

Possible Factors Contributing to Students' Late Registration, Dropouts and Absenteeism in Some Selected Rural Primary Schools in Oromia Region

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Abstract: The major goal of this study is to examine possible factors contributing to students' late-registration, sudden dropout and regular absenteeism in schools found in the rural mixed-farming and crop-pest infested areas of Yayya-Gullalie Wareda of North Showa Zone, Oromia. Accordingly, three schools were selected. Data were collected using four types of instruments- observation, document analysis, interview and focus-group discussion. Observation was made to identify the nature of students' attendance in the schools. The document analysis was made to identify the cases- late-registered, dropouts and absentees. The interview and focus group discussion were made with individuals and groups respectively. The targets of the discussions were teachers, students and guardians. The findings indicated that there were about thirteen major factors that contributed to students' late registration, sudden dropout and absenteeism. Based on the results, recommendations were given to alleviate the situation.

Key terms: *late registration, dropout, absenteeism, mixed-farming*

Introduction

Education serves as a tool for development. As scholars confirm education and development are two faces of a coin because progress in education is indispensable for sustainable economic development, environmental protection, improvement of health, participation in democratic, social and political aspects (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991). This conception of education starts with the activities of early human ancestors and is passed from generation to generation. In the light of this, Dewey says: "this transmission occurs by means of

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communication of habit of doing, thinking and feeling from the elder to the younger. Without this communication from those members of society who are passing out of the group life to those who are coming into it, social life could not survive.” (Dewey, 2005, p. 3). This shows education started from the basic social experience and became part of spiral transformation along with human mind advancement which render that any behavioral change emanates from proper attendance of an experience in any context as well as in the sphere of formal education (Dewey, 2005).

Therefore, as a basic necessity for life, the importance of education is swiftly increasing from time to time. This is why education is set at the center of the schedules of development activities of a country since education helps people acquire the skills they require in every aspect of everyday life. As Thompson (1990) notes, the developing sub-Saharan African countries are committed to the notion of national development and they consciously seek to bring about fundamental change in the lives of their peoples’ which starts from education and extends to the political, social and economic development spheres. The Ethiopian Government also accepted that the realization of basic or general education is both a necessity and fundamental human right that might bring a drastic change and development of the country. In this regard studies (Kinfu, 1994; FDRE report, 2004 and Tesfaye, 2009) indicate that the present government of Ethiopia places great importance on education and recognizes it as an essential component for development needs of the society or country.

Consequently, different organizations make generous contributions to the maintenance of child access to quality universal education. As Derbsa (2006) states, with the concept of “education for all declared in 1990 and the Dakar framework for action (2000), UNESCO supports efforts to enhance access to education with the special commitments to improve all aspects of the quality of education and to ensure excellence in all portions so that the recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy

and essential life skills. Furthermore, to alleviate the inadequacies, actions like education sector reforms, financing reforms, and cross-sector reforms were made (Derebsa, 2006; Tesfaye, 2009).

However, late registration, sudden school dropouts and regular absenteeism are supposed to be some of the prominent constraints of the Ethiopian Government attempts to render quality education to every citizen especially in the rural mixed farming and crop-pest areas. To be explicit, the nature of rural economic condition is assumed to be an obstacle to the realization of the country's educational policy to attain UNESCO'S millennium development goals (MDG) of Education for all (EFA). This is probably for two reasons. On the one hand, since the agricultural economy is at the subsistence level, almost much effort of the agricultural production is for home consumption, not for the goal of principal economic growth or surplus that can cover costs for schooling (Jean-Marie, 2002). On the other hand, 90% of the total agricultural production is from small holder agriculture which is labor intensive and depicts a livelihood which **pilfers** the time and energy of rural poor Ethiopian children (Rahel 2003:2). Furthermore, there is no research so far on the issue of late-registration, dropouts and regular absenteeism in the selected research site. This is the possible gap that motivated the researcher to pursue the study.

Noting the fundamental role of education in social development and poverty reduction, it is reported that Ethiopia is in a course of transformation in the delivery of education. This effort with support from international agencies and organizations like ODA, UNESCO, UNICEF and BESO attempts to maintain and enhance the coverage and access of schooling to the rural population.

However, despite different reforms made to improve access and quality in education, the changes of the schooling in rural Ethiopia is reported to be low (UNESCO, 2005). As Derebsa (2006) states the documents of Ministry of Education (MOE, 2005)- results of the national learning assessment so far made, the Ethiopian baseline learning assessment

and the second national learning assessment conducted in 1999/2000 and 2003/4 respectively in grades four and eight - shows that the overall achievement of schools stands were below 50% mean or less than average. What is more, there is up-to-date information that there is a low achievement in grade 8 national examination in Oromia rural primary Schools. This bears out that the (2009/10-11/12) low achievement of grade 8 national examination is found to be an indicator of the prevalence of the problem in the rural areas of Oromia Region.

