School dropout in South Africa: The synopsis of its accumulative social, economic, and political effects

Toyin Cotties Adetiba[1]
[1]University of Zululand, South Africa
[1]AdetibaT@unizulu.ac.za*

Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study explores the synopsis of the accumulative effects of school dropout in South Africa. Primarily attending school until full completion is highly beneficial to individuals and the society, it brings about an upward movement in skills development, crime reduction, better health, and an increased sense of self-confidence. Contrariwise, dropping out of educational and training system often limits individual's range of possibilities in life. In South Africa, retaining students in school until they graduate from primary or secondary school has become a big challenge to educational policy makers, thus, reflecting the inadequacy of the quality or quantity of the system. Using qualitative method of approach and ecological model, adopted from Bronfenbrenner, this work believes that school dropout is based on the interrelationships between individual learners and multiple systems connected to them which in turn affects the country socially, economically, and politically. The paper concluded that policy makers and education specialists should work together to implement a successful education system suitable for a new generation of students in meeting their challenges of modern globalized world while fostering social mobility and economic growth and reducing the inequitable distribution of societal resources.

INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the level of globalisation, there are still some areas globally that do not have access to quality education. Significantly, the most important social institutions as well as the strongest predictors of healthy society with well-documented positive outcomes through which students and citizens alike develop their potential is education. Hence its relevance in reducing social inequality, unemployment, and other societal vices (Mahbubur Rahman, 2024). The UNESCO (2016) states that access to education is the cornerstone of nation building and economic progress for all countries. Sant (2019) highlights that education is central to the implementation of inclusive governance of any country and, at the very least, the acquisition of a basic education is significantly important for the advancement of citizen's wellbeing. What this portends to mean is that education is pivotal to human development, the well-being [and social security] of every individual, as well as that of a country.

Granting that international rates of dropout differ, but one consistent finding is that dropping out of school results in poorer psychological, physical, social, and economic health (Lamb & Markussen, 2011). Thus, making youth education a global priority and school dropout needing an urgent attention. The United Nations Children's Fund (2021) defines dropping out school as the process of leaving or abandoning schooling before the completion of a cycle of education without obtaining the required school certificate. It is a term that signifies the unfortunate discontinuation of a student's educational journey without the attainment of a high school diploma, thus making it a global challenge (Khurram et al., 2023). The UNESCO Institute for Statistics cited in Weybright et al. (2017) sees school dropout as the proportion of learners from a cohort enrolled each year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year. Reschly & Patton (2014) refers to it as the premature termination of an educational programme. In South Africa, school dropout is considered a prevalent social phenomenon where less than 50% of learners who started at Grade 1 made it to Grade 12.

Apart from the problem of low enrollment and attendance, one of the biggest concerns for educational systems in Africa is the inability to retain learners until they graduate from either primary or high school. From the look of things, the challenges of school dropouts [in South Africa] is tantamount to the proverbial deadly cancer if not discovered early for treatment. Thus, school dropout is a troubling phenomenon to policymakers while it reflects the inadequacy of a schooling system in terms of either school quality or quantity. Fernández-Suárez et al. (2016) suggested that school dropout might be regarded as the last stage of a dynamic, cumulative, and multidimensional process of school disengagement where the phenomenon can be explained at different levels such as individual, family, school, and neighbourhood. Mostly, its consequences extend beyond the educational sphere. Therefore, learners [who are still in their formative years] who leave school prematurely are more susceptible to socio-emotional challenges and subsequently engage in reckless and criminal behaviours.

According to Esch et al. (2014) internalising and externalising social disorders are both implicated as individual risk factors for school dropout, with disruptive behaviour exacerbating the educational environment as significant hindrance to learners' educational attainment, while anxiety as well as depression are common internalising challenges. The academic performance, parental involvement, and supervision as well as teacher-student relationships are some of the common denominators that impact on academic success of learners. Esch et al. (2014) goes further to say that among individual risk factors, substance abuse, is one of the risk factors that is of particular concern, with a well-documented connection between substance misuse and school dropout. Debatably, students who use drugs or alcohol are more prone to dropout owing to its associated peer pressure ranging from neurobiological factors to learning difficulties and poor academic performance.

