

The Relationship between School Dropout and Future Anxiety among Preparatory Students in Qatar

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between school dropout and future anxiety among preparatory school students in the State of Qatar. School dropout is considered one of the most pressing issues facing educational systems in many countries, including Qatar, as it can have detrimental effects on students' future lives. Future anxiety is also a psychological concern that affects many adolescents at this developmental stage, potentially leading to poor educational decisions, including dropping out of school. A quantitative research approach was adopted in this study, utilizing a questionnaire distributed to a sample of preparatory school students in Qatari schools. Both school dropout and future anxiety were measured using reliable scales. The results revealed a statistically significant relationship between school dropout and elevated levels of future anxiety among students. Moreover, differences in anxiety and dropout levels were observed based on certain demographic variables, such as gender and socioeconomic status. This study contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between school dropout and future anxiety and offers recommendations for stakeholders in the Qatari educational system regarding the importance of adopting strategies that support students in coping with future anxiety, thereby reducing dropout rates.

Keywords: School Dropout, Future Anxiety, Preparatory Stage, Qatar.

Introduction

School dropout is one of the most pressing challenges facing educational systems worldwide, including in the State of Qatar (Sadeeq, 2021). Its causes are diverse and span across social, economic, psychological, and educational factors. School dropout is defined as a student's discontinuation of education before completing the required academic stage. This phenomenon poses a significant threat to students' future opportunities and results in negative consequences at both the individual and societal levels (Attia El-Sayed Dehim & Hesham, 2018).

The preparatory stage is a particularly sensitive period in a student's life, during which they experience various psychological and social changes and begin to form perceptions about their future (Tamer Bushra Khalil & Afaf, 2024). At this stage, students may experience varying levels of anxiety and stress about the future, which can influence their academic performance and attitudes toward education. Future anxiety is a psychological disorder characterized by fears and concerns related to upcoming opportunities—whether professional, personal, or social.

Several studies have shown that future anxiety may be one of the contributing factors to school dropout (Al-Harbi, Tahani bint Mohammed, 2014). When a student experiences persistent anxiety about the future, they may find it difficult to concentrate and perform academically, which can lead to declining academic achievement and, ultimately, dropping out of school.

In the Qatari context, some studies indicate high dropout rates in certain preparatory schools. However, there is a lack of sufficient research focusing on the relationship between this phenomenon and students' future anxiety. This study aims to explore the relationship between school dropout and future anxiety among preparatory school students in Qatar. Therefore, it seeks to answer several key questions: What is the level of school dropout among preparatory students in Qatar? What is their level of future anxiety? Is there a statistically significant relationship between school dropout and future anxiety? Additionally, the study investigates the influence of certain demographic variables, such as gender and socioeconomic status, on these phenomena.

Through this research, we hope to provide deeper insights into the psychological factors associated with school dropout, thereby contributing to the development of educational strategies aimed at reducing this issue in the future.

This study addressed the issue of school dropout based on data obtained in the study, which indicate a growing trend in dropout cases that can lead to long-term psychological effects, particularly among preparatory school girls in Qatar. While previous studies have examined school dropout from academic or economic perspectives, this study shifts the focus toward the emotional and psychological consequences, especially future anxiety.

The main academic contribution of this research lies in exploring the relationship between school dropout among preparatory students in Qatari schools and future anxiety. It offers context-specific recommendations that may support the development of targeted educational and psychological interventions.

Letrecher Review

School dropout is a significant issue that impacts the quality of education and leads to the loss of many educational and career opportunities for students. In this context, several studies have addressed the causes of school dropout and proposed solutions to mitigate it by examining the various influencing factors.

The study by Afrah Mohammed (2019) aimed to investigate the role of school counseling programs in reducing dropout rates and improving academic achievement among secondary

school students in Jabal Awliya locality. The study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach and used a questionnaire as a data collection tool, targeting a sample of 36 counselors and 303 teachers. The results revealed statistically significant differences in the role of counseling programs in reducing dropout rates and enhancing academic performance. The study also found that the effectiveness of counseling programs was higher among female students, while no significant differences were found based on counselors' experience or academic qualifications. One of the key recommendations was to increase attention to counseling programs in secondary schools.