Similarly, pilot observation made on Qarie-toke school depicts that students' late registration, sudden dropouts and regular absenteeism are the prevailing issues that need some study. This shows that there could be an apparent problem. Thus, the study attempts to deal with the possible factors that contribute to the above mentioned issues. The following questions are addressed in the study:

- What are the possible factors that contribute to the late registration, sudden dropouts and regular absenteeism of students in the schools?
- Which factors are more acute in the study areas and why?
- What are the possible intervention options to be employed to ease the prevailing challenges?

The main objective of this research is to investigate major factors contributing to students' late registration, sudden dropouts and regular absenteeism in the rural primary schools of mixed farming districts of Oromia Region. Precisely, the study attempts to:

- examine the possible contributors to students' late registration, sudden dropouts and absenteeism from school.
- Sort out the most acute problems in the study areas.
- Pinpoint the actions to be taken to alleviate the problems.

The study is significant for the following. Firstly, it attempts to spot the barriers to carry on with both the maintenance of educational EFA goal and shows the possible direction for the resolution of the problems. Secondly, the product of the research will serve as a resource for further researchers. Thirdly, as the study endeavors to look into the factors hampering development of education, scholars doing research in education, agriculture, economics, social work, sociology and psychology may use as a spring board to enrich their studies.

The study has some limitations. Primary, the topic is very broad and it requires a large geographical area to dig out all the problems or the issues in detail. This and some other possible variables are the limits that may affect the level of clarity of the research. Owing to time constraint, this study is delimited to three rural schools in the remotest *kebeles*: *Ali-dhera*, *Buyamaa-qowaat* and *Dedde-dhuftu* of Yayyaa-gullallie Wareda, North Showa Zone, Oromia.

Literature Review

Most human right legislation focuses upon access to education while it is comparatively silent about its quality (EFA, 2005). This is likely to be true in the Ethiopian context. According to FDRE report (2004) and Tesfaye (2009) education in Ethiopia is assessed and reported in view of gross enrollment at the neglect of issues of proper attendance. Nonetheless, UNICEF (1999) portrays the poor quality of education deters children from attending school. Furthermore, whether parents send their children to school at all is likely to depend on their judgments about the quality of education (Maglad, 1994).

Maglad (1994) further states that the family may hesitate to send their children to school as they may pretend that their children are academically weak and would not succeed. Likewise, the families feel that children are needed to help in the family farm, looking after cattle and other animals or join the family inside and outside the home, and are thus considered as a cheap source of labor in the rural economy

(Udry, 2003). Udry (2003) further exposes that child labor exists because it is the best response people can find in any intolerable circumstances. This makes children to be considered as an asset in the agrarian countries. Accordingly, ILO (2002) estimates that about one-third of children are economically active in Africa and about one-sixth are working full-time. This shows that child labor is overwhelmingly a rural and agricultural phenomenon.

As stated by Human Rights Watch (2002), the nature of agricultural work exposes child laborers to many risks and dangers, including long hours in scorching heat, hauling heavy loads, exposure to toxic pesticides and injury from sharp knives and other dangerous tools. However, Udry (2003) notes light works at home are tolerable in the agricultural economic system as a result of which ideally, such benign works by children are excluded from data collection on child labor. Similarly, NCFH (2009) portrays three types of child farm workers: (A) those who work on their parents' farm; (B) those who work on local farms part-time or during the summer to earn extra money; and (C) those who feel compelled to work out of economic necessity, often migrating alone or with their families from farm to farm. This circular pattern between poverty and child labor may lead to a vicious cycle of poverty, in which the descendants of the poor remain poor because they are poorly educated according to Udry (2003).

Studies also show that school attachment of learners from poor families depends on the demand of labor in agriculture (Jacoby & Skoufias, 1997; Boozer & Suri, 2002). These scholars also indicate that as the daily labor wage increases children prefer to go to work by interrupting their schooling. Jacoby and Skoufias (1997) find that school attendance drops among the children of households facing transitory income shocks in a sample of Indian farm households. If the household is too poor, the value of the immediate return from the child working trumps the future higher wages the child could earn if s/he stayed in school (Udry, 2003). Edmonds (2002) also shows that there is a dramatic decline in child labor and an increase in school

attendance when a member of the household becomes eligible for the sizable South African government-funded cash pension.