Khurram et al. (2023) opines that socio-economic status, family structure, and the role of parents in academic performance have all been linked to school dropout. Very important to school dropout and criminal behaviour are those who leave school for personal reasons, learners in this group are characterised by their vulnerability to engaging in petty to big crimes than those who leave for economic reasons.

In South Africa, failure to complete high school is considered a national challenge. Increasing the completion of both primary and high school rate is believed to be catalyst to reducing risks for multiple social problems, help guide the creation of effective approaches to preventing this problem. Roman et al. (2022) alluded that learner who drop out from school may be limited or denied of the freedom to participate in social and economic opportunities that are likely to improve their situations and their living conditions because they have limited choices for wellbeing that negatively impact their reasoning and their ability to develop. They are deprived of the opportunity to actively participate in the production economy as a member of society.

From the ongoing, there may be multiple exits that easily leads to school dropout in South Africa. In a study conducted by Desai et al. (2024), using a longitudinal cohort study in the USA, academic mediation theory, general deviance theory, deviant affiliation theory, poor family socialization theory and structural strains theory were tested in predicting school dropout. What this portends to mean is that there is no single theory that can be used to adequately explain the occurrence and prevalence of school dropout in South Africa and elsewhere. Primarily the best model that seems to be appropriate to explaining school dropout must include theories that is fundamental to explaining the position of the family, the school, the peer groups, and the community at large.

In line with this, the study sees Bronfenbrenner ecological model as appropriate for the study. The ecological model according to Bronfenbrenner (1977), advances that school dropout is based on the interrelationships between individual learners and multilayered social systems that are connected to them. These systems, however, exist at the community level in terms of their relationships with friends, family, and teachers, at societal level, it relates to the level of poverty, social norms, the roles play by gender and cultural values, and at political level, educational policy and political structures are somewhat the indicators. Hence the argument that the construction of adolescents' realities hinges on their interaction as well as their relationship with these systems that could have a direct or indirect influence on their life (Desai et al., 2024). In South Africa, the accumulation of challenges within the

wider social systems and the individual interactions with the system may result in increase in school dropouts.

Scholars such as Branson et al. (2014), Fernández-Suárez et al. (2016), Khurram et al. (2023), Muzekenyi et al. (2023), have researched on reasons why learners dropout of school in South Africa but there seems to be none on its accumulative social, economic, and political effects, thus, making it very important to investigate its effects on South Africa's social, economic and political system. This study is therefore, driven by the need to address the accumulative socio-economic and political effect of school dropout in South Africa. But the question that needs to be answered is what are the causes of this phenomenon and what are its consequences on the country socially, economically, and politically? Understanding this complex issue is essential for any society, and this study is a step toward that goal.

RESEARCH METHODS

Every scientific research must largely primarily involve a systemic approach while trying to find out the most appropriate and acceptable results. Therefore, this study relies on qualitative research methodology. This is a form of social action that stresses the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals (Mohajan, 2018). Thus, qualitative researchers, take into consideration people's belief, experience, and meaning from the people's perspective. In research, the primary goal of the qualitative method is to seek a deep understanding of a particular research phenomenon, while trying to generate new concepts and theories. Qualitative research also seeks to describe and interpret a social phenomenon systematically from the point of view of the individual or population being studied.

