

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENTS' FRIENDS AND THE IMPACT ON DROP OUT RATES: A PSYCHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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***Abstract:** This study explores the intricate relationship between peer dynamics and student dropout rates in Israel. Results indicate notable differences between truant and non-truant students across various parameters related to peer relationships and academic performance. Non-truant students demonstrate higher connection levels, fewer attendance problems, and more shared activities, emphasizing the significance of maintaining connections within their peer group. Correlation analysis reveals positive relationships between interest similarity, connection with peers, and factors contributing to a supportive environment. Additionally, non-truant students exhibit a higher emphasis on the importance of friend support and tend to share more about school with their peers. Implications highlight the critical role of positive peer relationships in fostering academic and personal outcomes. Recommendations include strategies to promote positive connections, engage students in growth-oriented activities, and identify and support at-risk students. Acknowledging study limitations, this research provides actionable insights for educational stakeholders to address dropout causes and enhance positive outcomes for students.*

***Keywords:** Student Dropout Rates, friends dynamics, peer relationships, dropout prevention, emotional well-being, academic success, support systems.*

Student Dropout Rates

The global phenomenon of student dropout represents a critical challenge

within educational systems worldwide. Characterized by students leaving school prematurely before completing their education, this issue carries profound and enduring implications for individuals and society at large. Dropout rates exhibit considerable variations across countries and educational levels, presenting persistent challenges for educational institutions, policymakers, and communities alike.

Statistical data from Statista in 2022 illustrates that while 90 percent of the global population had completed primary education, only 66 percent and 40 percent had attained secondary and tertiary education, respectively. Gender disparities persist, with adult males exhibiting higher literacy rates than females, who predominantly pursue tertiary education. Notably, projections indicate that over 200 million children will be out of school by 2030, with significant percentages missing primary and lower secondary education, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing educational inequalities, with school closures affecting 90 percent of students globally. Approximately 1.5 billion students and 630 million teachers have faced disruptions, with an alarming estimate of 23.8 million students at risk of not returning to educational institutions, especially those in tertiary education. Marginalized groups, minorities, and children with disabilities bear the brunt of this crisis, leading to widened educational inequalities and learning gaps.

Within the context of Israel, dropout rates are not uniform across populations. For instance, Arab students experience higher dropout rates compared to their Jewish counterparts, and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face higher attrition than those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds.

Several factors contribute to dropout rates in Israel, as reported by the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Association of Local Authorities. These include regular absenteeism, low socioeconomic status, gender disparities, low

self-esteem, single-parent families, large families, parental disabilities, and parental low education levels.

This article aims to explore the impact of relationships between friends on student dropout rates in Israel. The hypothesis posits that a closer, more inclusive, and stronger friends' relationship correlates with a reduced likelihood of student dropout. Also, a positive relationship between peers, that contributes to students' experiences at school can reduce dropout rates. The significance of investigating this relationship lies in its potential to inform targeted interventions and strategies aimed at mitigating dropout rates and fostering educational attainment.

Understanding the intricate interplay between friends dynamics and dropout rates enables the development of targeted interventions and policies. Collaborative efforts between schools and communities are crucial to promoting positive relations between peers, enhancing communication channels, and providing support to students facing socio-economic challenges. By nurturing strong and supportive relationships, an environment conducive to educational persistence can be cultivated, ultimately enhancing the prospects of academic success for all students.

In conclusion, student dropout rates remain a formidable challenge globally, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors contributing to this phenomenon. Through a focused examination of friends dynamics in the Israeli context, this article aims to contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on dropout prevention. It is imperative for educational stakeholders to collaborate and implement targeted interventions to address the root causes and create an environment that fosters educational persistence and success for all students.

Impact of Relationships between friends on Student Dropout Rates

The impact of relationships, particularly those among peers and friends, on dropout rates is a multifaceted issue influenced by various factors. McLean's

(2020) research in Jamaica highlights the interconnectedness of dropout rates with student communities, families, and peer dynamics. Negative influences from friends and at-risk youths, divergent interests, devaluation of study programs, parental responsibilities, and disciplinary issues contribute significantly to dropout rates. Additionally, factors such as inadequate financing, crime, and violence are correlated with the decision to discontinue education.

Contreras, González, Láscar, and López (2022) emphasize the critical role of relationships within the classroom setting. Negative student-student and student-teacher relationships, as perceived by either party, serve as catalysts for dropout. Individual characteristics of students and their families also shape teachers' perspectives on relationship quality. Their study reveals a heightened risk of dropout for students in schools with lower Education and Socioeconomic Status (SES), with class size exhibiting a negative correlation with dropout likelihood.

Abreu, Audette, Mitchell, Simpson, Ward, Ackerman, Gonzalez, and Washington (2022) shed light on the challenges faced by LGBTQ students, particularly nonwhite individuals, who perceive schools as unsafe environments. This lack of safety may contribute to higher dropout rates among this demographic.