However, as Moehling (1999) notes, the first difficulty of the outright ban of the child labor practice is that it is by no means clear that developing country governments have tools available to enforce it. Furthermore, the task would be extremely difficult, because most child labor is in agriculture, much of it on family farms (Udry 2003). Udry (2003) also adds child labor can be seen as the draconian choice made by poor households faced with severely limited options. Child labor should be understood as it is a result of current poverty and a cause of continued poverty for the children who sacrifice their education time in order to work (Udry, 2003).

Nevertheless, Handa (2002) states that the most effective way to draw children out of damaging work is to encourage school attendance. The concern of quality education stimulates both economic growth and intellectual capacity. To begin with the economic growth, the contemporary behavioral change heartens students to assist their families at home and in farm before and after school so as to nourish themselves well and successfully attend their school. As to the enhancement of intellectual capacity, it is considered that mentally capable school children are potential resources to transform a country in a single generation (quality primary education: web page).

In line with this trend, Tribus (1987) argues for the application of the Total Quality Management (TQM) in schools. Lockwood (1992, p. 3) also strongly argues for the importance of quality in education saying "quality in education is what makes learning a pleasure and a joy". Similarly, Tribus (1987) adds that while some measures of student performance may increase as a result of threats and competition, these negative approaches in education - culture of late registration, regular absenteeism and sudden dropout - will not produce a healthy attachment to learning. Tribus (1987) further argues that it takes a quality experience to create an independent learner in which the

learners in turn becomes motivated to steadfastly seek quality for themselves.

This confirms quality primary education is the central theme of education in which education should allow children to arrive at their fullest potential in terms of cognitive, emotional, creative and productive capacities (EFA, 2005). Even if governments could effectively ban child labor, the consequences could be dire for those poor households (and their children) who are resorting to child labor out of desperation. These children work to help the household make ends meet. An effective ban on child labor would make these households and these children worse off. Therefore, any legal restrictions on child labor in developing countries should be focused on the most odious forms of child labor, including working under hazardous conditions or as bonded laborers (Udry, 2003). The most promising tool yet developed for reducing child labor is a targeted subsidy to families sending their children to school. The particular value of this intervention is that it addresses the root causes of child labor (Udry, 2003). Therefore, quality should be at the heart of primary education. Improving the learners' achievement by enhancing the quality education is contingent on the development of strong community based school systems that are upheld by highly mobilizing communities and supported by enthusiastic and competent local government departments.

Many studies pinpoint that the issue of child enrollment in education is controversial all over the developing world. But this section intends to fix its intensive investigation on to limited related work by Ethiopian scholars in particular and some African countries in general. To begin with African cases, Chemichovsky (1985) points out that large family size is an asset to render a big chance for the children to join school rather than the smaller ones because children are the best workforce in the agriculture. On the other hand, Tan, Lee and Mingats (1984) indicate that school related costs are the factors to hamper the children enrolment in one of the African country, Botswana. Bidsall and Orivel

(1996) also add that school fees, school distance, availability of resources like books ... affect children's school enrolment. Furthermore, the extensive study made by Liyond and Mensch (2008) address that marriage and child birth are the two prominent factors in increasing the dropout of age 12 and above schoolgirls in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cote-de-Voir, Guinea and Togo.

When it comes to Ethiopian research outputs, there are six MA thesis and two journal articles are available on the issue of dropout and absenteeism. To begin with the subject of dropout, (Berhanu, 2011; Daniel, 2012; Haylesilasie, 2011; Semunigus, 2011; Mengistu, 2011 and Zerihun, 2011) indicate some factors in which most of the findings reveal similar characteristics. But only Mengistu's (2011) work indirectly mentions regular absenteeism and none of the reviewed thesis documents mention late-registration. As to their basic differences, Berhanu's (2011) work is about causes of dropouts, at second cycle primary school of East Hararghie Zone of Oromia Region. Daniel (2012), Haylesilasie (2011), Mengistu (2011) and Semunigus (2011) focus on primary cycles which share some features with this work but geographically different. Zerihun's (2011) work is unique from the others in that it identifies factors affecting female students' dropout at high school. Essences of dropout are also stated on the two articles of Ethiopian Journal of Education. In the Journal, Tilaye (1999) and Tesfaye (2009) show the degree and direction respectively. Tilaye's work specifically aims at the problem and situation of dropouts at the secondary schools of Eastern Gojjam; whereas Tesfaye's work focuses on patterns of dropouts, potential follow up and sex preference in making enrolment decision in the Sidama Zone (SNNPR). The discovered prominent contributing factors to dropouts are: gender, poor family participation in school governance, poor teaching performance, students lack of interest in learning, child labor, peer group influence, low academic achievement, hunger, poverty, early marriage (teenage pregnancy), speculated less success in the future performance and less training for teachers.