In addition to using secondary data, primary data were collected from both female and male participants. However, the process of data collection [from the participants] took place at their own preferred location. For example, the researcher collected data from two of the participants in their local church and one was collected in a drinking bar otherwise known as "shebeen" in South Africa.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

School Dropout Explained

Globally, and among populations, education is considered to be an effective tool for reducing poverty, inequality, and unemployment as well as improving health outcomes. It is within this context that the recent global policy frameworks such as the former Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have emphasised the value of education Muzekenyi et al. (2023). The United Nation (2015), for example, states that the Goal 2 of the MDG focused on the achievement of a universal primary education through the promotion of primary school enrolment, reduction in the number of out-of-school children of primary school age and the promotion of literacy globally. Correspondingly, the current 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 4, places emphasis on ensuring inclusive and quality education for all while promoting lifelong learning (United Nation, 2015). To this end, there has been various policy-frameworks showcasing the commitments and efforts of various governments to improve education outcomes for their citizens and at the same time addressing several social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Across the globe, an estimated 263 million children and youth were out of school in 2015, of which 61.1 million were of lower secondary school age 12-14, and a further 138.5 million of 15- to 17-year-olds (UNESCO, 2018). Within the sub-Saharan Africa region particularly, the low-income, and war-torn countries, the problem of school dropout amongst adolescents and teenagers alike is on a very high side (UNESCO, 2009). In areas where school dropout is a crisis, a large proportion of young people never attended school, especially the female folks [from rural and poor communities] where the attitudes of parents towards education and households' income potential are regarded as fundamental to determining the outcomes of education amongst children (Seribe, 2019). In research conducted by Zuma (2023) about 250 000 school-going children in South Africa drop out of school every year.

In their contribution, Corbett & Forsey (2017), Inoue et al. (2015), are of the opinion that youths from households where the head or adults are educated are less susceptible to drop out of school compared to households where the head never completed or attended formal school. Further to this, the explained that in Mali, 68% of youth aged 12-24 are out of school [one in seven out-of-school youth is a dropout, while the other six never attended school]. In Burkina Faso, Chad, and Sierra Leone, there is indication that one in five youth is a dropout. Contrariwise, in the Republic of Congo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, most out-of-school youths are dropouts. In Ghana, there are more school dropout, it varies between 18% from age 12-14 years and more than 80% at exit of secondary school.

Given their lack of academic and life skills, many uneducated and undereducated youth will continue to struggle to find formal employment in an environment that already provides scarce employment opportunities where less than one-third of adolescents from the poorest quintile in Africa attend secondary school, compared to three-quarters of those from the richest quintile (Inoue et al., 2015). In Angola, the Central African Republic and Niger Republic, for example, more than 80% of adolescents of the correct age are not enrolled in secondary school (UNESCO, 2009). This accounts for the substantial inequalities in secondary school attendance that occur between different socioeconomic groups in Sub Saharan Africa.

Ananga (2011) classified school dropout into two main categories of temporary and permanent dropout. Within these two categories, there are evidence of different temporal patterns of school leaving. Weybright et al. (2017) explains that sporadic dropout for example is categorized by intermittent school leaving for a few months and then returning to school. Some of these learners are classified as event dropouts. They drop out of school because they had school, family, or life events [like getting pregnant] resulting to dropping out school for a long period of time. More often than not some of these learners eventually go back to school while some never go back.

Cited in Weybright et al. (2017), Ananga (2011) reiterates that youths who are classified as permanent dropout never again had any intention of going back to school to continue their studies. Ananga further argues that some of these [learners] to a certain degree felt lost after dropping out of school but with the hope of returning to school if something in their context changed. On the other hand, others left school completely for the reason that they could not see value in schooling and left to pursue a type of vocational training for job hunting.

Proverbially, there seems to be a very big dark hole in post-apartheid South Africa's educational system that has continued to swallow many youngsters that are supposed to be in school, manifesting itself in the form of high dropout rates in both primary and high school, including tertiary education. Unapologetically, this monster has continued to weaken and destabilises some of the [important] gains of post-apartheid South Africa.