Meanwhile, the study by Maha bint Rabah Al-Mukhlafi and Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Munee' (2017) examined the extent and causes of dropout in vocational education programs for girls in several regions of Saudi Arabia. This study utilized a descriptive documentary and survey methodology, collecting data from administrative records and questionnaires administered to teachers and female students who had dropped out. The findings showed a dropout rate of 11.29% during the study period, with key contributing factors including organizational procedures and educational services, such as delayed financial rewards and limited job opportunities after graduation—indicating the influence of external factors on dropout decisions.

Another study, conducted by Mohammed Al-Harasha and Amina Hamad (2016), explored the causes of school dropout, its impact on development, and the role of social institutions in addressing the issue. The researchers employed a descriptive survey approach and collected data from 144 participants, including school principals, parents, and students. The results indicated that participants rated the causes of dropout and the role of schools and community institutions as moderate, with no statistically significant differences based on gender or occupation.

The previous studies consistently identify school dropout as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by educational, social, economic, and psychological factors. They highlight the importance of counseling programs and creating a supportive school environment as effective strategies for mitigating this issue. Based on this, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between school dropout and future anxiety among preparatory school students in the State of Qatar, with a focus on the psychological and social factors that may contribute to dropout decisions.

Problem Statement

School dropout is one of the most challenging issues faced by countries worldwide, particularly in the Arab world. A study by Amira Qasimi and Zahra Majoubi (2022) reported that approximately 24% of children in the Arab region drop out of school, with female dropout rates ranging from 31% to 52% in rural areas. School dropout remains a major challenge affecting educational systems across the globe, including in the State of Qatar. Many students in the preparatory stage experience anxiety about the future, which may lead them to make unwise decisions—such as leaving school before completing their education. This dropout phenomenon is not only driven by economic and social factors, but is also closely linked to psychological disorders such as future anxiety, which causes feelings of insecurity and a lack of clarity about what lies ahead.

Accordingly, the problem addressed in this study is to determine the extent to which future anxiety affects school dropout rates among preparatory school students in Qatar, and to explore the relationship between these two phenomena from both psychological and educational perspectives.

This study aims to achieve several primary objectives:

1. To measure the level of school dropout among preparatory students in Qatar.
2. To assess the level of future anxiety among these students.
3. To examine the relationship between school dropout and future anxiety through a detailed analysis of the collected data.

Additionally, the study seeks to identify whether statistically significant differences exist in this relationship based on demographic variables such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the psychological and social factors leading to school dropout. It provides valuable insights that can assist educational policymakers in Qatar in developing strategies to support students during this critical stage of their development. Moreover, the study offers practical recommendations aimed at reducing dropout rates by addressing students' levels of future anxiety—thereby enhancing their chances of continuing their education and achieving their aspirations.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative approach using a descriptive correlational design to explore the relationship between school dropout and future anxiety among preparatory school students in the State of Qatar. This methodology was chosen as it is appropriate for analyzing psychological and social variables and testing the relationship between them.

The study hypothesized a positive correlation between dropout and future anxiety among students at the preparatory level. It also hypothesized statistically significant differences in dropout rates at the 0.05 significance level based on school type (public vs. private), and based on grade level (seventh, eighth, and ninth grades).

A structured questionnaire was the main data collection tool, consisting of two primary scales:

1. A **school dropout scale**, which included items related to potential contributing factors such as family, social, and psychological problems.
2. A **future anxiety scale**, composed of items designed to assess students' levels of concern about their personal and professional futures.

The sample consisted of **300 male and female students** from various public and private preparatory schools across Qatar. A **stratified random sampling** method was used to ensure accurate representation of all age and social categories. Students were given approximately **20 minutes** to complete the questionnaire.

Data were analyzed using statistical software such as **SPSS** or **Excel**. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate means and standard deviations for dropout levels and future anxiety. Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to examine the relationship between the two

variables. Group differences were tested using **t-tests** or **ANOVA**, depending on demographic variables such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

The questionnaire's **validity** was ensured by having it reviewed by a panel of experts in education and psychology, while its **reliability** was measured using **Cronbach's alpha**, which yielded a satisfactory value above 0.8—indicating the tools were reliable for measuring the targeted variables.

Discussion of Results

Despite the strict and firm measures implemented by various school administrations to regulate student behavior and address negative phenomena within the educational system, no educational system is entirely free from issues such as student absenteeism or dropout. However, the extent of this problem may vary from one country to another, and from one educational stage to the next. School administrations often find it difficult to completely eliminate serious infractions committed by students, such as skipping school or individual classes, and making up excuses to leave school. For some students, escaping the constraints of the school day becomes their primary concern.