As to the matter of absenteeism, Darge (2000) indicates the pattern of students' absenteeism in the Addis Ababa government schools. He states that absenteeism swells at the common wedding seasons for enjoyment of wedding and get-together. The above stated works are the acknowledged research outputs accessed by the researcher. However, the researcher found no article and/or thesis that talk about the issue of late registration.

It is clear that the above stated works are relevant to this work in some cases. But this work is assumed to be different in its perspective and context or physical area as it intends to pinpoint the root causes of late registration, sudden dropouts and absenteeism in the sedentary (non-migrant) rural villages of Yayya-Gyulalie *Woreda*, Oromia. In addition, the targets are the primary schools of rural *kebles* where mixed farming is common.

Definition of Operational Terms

Late registration: refers to students delayed enrollment which is made between early October and end of December.

Sudden Dropouts: refers to the incidence of students' school termination or interruption at any time and disappearance from the site of the school in a given academic year.

Regular Absenteeism: refers to students' habitual absence from school due to different reasons

Methods of Data Collection

This research employed qualitative method. The qualitative method is preferred to others due to the following reason. It is found more appropriate for gathering rich information via interview and focus group discussions.

The research consists of a sum of 84 participants out of which 36 are teachers, 30 are students and 18 are students' parents. With regard to the sampling procedure, the researcher engaged a multistage sampling technique. However, in view of technique, the research involved purposive and/or availability in which both are non-probable in their nature. Hence, out of the zones in the Oromia Region the most appropriate zone, Selale (North Showa), is selected for its convenience to the researcher on the one hand and the acuteness of the variables as observed by the researcher in the spring of 2009 while moving in the zone for other research purpose on the other hand. Similarly, from the Zone, Yayya-gullalie *Woreda* is selected as the stated problems are identified by the 2009/10 academic year pilot study. Similarly, the last rim of primary level - first cycle (grade 4) - is selected as the grade is most recognized case in late registration, sudden drop-outs and absenteeism.

As to the case selection, it is difficult to get pre-set criteria to determine the cases. However, the national Education Policy suggests that a student should spend 80 percent or more in class to sit for exam and be promoted to the next grade. As their class attendance documents show more than 50% percent of the students couldn't fulfill the criteria to be assessed and promoted to the next class/ grade. They use half of their school time in the non-academic (home) activities. Therefore, the researcher is forced to use the situation of the schools (school norm) and relative intra-school comparison as criteria to identify those cases and label them accordingly. Accordingly, students at the last tip the problem were selected from the most delicate to the better ones. Then, the students who were admitted between 'Meskel' (28/9th of September and last of December, are labeled as late registered cases. The students who consecutively disappeared for more than three months and probably didn't come back to school were labeled as the drop-outs. The regular absenteeism is tagged for the students' average non-appearance from two days in a week to three months but they come back to attend school at the last month(s) of the academic year. Then the gravest seven cases of regular absentees and three dropouts are

taken from each school. The data collected by interview and FGD are recorded by audiotape, transcribed into verbatim and finally analyzed and interpreted.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

In this section, the data collected through interview and focused group discussions, are analyzed (sorted, coded and ranked as they are frequently coined by the respondents), and interpreted subsequently. The ranking of the factors is made from the most repeatedly mentioned to the slightest ones. The observations and pictures are also used to substantiate the oral information with the situation in the classrooms and the conditions of agricultural production. The ranking of the finding is indicated in the following table.

Possible Factors contributing to Students' Late registration, Sudden Dropouts and Regular Absenteeism

Table 1: Case Summary

Key	NP= Total parents	NT= Total teachers	NS= Total students		N ₁ = some total from all categories		n = no of respondents from each case N= Total population			
No	Possible factors Identified		Parents		Teachers		Students		Total	
			NP = 18		NT= 36		NS= 30		N= 84	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	N ₁	%
1	Diversified activities in agriculture		17	94.4	32	88.9	28	93.3	77	91.7
2	Social routine related activities		17	94.4	32	88.9	26	86.6	75	89.3
3	Low-level of household income		18	100	20	55.6	27	90.0	65	77.3
4	The nature of harvest		17	94.4	19	52.8	20	66.6	56	66.6
5	Students low achievement		14	77.7	30	83.3	12	40.0	56	66.6
6	Over treatments		16	88.9	20	55.6	3	10.0	39	46.4
7	Misinterpretation of country's education policy by some <i>woreda</i> education official		8	44.4	24	66.6	3	10.0	36	42.8
8	Less awareness of the value of education among some families		6	33.3	21	58.3	8	26.6	35	41.6
9	Lack of interests among some students		5	27.7	26	72.2	2	6.67	33	39.3
10	Some recently emerged crooked behaviors in the schools		2	11.1	30	83.3	1	3.33	33	39.3
11	The customized late-registration traditions		2	11.1	31	86.1	0	0	33	39.3
12	Destructive traditional discernments on female students		0	0	30	83.3	3	10.0	33	39.3
13	Untimely love among some learners		4	22.2	25	69.4	2	6.67	31	36.9

