letters to parents (SEAL); Showing the school's garden environment and sports activities are effective (SIHL); One-to-one meetings with parents, reporting absences, vounseling teacher, social activities, school fees (SERAL); Absenteeism prevention projects, positive climate created in the classroom, positive climate created in the school, increasing social activities (SEOAL)." In line with the strategies of administrators and teachers, the administrators itemized them as follows;

"Early Intervention: School administrators and teachers can intervene early by monitoring students' absenteeism and potential dropouts. This can ensure that students are supported to stay in school and have access to the necessary resources.

Academic Support: Teachers can help students succeed in school by providing academic support. This can boost students' self-confidence and keep them in school.

Directing to Areas of Interests: Orienting Students to their interests can make them more motivated to stay in school. This can reduce student retention and dropout rates.

Family and Community Cooperation: School administrators, teachers and parents can collaborate to ensure that students stay in school. It is also important to use resources available in the community to help students stay in school.

Extracurricular Activities: Engaging students in out-of-school activities can make them more motivated to stay in school. These activities can increase students' self-confidence and keep them in school.

Student Support Programs; School administrators and teachers can develop student support programs to help students stay in school. These programs can be designed in accordance with students' needs and can provide support for students to stay in school (KAL)."

Administrators' Opinions and Suggestions for Reducing Student Absenteeism and Dropout

The opinions and suggestions of the administrators for reducing absenteeism and dropout rates in schools focused on reducing the duration of compulsory education, conducting comprehensive research by the ministry and directing children to open or distance education programs if they do not want to go to school. It was mentioned that efforts should be made to connect absent students with their social environment and that vocational secondary schools should be opened. *"Attendance can be prevented by connecting absent students with their close friends, and by including them in activities, competitions, projects, etc. at school (SAPAL); Each child should be educated according to his/her interests and abilities, vocational secondary schools should be opened (FSL); The Ministry should conduct more detailed workshops on absenteeism (SIHL), Compulsory education should be abolished except for primary school (SERAL); Students who do not attend should not be forced, there should be open secondary school or distance education starting from the 6th grade (ŞEOAL)".*

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to the research and the data obtained, school administrators see the family as the most important reason for students' absenteeism and school dropout.

At the same time, financial inadequacies, students' lack of goals, students' unwillingness to study and read, economic conditions, excessive number of courses, parents' lack of interest, and academic failure of the child are other factors affecting attendance and dropout.

Administrators do not have a clear and definite view on their awareness of students' dropout and absenteeism. Some of the administrators think that they are fully aware, some think that they are partially aware, and some think that they are not aware at all. However, proportionally, school ad-

ministrators think that there is no clear awareness of students' dropout and absenteeism. Therefore, first of all, families should be informed about the seriousness of the situation and students should be reached through their families.

There is a dominant view that school administration does not have much influence on school dropout and absenteeism in terms of self-criticism. Only some practices within the school trigger dropout and absenteeism. For example, the harsh, rude and oppressive attitude of the administration, not protecting the student, not treating the student as an adult, and not caring about forgiveness trigger dropout. Some school administrators made suggestions on school dropout and absenteeism and emphasized the impact of increasing the function of the guidance service, regular follow-up of absenteeism and healthy communication with the family on reducing absenteeism and school dropout.

In this respect, studies should be carried out for group counseling and group guidance activities that are structured and have specific stages, psychological counseling services should be carried out by school psychological counselors, and group guidance services should be carried out by class and branch teachers at school. It is emphasized that school administrators have little influence on teachers' views on absenteeism and dropout, and it is mentioned that some teacher behaviors trigger the process.

For example, monotonous teaching, disinterested behavior, and an oppressive attitude in the classroom are seen as a triggering factor for absenteeism. From this point of view, teachers should include different approaches that students are not used to, such as hybrid model, differentiated instruction, flipped model, etc. in the lesson teaching process.

According to the findings obtained according to school administrators, the most influential and important factor after the family factor is friends, peers and the social environment. School administrators think that situations such as choosing the wrong friends, role model behaviors, and proving oneself are effective in terms of school dropout and absenteeism, and state that the negativities and bad examples in the individual's environment affect the individual. Some administrators think that the influence of friends and peers is less, especially at the primary school level.

In this context, it is necessary to make the school policing practice more functional, to monitor the social environment and friends with negative tendencies and predisposition to substance use in schools, and to warn and educate families about this issue. Almost all school administrators think that the most important factor in school dropout and absenteeism is the family. Family fragmentation, poverty culture, too much tolerance, indifference, low educational and socio-economic status, and expectation of academic achievement above the student's potential trigger absenteeism and dropout.

The Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the institutions and organizations affiliated with these ministries should organize trainings and visit families as much as possible. Since families find it difficult to attend trainings, it

is very important that trainers go directly to the families and visit them in village and neighborhood coffee houses.

School administrators think that academic anxiety has no effect on absenteeism and school dropout. Administrators are of the opinion that students with academic inadequacy and lack of interest in school and lessons are more likely to be absent. The student's interest in attending a course that he/she does not like and does not want to attend is quite low. In this context, students with low interest in school and academic courses should be directed to vocational education centers immediately.

Strategies used by school administrators to reduce absenteeism and dropout rates include home and parent visits, SMS system, positive approach to students, guidance, creating a positive climate at school, home and parent visits, prioritizing sports activities and prioritizing dialogue with parents.

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