Although it's a global phenomenon, learner drop-out, have had tremendous effects on the communities of developing countries, South Africa inclusive. The rate of pupil dropout in South African schools according to Zuma (2023) is alarming, and presumably escalating the drop-out problem in South Africa seems much more seasonal than any other problem that needs urgent attention. A report by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA 2022) cited in Zuma (2023) shows that, close to 3% of 15-year-olds and nearly 9% of 17-year-olds dropped out of school in 2021. Furthermore, in 2010, 1.1 million pupils enrolled for grade 1. Of these, 1.1 million first school entries, only 755 981 enrolled for their National Senior Certificate in 2022. The number of pupils who enrolled for matric in 2022 was 22 783; more than the previous year, 2021, in which 733 000 pupils were enrolled (Zuma, 2023). This is an indication that pupil drop-out continues, with minimal chance of decreasing while contributing to increase in the level of illiteracy rate among South Africans.

Montoya (2018), Muzekenyi et al. (2023), believes that the literacy rate [in a country] can be considered as one of the major indicators of education outcomes. On the whole, they opinionated that a literate is a person with the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Of a certainty, the high-level of illiteracy in the former apartheid enclave can be linked to the Bantu education, designed for black students [to be laborers] as opposed to quality education offered for white learners during the apartheid system, and to the environment of a developed-developing nation. By interpretation the system had far-reaching effects

on South Africa's education as well as contributed to the entrenchment of racial and gender inequalities in South Africa's educational system. It should however be noted that educational inequality is a deeply rooted and persistent phenomenon that takes many forms, including inequality based on gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, socio-economic or class status, place of residence and other social axes of differences (Hiramori et al., 2024).

In their contribution, de Villiers (2021), Olamide et al. (2022), concur that a high literacy rate may likely help to increase economic progress, while decreasing poverty, reduction in crime rate, promote inclusive governance, reduce transmissible diseases, and confers personal benefits such as higher self-esteem, confidence, and empowerment. To understand this, this paper first looks at some of the contributing factors to incessant school dropout in South Africa.

Causes of School Dropouts in South Africa

Without any point of contradiction, education can be considered as essential social ingredient in the transformation of the socio-economic status of an individual, households, community, and by extension the country. It therefore translates to mean that with its crawling economy, high rate of youth unemployment and some sort of political uncertainties, and corruption that has beclouded the country, South Africa cannot afford to face the escalating rates of school dropout. This is the reason why school dropout rate is of more concern to South Africa government because learners who drop out of school prematurely will experience a lack of access to higher education, fewer job opportunities and lower wages than their peers who finished their schooling (Stats SA 2022).

Education largely creates opportunities for learners to acquire not only content knowledge of the subject matter, but also create the avenue for skill development and self-confidence that eventually made them to become the change agents needed by their communities and the larger society. However, it is a fact that learners across grades have continue to drop out of school with significant and long-lasting consequences across various sections of the society, while negatively impacting the future development of a country (Huisman & Smits, 2015).

Academic success or school dropout is not predominantly determined by the learner alone. Weybright et al. (2017) believes that from an ecological viewpoint, there are contributing multi-level and cross-level influences which are found at the individual level, previously failing a grade, family influences and social level. In a study conducted by Strassburg et al. (2010), four main reasons why learners dropout of school were identified. These are household poverty and cost of education, teenage pregnancy, a lack of interest in schooling, and previously failing a grade or being behind in schoolwork.

In a radio [call-in] programme on SABC FM monitored by the author on the 23rd of January 2024, a parent lamented that . . . *her daughter finished Grade 12 in 2021 with a Bachelor pass but she is yet to find a placement in any South African University, with the schools claiming that the programme she had applied for is full. In his contribution, another caller however, said that the system is deceptive, hence the inability of many Grades 12 students who had obtained a Batchelor pass to get admission some of whom has lost hope of going to tertiary institution to study for the programme of their choice.* The question that needed to be answered concerns the deceptiveness of the system. For example, a university programme that requires a minimum of 26 points with many learners with an average of 29 to 30 points will not lower its benchmark to admitting a learner with 24 points who the system says qualifies for university education. Another twist to this system is that a learner who is already 19 years old when she/he finishes Grade 12 may no longer be allowed to sit for the exam again and where she/he is allowed, the possibility of passing is very slim because of the mark the learner had scored in her/his portfolio while in Grade 11. The result for such learners is to drop out of school because of the maladroitness of the system.