Diversified Activities in Agriculture

As indicated, 91.7% of the total respondents, diversified activities in agriculture are the most outgoing factor contributing to late registration, sudden dropout and absenteeism. The major specific instances are:

Mixed farming: the information from the three groups- students, teachers and families confirm that the mixed-farming agriculture, which consists of animal husbandry and crop cultivation, demands at least three productive individuals in a small family unit. This means there should be one individual in addition to husband and wife at home. It is explicitly justified that mixed farming is an obscuring cause that needs children's contribution. When the husband goes for ploughing or weeding, or harvesting, the mother needs to take care of her child(ren), and accomplish other house hold chores. The other person- a boy or a girl needs to aid as a cattle herder. This is clearly identified in observation as seen below.



Figure 1: Different roles in the small rural family unit – collecting crop, house hold chores and keeping out crop-pest respectively

Crop Pests: the study also shows the required workforce can be extended to 3-4/5 members in the crop-pest infested vicinities. To this end, school children are needed to keep out crop-pests like birds, monkeys, apes and cattle from the crops. Information from all sites of

the research addresses the rural community clearly knows the future advantages of education. In the focus group discussion (FGD) the informants emphasize that the parents let the school boys and girls be absent from school as they are heavily overburdened and they find no alternatives to shoulder the burden of scaring off pests. Most of my informants from the parents in each locality say that if they leave the farm land alone, armies of monkeys, shrewd apes and pod birds would instantly invade the fields and destroy the crops they have collected for several months through hard work. This may expose them to starvation at the end of the year. They perceive that the problem is greater than the benefit from schooling as a result of which they are obliged to forbid their children from going to school.

One of the participants expressed his pain that he has a clever school girl who is hopeful to succeed in her education. He said had to say:

As she is strongly motivated in her school, she is always in tears when I raise the request of absence to her, which injures my heart and made me cheerless too. But as I have no alternative, I regularly let her be absent from school and protect the crops from the monkeys and birds when there is a mourning or burial ceremony from the neighboring compound.

The figure below substantiates this:



Figure 2: A school age girl is protecting a bunch of Sorghum/'Zengada' from cattle, apes and monkeys

The prevalence of such problems is confirmed by the researcher himself. It is observed that the problem is serious when the crops are ripe. This is from the end of September to February. It is quite obvious that unless the farmers seriously protected their harvest day and night in these months, the pests and cattle would destroy the crops. This implies that the problem is very serious as it diminishes agricultural production which is the basis of their sustenance.

The following pictures, for example, indicated the problems.



Figure 3: The crops destroyed by birds and domestic animals respectively.

As it is clearly seen from the above pictures, the ripped crop of *Zangada* is damaged by birds and the dried and harvested wheat is destroyed by cattle as it is amassed and laid on the original farmland. These are specially the most tempting cases in contributing to high degree of absenteeism and dropout. Hence, families some times prefer to forbid one or two of their children from school even if they are many in number, and even prohibit their single child as they do not have any alternative to compensate with.

Social Routine Related Factors

About 89% of the total respondents state that the social routine related factors namely mourning, wedding, team assistance in agricultural production - like (*dabo*; *qaba*; *wanfala*) and marketing are the subsequent possible factors contributing to students' apathetic school absenteeism. To begin with the mourning, there is a strong network of solidarity which is called *'idir/afosha'* in which the community with common interest collaborate to help one another in burial and sharing one's sympathy when either member and/or a relative of a member passes away. This is stronger if someone gets mourns of the relatives or the problem arises in the community solidarity institution called *afosha (Idir)*. During such occasions, the school boys and/or girls are urged to stay at home to look after the compound and/or the small child(ren) as it would not be allowed to miss the occasions for adults. Similarly, when there is a wedding ceremony in the neighborhood, it is common for the students to miss classes and stay in the house of the newly wed couples for two or more days and wander from one to the other when there is a good period for matrimony.

Regarding co-operation in agricultural production (*dabo*, *qaba/dado*, and *wanfala*) the society commonly cooperates in activities like: ploughing, weeding, harvesting and collecting crops. According to the informants, this network sometimes conversely, requires the help of school boys and girls. Hence, the matured school boys and girls are obliged to go for *dabo* or *qaba* or collaborated in a team known as

'*wanfela*' to ease the burden of parents. Apparently, this pressures the registration dates to post Ethiopian true cross (*Meskel*) and probably extends to the time of harvest or November, in which the school boys and girls help their parents in collecting crops by sacrificing their school time.

