

CONCLUDING CONSIDERATIONS

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This final chapter provides some recommendations and points to policy implications with respect to the phenomenon of having large numbers of learners drop out of school, and highlights the significance of the study. The chapter starts by considering the issue of second-chance education. Then it links the core of the study to the human capital theory and rational decision-making theory and suggests further research on school-to-work transitions.

Central to the chapter is a recommendation for the establishment of a second-chance education system designed to receive those who wish to re-enter the ETD system. The study proposes that only after these youths have been afforded an opportunity at second-chance education should we look at labour market entry. This assertion is based on interaction with the participants in this study.

7.2. INVESTING IN SECOND-CHANCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR THE YOUTH

7.2.1. Dropping out: Does the definition need alteration?

Given the definition of dropping out in South Africa, what are the interactions with and the implications for the education system and the youth labour market? South Africa has defined dropping out as ‘the percentage of pupils who dropout from a given grade in a given school year. It is the difference between 100% and the sum of the promotion and repetition rates’ (Ministerial Committee, 2007). The ministerial committee suggests that ‘there is a problem of learner retention, which is more pronounced after Grade 9. The dropout rate below Grade 9 is statistically

insignificant, but increases sharply from Grades 10 to 12.’ The question thus becomes, if a person leaves school after the compulsory stage, why does the system still assign a negative derogatory implication to dropping out? Should a new term be coined to affirm a positive status to these youth, so that the labour market can be receptive of them? While the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, stated that ‘the lion’s share of the drop off in enrolment takes place in the post-compulsory school phase’ (DoE, 2005), the ministerial committee has argued that learners dropping out after the post-compulsory years or Grade 9 does not constitute failure to the DoE. Despite that argument, like most South Africans, the Minister was also ‘concerned with the number of learners who do not complete Matric’ (DoE, 2005).

While the DoE and policy makers are arguing about the numbers and grades within which dropping out is occurring, the system is in need of:

- Redefining dropping out in South Africa;
- Developing strategies and policies which will address the non-completion of matric or the equivalent as per the NQF;
- Developing alternatives which provide equivalent chances; and
- Promotethese on the labour market.

The inadequate accountability of the principals and the DoE at a provincial and district level regarding policy implementation needs to be addressed if we are to address the issue of learners dropping out of the ETD system. It is obvious that while the legal accountability for school attendance lies with the HOD, the actual responsibility lies with all stakeholders including the HOD, the parent, the SGB and the principal. Policies are a point of departure, but without implementation processes and accountability, school-to-work transition in South Africa will remain a challenge and a threat to the skills and economic status of many of the youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

There is thus a need for the planning of strategies to develop and improve q second-chance education system aligned to the NQF which ensures the equitability of school-to-work transitions. This should be in line with the principle of addressing the

transformation of the youth, irrespective of level of education and locality, thus contributing to the process of redress and justice and ultimately addressing poverty eradication through the employment of the young. These strategies would have to be inter-departmental if they are to prove successful in focusing on the plight of the youth when entering the labour market.

7.2.2. An integrated model for assimilation into the ETD system for the out-of-school youth

Re-entry into the ETD system should not be viewed as an academic exercise only. It should be viewed as the development of life skills, psychological development and academic performance for the youth who re-enter the system.

The Australian government, in response to the challenge of out-of-school youth, developed a 'Youth Pathways Programme'. This programme was based on the individual, and its purpose was to assist young drop-outs or youth at risk. This programme was a strategy devised in response to national youth transition challenges similar to those in South Africa and most other parts of the world. South Africa needs similar strategies. These need to be linked to DoE or DoL strategies.

7.2.3. Advocating for second-chance education

The experiences of out-of-school youths have an impact on their understanding of the value of education for them as individuals in their contexts. These youths therefore want a second chance. In South Africa, second-chance education is more accessible to youth who have work experience or are currently employed. South African policies and youth development models have to recognise the value of re-entry and giving a second chance to unemployed young people who have dropped out of school. South Africa thus needs some policy or programmes on second-chance education.

In 2001, while South Africa was rejoicing about its achievements since the year 1994, the DoE recognised the need for second- chance education. Their report states:

There may be greater demand for second-chance education by learners returning to education after an absence from the system, or for more flexible learning opportunities for those who are ill, caregivers, or wage earners. On the other hand, these demands may be offset by fewer births and more deaths of under-fives, and the fact that families will have less disposable income for school fees (DoE, 2001).

The notion of establishing a second-chance education system was supported in a speech by the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, in 2008, when she suggested that:

Education cannot be separated from training. Basic and secondary education is the foundation on which an effective vocational education and training system should be built. Good quality basic education and initial training, availability of adult and second-chance education, together with a learning culture, ensure high levels of participation in continuous education and training.

Second-chance education in South Africa should be viewed as a corrective measure and a necessity for the out-of-school youth who dropped out, and should provide components addressing the youth-at-risk cohort. It should also include basic components that provide positive and effective transitions for the recipients.