Several educators have attributed this phenomenon of deliberate absenteeism or dropout to family problems and domestic disintegration (Qasimi & Majoubi, 2022, p. 26; Hamza et al., 2017, p. 11). These issues are seen as key contributors to students' disengagement from school life.

This study was conducted on a random sample of preparatory school students from grades **seven, eight, and nine**, with a total of **50 students** of various nationalities enrolled in Qatari schools during the **2023–2024 academic year**. The students' ages ranged from **12 to 17 years**. The study sample consisted of **male preparatory school students** in schools across the State of Qatar. The table below presents the characteristics and distribution of this sample based on variables such as nationality, school type, and grade level:

Table (1)

Distribution of Study Participants in the Main Study According to Country, Type of School, and Grade Level

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Notes |
|--------------|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------|
| Country | Qatari | 38 | 76% | |
| | Egyptian | 2 | 4% | |
| | Yemeni | 5 | 10% | |
| | Sudanese | 1 | 2% | |
| | Palestinian | 3 | 6% | |
| | Saudi | 1 | 2% | |
| Total | | 50 | 100% | |
| School Type | Public | 42 | 84% | |
| | Private | 8 | 16% | |
| Total | | 50 | 100% | |
| Grade Level | Seventh Grade | 11 | 22% | |
| | Eighth Grade | 22 | 44% | |
| | Ninth Grade | 17 | 34% | |
| Total | | 50 | 100% | |

A pilot sample was selected to verify the psychometric properties, consisting of 20 students. The study was based on several hypotheses. The first hypothesis was: "There is a relationship between dropout and future anxiety among middle school students." To verify the validity of this hypothesis, the researcher used Pearson's correlation coefficient between dropout and future anxiety, and the results are shown in the following table:

Table (2)

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Dropout and Future Anxiety Scores

| Variable Correlation with Future Anxiety | |
|--|-----------------|
| Dropout / Future Anxiety | 0.957 ** |
| Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) | |

It is clear from Table (2) that there is a strong positive correlation between dropout and future anxiety with the highest correlation coefficient of (0.957), which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This result means that as future anxiety increases, dropout rates also increase, and vice versa. The researcher considers this to be a logical and reasonable outcome.

The second hypothesis states: "There are statistically significant differences in dropout responses at the 0.05 level attributed to the variable of school type (public vs. private)." To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used the "t-test" (T-test) to calculate the significance of differences between two independent groups, and the results are shown in Table (3):

Table (3)

T-test Results for Differences in Dropout Responses Based on School Type (Public vs. Private)

| Variable | School Type | N | Mean (M) | SD (σ) | T-Value | Sig. Level | Significance |
|----------|-------------|----|----------|--------|---------|------------|-----------------|
| Dropout | Public | 42 | 58.83 | 7.923 | 1.389 | 0.171 | Not Significant |
| | Private | 8 | 62.88 | 4.764 | | | |

From Table (3), it is clear that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean responses of students from public and private schools regarding school dropout, as the t-value is (1.389) with a significance level of (0.171), which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This result means that the factors leading to school dropout do not differ based on the type of school (public vs. private).

The third hypothesis states: "There are statistically significant differences in dropout responses at the 0.05 level attributed to the grade level (7th, 8th, 9th)." To verify this hypothesis, the researcher used One-Way ANOVA, and the results are shown in the following table:

Table (4)

One-Way ANOVA Results for Dropout Scores by Grade Level

| Grade Level | Mean (M) | SD (σ) | F-Value | p-value | Significance |
|---------------|----------|--------|---------|---------|--------------|
| Seventh Grade | 65.00 | 6.678 | 4.323 | 0.019 | Significant |
| Eighth Grade | 58.41 | 6.177 | | | |
| Ninth Grade | 57.29 | 8.491 | | | |

Significant at the 0.05 level

From Table (4), it is clear that there are statistically significant differences in dropout responses at the 0.05 level attributed to the grade level (7th, 8th, 9th), as the F-value is (4.323), with a p-value of (0.019), which is smaller than 0.05, making it statistically significant. To determine the cause of these differences, the LSD post-hoc test was used, and the results are shown below:

Table (5)

LSD Post-Hoc Test Results for Dropout Scores by Grade Level

| Comparison | Mean Difference | p-value | Significance |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|
| Seventh vs. Eighth Grade | 6.591* | 0.016 | Significant |
| Seventh vs. Ninth Grade | 7.706* | 0.008 | Significant |
| Eighth vs. Ninth Grade | 1.115 | 0.631 | Not Significant |

The results yielded several significant conclusions that contribute to understanding the relationship between the two phenomena. In this context, the study's findings were discussed in light of previous literature and the study's objectives.