Rejection of students who performed below expectation in their Grade 11 exams by their schools often leads to frustration and low self-actualization. The author in a discussion with a learner who once repeated Grade 11 but now a Nursing student in one the South Africa's leading university, discovered that if not for the intervention of her father who is a university lecturer, she would have been out school. According to this young lady, *she didn't do well in her major subject (Life Sciences) in Grade 11, and personally accepted to repeat the class, but the school vice principal insisted that she*

wouldn't be allowed to repeat the class, more so there are other programmes that she can do in the university apart from Nursing Science. She said it was only when her father sat the school management down and explained how difficult it is for students to get admission without the major subject that she was allowed to repeat the class.

Very common among South African boys and girls are their cowardly consent to the pressure from their peers. At the level of social interactions within and outside school, friends who had dropped out of school, as a result of their poor academic performance often had a major influence on their peers to join them in not attending school. Thus, dropping out of school is not just a spontaneous, stimulus of the moment decision by learners, but a process that progresses over a period, thus culminating in their dropping out of school (Weybright et al., 2017). It is a fact that the duration of the process of dropping out of school are different for each learner. Factored into this is the exceptionality of the challenges that these learners may be facing. In essence, while some learners at some stage may be considering dropping out, there are some that may actually decide to terminate their high school career for reasons best known to them.

As stated above, school dropout is to a certain degree built on the interconnectedness between [individual] learners and other complex social systems that are connected to them Bronfenbrenner (1977). One of these relates to the level of poverty that exist within families and by extension at the community level where the members of the community find it very difficult to assist one another, in addition to skewed [public] educational policy that favours some to the disadvantage others. In a chat with a third-year [university] student, she said . . . *I had initially dropped out of school for two years for lack of funds; though, I'm still owing the institution up to R 100,000, I have to do menial jobs for me to be able to continue my education since there is no family member to fund my education, and my mother is not working, my father is no more, thus making it difficult for my mother to sustain my younger sister [who has dropped out school] and I with R 350 monthly grant.*

It is a fact that girls/adolescents who become pregnant while in [primary or High] school will almost certainly drop out of school. In research conducted by Toska et al. (2015), the result shows that only a third of teen-age girls that become pregnant return to school. Mokgalabone (1999) concurs that pregnancy was among the causes of school disruption, particularly at the secondary school level. A learner corroborates this that . . . *although, I was allowed to come to school when I got pregnant in 2021 because I was already in Grade 12, but it affected my performance because of which I have to drop out of school.* By implication, the birth of a baby marked the end of schooling for [many] adolescent mothers who are themselves children.

According to Sharma (2023), in a parliamentary response in June 2022, the South Africa's Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, reiterates that between April 2021 and March 2022, girls aged 10 to 19 had almost 90 000 pregnancies. Statistics on adolescent/teenage pregnancy between 2022/2023 show that there is a high increase in the number of school girls that fall pregnant. Aside from other variables such as backstreet abortions, home births, miscarriages, and babies whose births are not registered, over 150 000 young girls were pregnant in the 2022/2023 academic year.

Working or searching for job is a common reason given by the adolescents for dropping out of school, especially by males. Branson et al. (2014) had argued that frequently, both males and females also report that they had finished schooling, given the large labor market returns to completing matric. Cited in Desai et al. (2024), Ananga (2011) found out that in Ghana students dropped out of school because they could see no value in it, or somewhat struggled academically, thus, forcing them to pursue a vocational or artisanal training. This is in consonance with the situation in South Africa where the male folk left school hoping to pursue a college diploma while boosting their chance of getting better placement in terms of employment. However, this does not work for some of them as some remain roaming the streets and thus making them vulnerable to societal ills such as gangsterism and substance abuse.