The trade activity and the home demand to purchase or buy different household goods for home consumptions and/or exchanges are also the other routine related activities which aggravate absenteeism and dropout. When the mother goes to the market one or more days in a week, a school boy or girl is obliged to look after the young child and/or home. In this case, a student is subjected to be absent for 2-3 days a week as the mother leaves home for market.

Low level of Household Income

As the figure in Table1 shows, the third most serious factor contributing to students' late registration, sudden dropouts and absenteeism is low level of household income. About 77% of the respondents mention household income is the big barrier to schooling. All of the parents (100%) explain that they are basically eager to send their children to school. They strongly state that since they are not capable of covering all the life and school costs of their children they would be very pleased to send their children to school. Nevertheless, there are parents who take advantages of the wage or salary of their children by hiring them either as cattle-herders or domestic servants of well-to-do families.

The details of the informants also portray that there are many landless peasants who have no source of income. These parents wait for the wages of their children and use the toil of their children as means of their livelihood. The finding indicates that there are some female and male headed families who have no options to live on and cannot nourish or feed their children, and this ultimately makes one conclude that the children of the poor remain poor.

The Nature of Harvest

As shown in the Table 1, about 94% of the families assume that the other factor that causes students' late registration, dropout and absenteeism is the amount of yield the farmers bear each year. They argue that the crop production is commonly based on summer rainfall and the area is a single annual harvesting except in some favorable areas where irrigation is practiced. In other words, the time which the children begin schooling is the most tempting period for the families to nourish their children, let alone the matter of covering the school cost and equipment for the learners. Then, it is a natural compulsion for the majority of the learners to register late, as the families fail to fulfill the necessary school costs until crops are harvested and ready to put up for sale which is made possible by end of October and/or November. It is also a pressure for some school boys and girls to be absent from school to earn money either by weeding or harvesting in the farm of independent farmers to cover their subsistence school costs. Furthermore, some of the students from the low socio-economic status interrupt their schooling and migrate to either urban or some labor demanding rural areas like East Showa (Bishoftu), Bale, for harvesting of cereal crops and Jimma for the collection of coffee as the situation is worse and the family could not even feed them. What is more, the research shows that type of harvest (poor or good harvest) is decisive for children to stay in school. If the harvest is poor, it is logical for the family to reason out they have nothing to shoulder the school burden with and choose to prefer to take their children out of school and encourage them to get employment either by a richer farmer in the locality or send them away to other zones with labor demanding areas as they predict there would be a poor harvest in the current year.

Students' Low Achievement

About 67% of the respondents mention that low achievement of the students is the fifth possible factor contributing to late registration sudden dropout and absenteeism. This variable has dual implications.

On the one hand, students' responses reveal that they are becoming hopeless and hesitant to come to school and register on time as they are low achievers. As they lose their efficiency they prefer to participate actively in home service and/or agriculture by interrupting their school attendance. Conversely, as agricultural production demands intensive labor, the families drift into analysis of its cost benefit. If they find their children are low achievers, they suspect that teaching them is a big loss for the family and the community.

Over-treatment

It is basically advised that teachers have to have sympathetic relationship with learners. But this has got the wrong impression in the chosen research area. About 89% of the family complain teachers prefer to say 'lullaby' to students to keep them staying in the school instead of appropriately rewarding for their successful achievements and commenting on their failure. This idea is also shared by about 56 percent of teachers. The teachers describe that such treatment makes the students to feel proud of themselves and spark unusual self-concept in the mind of the students and make them to think that the teacher could not live without treating them in this way. Then, students impose all of their wishes and interests on to the teachers to find a pretext which is attributed to the teachers if the students want to interrupt their schooling. Then the teacher prefers to give maximum mark and provide him/her a good rank to keep the students in the school which aggravates delayed registration, dropout and absenteeism.

Misinterpretations of the Country's Education Policy by Some Officials

The Ethiopian education policy emphasizes that the country should work to ensure that by 2015 all children in difficult circumstances and ethnic minorities have access to completely free and compulsory primary education of good quality. However, about 67% of the teachers repeatedly remark that this goal would not be explicitly delivered down to schools.