Level of School Dropout among Middle School Students

The study results indicated that the level of school dropout among middle school students in Qatar varies significantly, with relatively high dropout rates recorded compared to expectations. The study demonstrated that social and economic factors play a substantial role in increasing the probability of dropout, with low-income families being more vulnerable to this phenomenon. These findings highlight the importance of improving students' economic and social conditions, which aligns with previous studies confirming the impact of external factors such as poverty and weak social support on increasing dropout rates.

Level of Future Anxiety among Students

The study also showed that the level of future anxiety was high among many middle school students. Students experiencing elevated levels of anxiety about the future were more likely to drop out of school. The results revealed that this anxiety is often associated with unclear perceptions about professional and social futures, reflecting feelings of instability and fear of failure. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that adolescents in the preparatory stage often face severe psychological anxiety due to unknown future challenges.

Relationship between School Dropout and Future Anxiety

Statistical analysis results demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between school dropout and future anxiety, as students suffering from high anxiety about their future were more prone to dropout. This suggests that future anxiety may be a psychological factor contributing to decisions to abandon education, highlighting the importance of addressing psychological anxiety in schools to reduce dropout rates. These findings confirmed some studies that examined the relationship between psychological stress and dropout decisions, showing that students facing high levels of anxiety about their future may experience difficulty adapting to the school environment.

Differences According to Demographic Variables

The study also revealed statistically significant differences in the level of dropout and future anxiety based on certain demographic variables. It was found that girls were more susceptible

to anxiety about the future compared to boys, which is consistent with some studies showing that girls may be more sensitive to future challenges. On the other hand, differences among students from various social and economic backgrounds were evident, with higher dropout rates in lower socioeconomic contexts, emphasizing the importance of providing economic and social support to help students overcome these difficult stages.

Impact of Educational and Psychological Interventions

This study provides strong indications of the necessity to implement early educational and psychological interventions to limit the impact of future anxiety on student achievement and prevent dropout. These interventions may include psychological counseling programs, life skills workshops, and helping students identify their future goals in a clear and organized manner. These programs can alleviate feelings of anxiety and improve student integration in the school environment, thereby contributing to reducing dropout rates.

Conclusion

The findings reached by the researcher are logical, acceptable, and theoretically consistent. The researcher explains that seventh-grade students still have a limited perspective on life and have not yet fully understood it. Their thinking remains weak and confined to negative superficial influences, which lead them to decide to leave school, develop an aversion to it, and lack patience in pursuing their academic goals. According to their limited experience, they are unable to deal with the causes and school problems that drive them to drop out, such as disliking school and lacking a sense of belonging due to the difficulty of certain subjects, peer bullying, harsh treatment by some teachers, excessive and unregulated homework, or school regulations—which, from their limited perspective, appear strict or punitive and restrict their freedom, among other issues.

In the context of feeling insecure at school or home, the absence of support from parents, teachers, and psychological specialists, as well as dependence on friends who influence their decisions and behaviors, combined with fear and anxiety about an unknown future, feelings of despair, and hatred of life due to school and home environments—potentially accompanied by the family's economic situation—all these factors may lead to dropping out and escaping from school. This contrasts with eighth and ninth-grade students, whose awareness and thinking have become more perceptive and conscious compared to seventh-grade students. Their understanding of life, for one reason or another, has become greater, more accurate, and more objective, enabling them to adapt to difficulties and problems that might otherwise push them to drop out, and to persevere in continuing their education.

Despite the preventive measures taken by the state to reduce school dropout by enforcing compulsory education laws, enacting deterrent legislation to limit the phenomenon, financially supporting poor families, preventing the employment of minors, and obligating media to raise awareness about confronting school dropout, the phenomenon still exists in Qatari society. However, we cannot describe it as a problem that negatively affects the educational and pedagogical process because, according to statistics, the number of dropouts decreases each year.

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