Debatably, the culture of gang violence and to a large extent drug abuse among male students are significant problems in South African schools. To Brook et al. (2006) of great concern is the contribution of the abuse of drug to communities that are perpetuated by the lack of schooling and its contribution to high unemployment figures. The Government Notice No 1040, South African Schools

Act (84/1996), declares all schools drug free zones. By interpretation, no substance abuse, possession of illegal drugs on school premises or being at school under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs is allowed (Fairmont High School, n.d.). Brook et al. (2006) reiterates that the use of illicit drugs is pivotal to criminality and thus contribute to school dropouts.

Significantly, the parental use of drugs assumes a pivotal role in the behavior of the adolescents. In response to a discussion, a year one university student who should be doing his Honors degree said . . . *I fell in love with smoking the first time I saw my father smoking cigarette, then I was in Grade 5; by the time I got to Grade 11, I was already taking illicit drug which eventually led to my dropping out of school.* This indicates that family influence plays a major role in the use of illicit drugs among adolescents vis-à-vis their dropping out of school. It is a fact that exiting from school does not offer any advantages to either the learner, the community, and the country at large as most youth find themselves idle and open to societal negativities once they have left school.

Accumulative Socio-Economic, And Political Effects of School Dropouts

Globally, it is an undisputable fact that the progress of a nation hinges on the level of education of its citizens. Across the length and breadth of the globe, it is generally acknowledged that education is second to none among the important factors that contribute to poverty alleviation and inclusive development (Latif et al., 2015). In other words, education plays a central role and has a cross-cutting impact on every aspect of human life that is worth investing for human and economic development. Unquestionably, attending and finishing school can alter students' life trajectories granting its effects on labour market prospects and through exposure to socioeconomic and political ideas and networks (Marshall, 2019). Thus, quality education capacitates the productivity, social and economic growth of a country apart from improving an individual's economic security as well.

Within the policy circles, the popular understanding is that the relationship between development and education is tantamount to education for development McGrath (2023). By interpretation, education is the pedestal to development. Hence, its importance to economic development. Education, according to vision 2030 is the key component of economic growth because it has direct influence on productivity, entrepreneurship, growth and then increases employment opportunities as well as women empowerment (Latif et al., 2015). It enhances the potential of youth for the enhancement of their ability, creativity and systematically sharpen their skills to contest with the fast-changing global disposition. However, when students drop out of school, it reduces the upward movement literacy rate of a country and its non-innovative environment.

When students drop out of school, the economy bears the cost. Horwitz (2019) writes that in 2018 alone, the cost of having repeaters [while trying to prevent dropout] in the public education system in South Africa, was around R20-billion which could absorb 8% of the national budget allocated to basic education in 2018/2019. If this is the case, it means that in 2023 the figure would be around 10 to 12% of the national budget. It is a fact that people without education will always find it difficult to access good jobs or become an entrepreneur and are therefore more likely to spend their lives jobless or depending on social grants from the government. By and large such a group of citizens often struggle with poverty, abuse, or neglect in their homes. In addition, it leads to loss of earnings by government or unrealized tax revenue every year, while the few that are working are overburdened with tax. It therefore means that education should be seen as an investment that is capable of accelerating human, capital economic activity and development.

A politically healthy and inclusive democratic system undoubtedly requires an informed, politically engaged populace. In great measure, the inclusive education discourse is one of the most acclaimed yet controversial. Through education, the moral character of citizens [old and young] are formed and through education institutions appropriate approach to inclusive education is developed. (Murungi, 2015). Going by this, education should be given a national priority. Most importantly, there should be a law that is specially coded in the constitution of a country that will see to the prioritization of education. Politically, education is a necessary precursor to understanding the workings of a political system while it is significantly fundamental to understanding self-governance or self-determination. In South Africa, the existentiality of education is imperative to inspire its populace to participate meaningfully in politics.

Reichenberg & Tambe (2022) argued that the level of education is somewhat one variable that can be used to predict voting participation which constitutes and legitimatises inclusivity in electoral democracy. *I started voting in 2019 as a member of . . . party ignorantly but following the completion of my degree I now understand that voting is more than just cast your vote for a party but one needs to understand what the party stands for* was the statement made by a newly graduated student from one of the South African Universities.