Velamazán, Santos, and Hernández-Leo's (2022) exploration of socio-emotional regulation in collaborative hybrid learning spaces underscores the complexity of informal learning interactions. They find that socio-emotional challenges during informal collaboration activities pose greater difficulties than formal learning. The suggestion emerges to support students in enhancing their socio-emotional regulatory skills to mitigate dropout risks.

Parviainen, Aunola, Torppa, Poikkeus, and Vasalampi's (2020) research reveals the prevalence of psychological ill-being among students, with one in five experiencing symptoms. These symptoms significantly elevate the risk of school dropout, indicating a need for targeted interventions to address psychological

well-being in upper secondary education.

In summary, the impact of relationships on dropout rates extends beyond the immediate peer circle, encompassing family dynamics, classroom interactions, and broader societal attitudes. Understanding and addressing these multifaceted influences are crucial in developing effective strategies to reduce dropout rates and promote a conducive learning environment.

My research delves into the crucial interplay between friends dynamics and student dropout rates, specifically focusing on how students perceive their relationships with their friends and how it affects their decision to stay at school. By exploring the quality and significance of these connections from the students' perspective, I aim to establish a hypothesis that highlights the inverse relationship between positive friends' relationships and the likelihood of dropout.

One of the primary factors influencing a student's decision to remain in school or discontinue their education is their perception of their relationships with their peers. When students perceive their relationships with their friends as supportive, nurturing, and harmonious, they tend to experience a greater sense of belonging and emotional well-being. This positive emotional climate fosters a conducive environment for academic growth, motivation, and resilience, which, in turn, can act as protective factors against dropout.

When students have a strong and meaningful connection with their friends, they often benefit from open lines of communication, trust, and mutual understanding. These factors provide a solid support system that encourages students to seek guidance, share their challenges, and seek assistance when faced with academic or personal difficulties. The presence of such support systems can enhance students' coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills, enabling them to overcome obstacles more effectively.

Furthermore, positive friends' relationships contribute to the cultivation of healthy self-esteem and self-confidence in students. When students feel valued, respected, and loved within their friend group, they develop a positive self-image and a belief in their own abilities. This sense of self-worth translates into greater self-motivation, resilience, and a higher level of commitment towards their educational journey.

Conversely, students who perceive their friends' relationships as strained, unsupportive, or lacking in emotional connection may experience higher levels of stress, isolation, and disengagement. These negative dynamics within the friend group can create a sense of emotional turmoil, undermining a student's ability to focus on their studies and navigate the challenges of school life effectively. Consequently, students may be more prone to considering dropout if their peers are dropping out as well or as a consequence of diminished motivation and self-belief.

The affect of students' relationships on dropout rates

Methodology

This investigation focuses on a cohort of truant students within Israel. The sample comprises 75 dropout students enrolled in alternative education at Kidum Noar - Hila. Additionally, a control group of 13 students who are still attending formal school is included for comparative analysis.

Data collection relies on a structured Likert scale survey administered through Google Forms—a user-friendly web-based tool for survey research and data collection. The survey consists of 20 questions, predominantly utilizing a five to seven-point Likert scale, where responses range from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The survey aims to gather students' opinions on their

familial relationships. Distribution is facilitated through email and social networks.

The sampling method employed is convenience or haphazard sampling, where participants are selected based on accessibility. The researcher identifies participants through pre-existing connections with them, their friends, and their teachers. The survey is disseminated via email and social networks, ensuring participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Results, along with survey data, will be made available upon request post-research completion. The researcher supplements the study with observations conducted at both the truant officer's department and Kidum Noar - Hila department. Google Forms facilitates data collection, offering various download formats, including Excel and SPSS for comprehensive result analysis.

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is employed for statistical analysis. This software enables interactive or batched statistical analysis (Nie, Bent & Hull, 1975). Initially, descriptive statistics are utilized to generate and compare metrics, providing a succinct overview of the collected data. Descriptive statistics aid in summarizing information from diverse measurement or evaluation tools. Subsequently, the researcher employs inferential statistics, a process through which conclusions are drawn about sample distribution characteristics based on empirical analysis. This analysis allows for drawing inferences about the broader population characteristics.

Research results

The research on the connection between peer dynamics and dropout rates unveils distinct differences between truant students and their non-truant counterparts across various parameters related to peer relationships and academic performance: levels of connection with peers, attendance problems, spending time

together, sharing about school, similarity of character traits, opinions as truant students, importance of contact with peers

For non-truant students, the mean score for connection with peers from school is higher, indicating a stronger connection compared to truant students. Non-truant students also experience fewer attendance problems among peers and spend more time together engaging in activities that foster academic and personal growth.

Non-truant students exhibit a higher mean score for the importance of contact with peers, emphasizing the significance of maintaining connections within their peer group. They also place a similar level of importance on peers' opinions but show higher importance of friends' support. Importantly, non-truant students tend to share more about school with their peers than truant students.