The teachers reveal that the *Woreda* officials blindly warn them - they are going to be investigated and evaluated if a single student is absent. The teachers accept that is logical if there is an irregularity among them as it is ethically believed that teachers should follow the necessary steps to alleviate the prevailing problems of students in their school in collaboration with supervisors and the *Woreda* Education Office. But every problem is pushed down to the teachers and they are compelled to do the instruction given from above. As the teachers repeatedly stress, it is absolutely unethical to mark a student in his/her absence in view of professional mores. But teachers are pressurized to mark the students who could not fulfill the criteria of promotion under the pressure of some *woreda* officials.

The information from grade 3 attendances of 2002 E.C. Academic year confirms that students who attend a class for less than a month (20 days) and drop out before the mid of first semester are marked and promoted to grade 4. This bore a discrepancy in the mind of learners and their family. Then the learners argue that they know not enough and prefer to repeat in grade three for fear that they may be below the required aptitude of grade 4 and prefer to be absent. Similarly, families complain that the students are simply going to school and come back home with less or no change in their abilities - some students at grade 3 or 4 cannot identify even numbers from one to ten which they are supposed to learn. The families also probe into the capability and

commitment of teachers in teaching their children appropriately as their children remain very poor achievers.

Low Level of Awareness of the Value of Education among Some Families

About 58% of the teachers raise that families force their children to be absent or to dropout. In their argument, the family claims that learning is only for getting a job in the government sectors. Therefore, instead of encouraging the learners to work on other alternatives, they prefer their children to discontinue their education as they perceive the schooling as “the go nowhere”. The families raise the case of some 10th grade completes who fail the GSLCE. The families of those who failed argue that they taught their children by shouldering every cost but to no avail.

Lack of Interest among Some Students

The study also indicates that there are a number of students who have less or no interest in going to school although their families are very encouraging and supportive. About 72% of the teachers and 28% of the families assert that there are students who dislike going to school although their families or guardians have satisfied their school necessities. There are known cases from the two target schools - Dedde-dhuftuu and Qarree-tokke - who hate going to school. Accordingly, they warn their family they would commit suicide if they force them go to school. Such students tend to harass school mates and seduce female schoolmates, to violate the social, moral and the school regulation in order to be expelled from school for disciplinary offences. They also act as vermin to deteriorate the quality of school performances, rules and regulations.

Some Recently Emerged Crooked Behaviors in Schools

As indicated in Table 1, about 83% of the teachers mention that recent behavioral manifestations school boys and girls is rather confusing. To

the best of their knowledge and experiences, the school is a place where students develop the spirit of submissiveness and kindness. Furthermore, about 11% of the families say that school used to be a place where students developed the motivation of helping their parents as they observed that the former students who shared the pains and the work loads of their parents. However, the trend of disobedience is the current manifestation students developed as they stay in the school. They are neither helping their families nor studying hard in their academic work. Furthermore, the details of the information show that there are some immoral events that deviate from the social norm. The society expects that the school students in general and girls in particular need to stay virgin before marriage. Parents used to discipline their daughters by saying “you are going to humiliate us by bearing a bastard, like Mr X’s daughter; this is why you are in travails”. However, there are common scenes in schools nowadays contrary to such parental beliefs and predispositions.

The Customized Late-registration Traditions

About 86% of the teachers notice that the schools are forced to tolerate the students’ late registrations. The rural society of the study area adapted that registration and schooling should be after the Ethiopian True Cross (*Mesqel*) holiday. Hence, the majority of the families would not send the students before the *Mesqal* and the early registered students would not come to school. It is also mentioned that some **ego-centered** families push the initial release of the learners for schooling date to the beginning of November (*Sadasa*). This pressurizes the schools to amend their school schedule. This leniency of schools again encourages the students and their family to promote the habit of late school admission which might have an impact on their achievement as they compete with urban students who begin the classes at the beginning of Ethiopian new year ‘2nd of *Fulbana/Meskerem*’.

Destructive Traditional Discernment on Female Students

About 83% of the teachers further state that there is a wrong perception of female schooling among some families. These families think that the school is a place where their social and moral aspects are dishonored as their daughters are away from their control, which may expose them to severe and/or misleading harassment that might drift them into disagreeable sexual relationship. Some members of the society discourage female students by saying “the girl will reach no where and it is a good idea to let her to marry before she bears humiliation to the family”. They force their daughters to have a fiancée without considering their capability and interests. This severely discourages the female students and aborts the outset of their vision of a good scholar.

Untimely Love affairs among the Learners

The untimely love affair among the young students is also one of the abortive elements contributing to the students' late registration, absenteeism and school disruption. About 69% of the teachers and 22% of the families say that as the school boys and girls may fall in love with each other or with someone outside the school community, they may prefer to devote their time and energy on the love affair instead of using their time for academic purpose. They think that their present-day educational level is the last destination for them and desire to devise other means of living to lead their life. Consequently, they leave home and go (migrate) somewhere looking for some kind of employment to lead some form of sustenance although some may not make it and this may force them to drift to misery.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings indicate that there are about some thirteen pressing conditions that are painful to mend the paradoxes between the need of quality education and the rural living conditions.