As noted, education is a very strong predictor of how and why people participate in politics and sometimes informs how and why people vote for a particular political party. To explain further, Willeck & Mendelberg (2022) ask how much formal education matters? How many years of schooling make a significant difference, and whether the quality of education matters?

In line with the standard and socialization models of education, socialization as a process of transformation helps an individual to acquire a new personality, social values, and experience, within the society and social communities and groups while enriching social relations and social experiences (Ashforth et al., 2007). Precisely, education may matter when students are taught about government and inclusive governance. Education theories are built around the idea that education matters, where students are better informed, and skills are acquired or are infused with the necessary information and learning experiences that will equip them to participate meaningfully in democratic processes necessary to be engaged citizens. However, when they drop out of school the necessary information vis-à-vis transformation through education would have been lost.

Another dimension to the place of education in relation to political participation has to do with the decision-making process. In a situation where a school dropout finds and maneuver himself/herself to the top, such a person is bound to make mistakes while in office and thus slow down developmental processes. In the parlance of political science, the causal effect of education on political engagement is a highly contested issue. Persson (2015) argues that within the space of absolute education model, education has a direct causal effect on political engagement. Education has the power to garnish the knowledge of political systems, skills, citizens' ability to process political information, while navigating the political space. This implies that well-educated individuals will have a greater stake in policy outputs and are thus rationally more inclined to engage in meaningful and rewarding political affairs. Unarguably, education and its quality matters. This is evident in decision making process in South Africa where uneducated political leaders are allowed to take the reins of power and hence its visible negative impacts on post-apartheid South Africa's political system. In summary, it is expected that educational environment will mold and modify individual through formal education vis-à-vis their participation in political process.

The reports on youth unemployment in South Africa are the quantification of a social tragedy, the description of a generation lost beyond attitudes towards education. To a large extent South Africa is in a precarious state owing to the threatening convergence of high school dropout, youth unemployment and an unforgiving economic environment set out to eliminate unskilled and semiskilled jobs. Lyndon B. Johnson in an article published by The New York Times (May 24, 1964) comments that the young man or woman who grows up without a decent education . . . is often trapped in a life of poverty. The National Research Foundation (2021) reports that 50% of the cohort of children entering school in Grade 1 leave school before matric, with limited job prospects. With employers of labour placing more emphasis on higher education, it means that whosoever does not have a higher education certificate may likely find it difficult to get the desired job. The NRF further said that South African educational system has failed to adequately provide the teaming South African youths with the needed basic skills that employers require such as literacy and numeracy. Where students drop out of school there is a possibility that such group will have limited access to post-secondary education and training of any kind. Given this massive social problem, and its delicate human dimension, is there any reason to think that such young South Africans that drop out school can be rescued?

In a [call-in] radio programme on SABC FM monitored by the author on the 23rd of January 2024, the presenter made a statement that . . . *a father or mother who drop out of school at a tender age may not likely see the danger of dropping out of school and if at all such parent sees it, there is probability that such parent may likely accept it as part of life.* Hence, Hanscombe et al. (2012) remarks

that indices of parent education, family socioeconomic status, would predict the quality of family [psychological] interactions which either produces low or high Intelligent Quotient (IQ), educational attainment and achievement, and possibly how to deal with social-emotional glitches. It does imply that parental education is an important index of socioeconomic status, as it predicts children's educational and behavioural outcomes.

Commenting on Bandura's Social Learning Theory in Education, Loveless (2024) believes that humans learn from observing and imitating the behavior modeled by others. This phenomenon is labelled observational learning. Invariably, the level of parent education and family interaction patterns all through the developmental stage of a child might be further linked directly to the child's developing academic success and achievement-oriented attitudes. It can, therefore, be argued that a child whose parents has exposed to model achievement-oriented behavior [such as] obtaining advanced degrees; frequent studying; encouragement of a strong work ethics laden with the provision of achievement-oriented opportunities after school, engaging in a robust educational programme, would develop a guiding principle that achievement is to be valued, pursued, and expected. What this translates to mean is that, [highly] educated parents tend to spend more time educating their children than parents with little or no education. Thus, parents who had dropped out of school and as a result experiencing difficult economic times would end up having children (uneducated generation) who are to some degree cynical about their educational and career futures.