The correlations for dropout students highlight positive relationships between interest similarity and connection with peers, similarity in character traits, and various factors such as interest similarity, ways students stay connected to peers, importance of friend support, and sharing about school with peers. Additionally, the importance of contact with peers is positively correlated with ways students stay connected to peers, while the importance of friend support is positively correlated with sharing about school with peers.

In contrast, for students in formal school, a negative correlation exists between connection with peers from school and attendance problems. Spending time together and sharing about school with peers are positively correlated. The importance of peers' opinions is positively correlated with the importance of friend support.

Overall, these findings underscore the critical role of positive peer relationships and engagement in activities that support academic and personal growth in fostering positive academic and personal outcomes for students. Additionally, they emphasize the detrimental consequences of truancy and engagement in risky behaviors for academic and personal development. The

research suggests that schools should actively promote positive peer relationships and create opportunities for students to participate in activities that contribute to their overall well-being and academic success.

Implications of the research

The research findings and existing literature consistently underscore a robust correlation between peer relationships and academic performance, with a direct impact on the likelihood of dropping out of school. Students with stronger connections to their peers are less prone to dropout, while weaker connections correlate with higher dropout rates. To address this issue, schools can implement strategies that foster positive peer relationships and provide opportunities for students' academic and personal growth, thereby preventing truancy and dropout while enhancing positive outcomes for all students.

The literature emphasizes the detrimental consequences of truancy and engagement in risky behaviors for academic and personal development. Predictors of dropout rates include poor academic achievement, absenteeism, misbehavior in school, and pregnancy. The correlation between peer relationships, engagement in growth-promoting activities, and academic performance further accentuates the need for comprehensive strategies to address these challenges.

To tackle the multifaceted issue of dropout rates, a tailored, multifaceted approach is crucial. Individual and group strategies should be explored to optimize teaching and learning. Recommendations for reducing dropout rates include the development of support services such as truancy officers, counseling, psychological, and societal services. Additionally, educators should be provided with resources to acquire missing skills, and curriculum and teaching methods should be designed to enhance engagement and learning outcomes, tailored to students' realities.

Creating a healthy school environment is pivotal, considering factors such as physical space, pedagogy, technology, biology/physiology, convenience,

culture, aesthetics, flexibility, multi-purpose opportunities, and survival. Identifying justified absences and distinguishing exceptional cases from dropouts are crucial steps in accurate data interpretation.

The literature consistently supports the hypothesis that a student's likelihood of dropping out increases when their friends discontinue formal education. The research further illuminates the influencing factors in this relationship, reinforcing the importance of promoting positive peer relationships and engagement in growth-oriented activities.

Recognizing the limitations inherent in this study is crucial. The research, confined to Israel, involved a relatively small sample of 88 students with disabilities, of which only 13 from the control group did not drop out. The study focused on dropout students residing in the southern region, aged between 13 and 19, exploring aspects like community involvement, contact with community-based agencies, interactions with colleagues and family, and students' self-development. It's important to note that the research may not encompass all variables influencing dropout rates, introducing potential limitations.

To attain a more thorough understanding of the connection between peer dynamics and dropout rates, future research endeavors should expand the scope. Utilizing larger and more diverse samples from various regions and cultural backgrounds would contribute to a more comprehensive perspective.

Furthermore, this study concentrated solely on the correlation between peer relationships and dropout rates, neglecting a comprehensive exploration of other potential contributing factors. Subsequent research should delve into the intricate interplay between peer relationships and variables such as socio-economic status, family dynamics, and the school environment, thereby enhancing our grasp of the dropout phenomenon.

In addition, the incorporation of qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups, can offer deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions concerning peer relationships and their influence on dropout

decisions. By exploring students' voices and narratives, researchers can uncover the intricacies involved in the relationship between peer dynamics and dropout rates, adding a valuable dimension to our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

Suggestions to address the problem include:

Promote Positive Peer Relationships: Encourage students to form positive relationships through team-building activities, mentorship programs, and social events.

Provide Opportunities for Growth: Offer extracurricular activities like clubs, sports, and community service projects to foster academic and personal development.

Identify and Support At-Risk Students: Implement support services such as counseling, tutoring, and mentoring for students at risk of dropping out, and utilize truancy officers to identify and assist those with attendance issues.

Design Effective Learning Environments: Create engaging and relevant learning spaces using technology, flexible structures, and curriculum aligned with students' realities.

Address Risky Behaviors: Develop education programs and support services to address factors contributing to risky behaviors, such as substance abuse or mental health issues.

Foster a Healthy School Environment: Implement restorative justice practices, positive behavior interventions, and supports to create a culture of respect and inclusion, ensuring a healthy and safe school environment.

In conclusion, the research and literature provide valuable insights into the correlation between peer relationships, academic performance, and dropout rates, guiding the formulation of comprehensive strategies and recommendations to mitigate this complex issue in educational settings.

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