The summary of the information from interviews, FGD and observation clearly indicate that most of the above-stated cases emerge due to the nature of rural economic activities and social custom. The mixed-farming economic system is the most arresting or acute factor that is highly contributing to the students' non-admittance, late registration, sudden dropouts and regular absenteeism. This discovery recognizes that the Ethiopian agricultural economic system is labor intensive which requires children as the essential workforces. Therefore, it is not possible to pull out the involvement of school girls and boys from the sphere of agricultural production. This means children are the substantial contributors to the perceived need of Ethiopian development and transformation aimed at doubling-up agricultural production. However, this is found to impair the country's commitment to realizing universal access, to quality schooling or education unless some possible solutions are worked out.

Moreover, the study reveals that low-level of household income, the non-scientific pressure from some officials, low level of students' achievement, some families' less awareness on the value of education, the informally customized late registration habits, deviance, premature love and some students' lack of interest in education contribute to the exacerbation of identified problems.

The agricultural related activities are the most prominent or acute factors to rural school late- registration, dropouts and regular absenteeism. The study also shows that the above-mentioned variables are clearly found to contribute to the decline in the students' achievement. As there are inconveniences, students are stepping in parallel tracks which may take them nowhere. For one thing, they could not actively participate in the agricultural production. For the other, they bear little or no behavioral change in their education which may create a dependent generation. This is rather a constraining phenomenon which makes it difficult for our country to remain economically, and socially competitive in a dynamic world of technology and education.

The investigation shows that there are some children who fail to have an access to basic education as they are forced to serve in the agricultural economy. Most of these workers are wage and salary workers (that is, hired farm-workers) who are compelled to help and contribute to the wellbeing of their families.

The findings indicate that there is seemingly a paradox regarding the demand for children involvement in the agricultural practice and the need for quality education for all. It is imperative to design the convenient time for basic education (CBE) related to the previously used trend called alternative basic education (ABE) and the time for the agricultural practice; that is, the arrangement of time should help both literacy and agricultural production. In this case, the dawn and pre-dusk shifts could be employed to create the educational opportunity for the agriculturally active children in the family farm, employed shepherds, the self helping learners and home-servants, the economically disadvantaged and living-on part-time work in the rural society. Accordingly, class could be conducted from 6:00 - 9:00 a.m. (in the morning), 5:00- 5.40 p.m. (in the after noon) from Monday to Friday and 6:00 – 10:00 a.m. on Saturdays. This arrangement may yield the following benefits:

- This is assumed to be effective to give the chances for the needy as the heads and/or other members of the family are in the compound in the morning and free to look after the cattle, protect the crops and /or assisting one another at home.
- It might help not only in minimising the cases of late registration, dropout and regular absenteeism but also in creating an opportunity for most of the highly occupied wage and salary workers (that is, hired wage-workers), the self-employed and the unpaid workers at home.
- As the dawn and dusk school times are prior and posterior to the time of social routine activities - mourning, wedding ceremonies and marketing or purchasing activities – this arrangement may

be suitable for students assigned to this shift as they would have few or no problems to attend school in the mornings and assist their families during the day (common moment of routine work) as they would be back home at about 3:30 p.m. on the working days and 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays respectively.

- Moreover, this trend is supposed to help the students and the families because the families can send their children to school in different shifts to get some who can replace and/or assist them in the agricultural economic activities either by keeping cattle and/or protecting crops from pests. This might subsequently contribute to the cumulative success of the Ethiopian second poverty reduction strategy known as the plan for accelerated and sustained development to end poverty (PASDEP) and growth and transformation plan (GTP).

The teachers need to give much emphasis on the learners' behavioral change to attain the goal of educational quality of the Regional State and produce independent and enthusiastic learners of today and nation builders of tomorrow.

The *woreda* education officials and school or CRC supervisors and the *woreda* administrative executives have to cooperate with the teachers in tackling the root causes of late registration, dropouts and absenteeism as they arise in the schools instead of putting the blame on the teachers.

More has to be done to broaden the horizon of the positive attitudes of the learners and parents/guardians/ towards the multiple benefits of education. The old thinking, the '***purpose of education is for employment in the government offices***', should be changed and diversified to the various extents of education values.

The customized late registration in the schools should also be banned. What is more, students who are the victims of late registration,

dropouts and absenteeism as a result of their incapability to cover all or part of the school expenses should be considered either by the government or by non-government organizations for some support scheme.

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