Given the growing importance of education as driver for socioeconomic mobility in post-apartheid South Africa, it is not surprising that school enrollment has increased substantially but the unfortunate reality is the increasing number of school dropouts. Debatably, it is often difficult to differentiate causes of school dropout from its consequences, but the fact remains that students who dropout from school are at increased risk of engaging in reckless and criminal behaviors (Fernández-Suárez et al., 2016).

Fundamentally, the completion of high school is unmistakably visible in its relationship to South Africa's economic growth and stability. As argued above, an increase in educational attainments is strongly associated with earnings which on the other hand increase government revenue through tax. Another side to this argument is that the rate of unemployment among those who completed high school and move on to acquire a higher degree or diploma is lower compared to those without any certificate or entrepreneurial skill.

From the foregoing, there are several possibilities for why dropping out of school might account for crime among the adolescents in South Africa. Obviously, the fact that a school dropouts lack the postsecondary educational qualifications that may facilitate successful transitions into other prosocial bonds, such as employment and marriage, which could serve as turning points away from criminal activities, and for these reasons, the mere lack of a higher qualification might negatively redirect the course of their life (Dennison, 2022).

Agnew (1992) general strain theory seems incline towards this explanation, suggesting that exposure to negative inducements, removal of positive inducements, or failure to achieve positively valued goals may lead to an assortment of negative emotions, for example, anger, bitterness, depression, or frustration. In response to these, a victim may resort to crime as a means for coping with such negative feelings. Dennison (2022) concludes that from a life course perspective, dropping out of school might represent a negative experience or realization of failed educational goals, which may lead to crime. It is on the record that every adult in South Africa [from age 18 and above] are politically conscious, whether educated or not. It is rather unfortunate that some big wigs in the political cycle have always use most of the school dropouts unknowingly to them, as political vigilantism, otherwise referred to as foot-soldierism, who use illicit mechanisms to advance and realize their parochial political goals.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the phenomenon of school dropout in South Africa and its accumulative social, economic, and political effects on the society. The study discovered that as important as education is, the fact still remains that school dropout in the former apartheid enclave has continued

unabated. Primarily, attending school until full completion is highly beneficial to individuals and the society, as it brings about an increased in employment opportunities, skills development, crime reduction, better health, and an increased sense of self-confidence. Contrary to this, dropping out of school often limits an individual's range of possibilities in life. Thus, leading to a disproportional high risk of societal unevenness and unemployment and weak perspectives of socio-economic mobility while inhibiting the full participation in the community life, directly or indirectly. To counter this, policy makers and education specialists must work together to implement a realistic and successful educational system suitable for a new generation of students in the competitive job market that meets the challenges of the modern globalized world.

The Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education in collaboration with schools must provide a conducive learning environment for students as well as make going to schools more interesting for the youths. The South African school environment would be more interesting when students and teachers feel secured. In other words, every social element that can scare students away from school must be eliminated by addressing school and community violence to foster better learning environments for youth. The school climate, human and material resources and infrastructure should be continuously improved and monitored. For example, there should be "training the trainers" seminars for educators to enlighten them on innovations in teaching pedagogy.

In addition to this the South African government must engaged in community awareness through seminars to launch and develop the interest of parent and students towards study while trying to avoid school dropout. It has been observed that the school system needs to be overhauled. A 2023 Grade 12 graduand out of frustration laments that . . . *I missed out on admission this year because the university said my 27 points is low, yet my Grade 12 result says Bachelor pass . . . I still believe this is unfair to many of us, it seems we are still living in the 1970s when others have moved on . . . something must be done.*

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