There are three basic qualities required of a genuine second-chance system (Inbar & Sever, 1989):

1. Accessibility – second-chance systems should be non-selective
2. Effectiveness – second-chance systems should improve educational attainment
3. Equivalence – second-chance programmes should lead to similar if not the same rewards for success as the first chance provides

Source: Ross (2004)

Developing an integrated model is basic to second-chance education, which should largely be based on the ‘reconstruction of identities and self-worth’ (Munns, Nanlohy & Thomas, 2000).

Second-chance education should be flexible and responsive to the integrated assimilation of the youth as they re-enter the ETD system. The notion of flexibility in education is also suggested by Coombe (2000) when advocating interventions like ‘providing more second-chance basic education for never-schooled children, or for those whose schooling has been random’ (Coombe, 2000).

7.3. SIGNIFICANT ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

While the reasons for dropping out are intertwined, environments that are conducive to retention and positive transitions are also intertwined. Extending compulsory schooling from age 16 to age 18 may better capacitate the youth to manage their immediate social contexts. Because of their maturity levels at this age, the youth are better able to assert their social standing and are therefore more likely to resist temptation.

It is also notable that the disparities between the FET and GET phases pose real problems for the youth and impinges on their employability. FET in schools and colleges is intended to provide more skills needed for employability than the GET phase. Per policy intention, youth with FET qualification (whether from schools or colleges), are meant to gain more industry-related skills than their counterparts. Whether these fundamentals of the FET phase are manifested in our day-to-day experience or are actually implemented is debatable.

The tracking of Learner Unit Record Information and Tracking Systems (LURITS) needs to be extended to tracking youth information until they are employed. Having records of where and what activities youth are involved in will assist in providing

structured programmes to assist youth with school-to-work transitions. LURITS is a system that needs to be supported by a responsive strategy. For example, LURITS assists government in determining the number of learners lost in the system, but does not assist with retention, and there is still no system for assisting with re-entry.

Establishing that youth do understand the value of education and its potential contribution in their lives is important to their re-entry and their ability successfully to follow their desired pathways. While there are alternatives, accessing these would assist with positive destinations. Revisiting access to alternatives and the existence of alternatives for the out-of-school youth thus become a matter of transformational urgency.

The DoE has argued that the models or formulas used for determining the drop-out numbers are not accurate. However, from the social studies perspective and the DoE statistics and observations, dropping out is a social and economic challenge. Addressing the challenges of dropping in and retention is necessary and urgent for poverty alleviation.

7.3.1. Linking the study to the human capital perspective

There is consensus among the respondents in the study regarding the benefits of education for individual development. This is based largely on the participants' recognition of the importance of education for employment and economic participation. This view is in line with the argument common globally that recognises education as being critical for the development of individuals and societies. Various studies have demonstrated that societies with well-educated labour forces tend to have higher levels of economic and social development (World Bank, 1999; Coleman, 1988 and Becker, 1975). The young participants' experiences in seeking employment and the labour market's response supports the view that highly educated people are generally well skilled, and that skilled workers are generally productive. This finding amounts to an extension of the human capital paradigm and furthers the thought that recognises the benefits of higher levels of education.

7.3.2. Linking the study to the rational decision-making perspective

All of the youths in the study, after dropping out, experienced the real drawbacks associated with the outcomes of being ‘unqualified’. The youth labour market’s demand for workers with skills and qualifications put them at a disadvantage, and they were unable to find employment. As they looked for employment and encountered only rejection, they became dependent on their siblings. After contemplating the sterile state of their lives they reconsidered the benefits that derive from schooling or further education, and desired to drop back into school.

Oreopoulos *et al* (2003) link academic performance, expectations about the benefits that derive from completing school, and local work opportunities in their model. The young participants in the study were mainly concerned with the benefits they might receive after completing their studies, and were motivated to re-enter the system by the demands of the local employers. The young drop in or yearn to drop in mainly so that they can be employable.

7.3.3. Contribution of the study

There have been many studies investigating the reasons for dropping out, and policies have thereafter been drawn up to attempt to prevent learners from dropping out. The South African government recently piloted the Learner Tracking System, which is aimed at tracking learners within the school system. While this tracking system is in its early stages, its potential to make a great contribution should be recognised. However, the system is not designed to stop dropping out, but to track the extent to which dropping out occurs. Dropping out will still happen despite the tracking. This necessitates the facilitation of re-entry.

The study also challenges the various education directorates to consider the implications of its findings for their policies and programmes addressing the challenge. It is envisaged that the study will play a role in highlighting the experiences of the challenges facing youth as they try to access the education and training system after dropping out of school and the development of youth at risk before they are out of school.

As suggested earlier, scholars in the field tend to focus on the reasons why learners drop out, and to compare the chances of matriculants and tertiary education graduates in entering the labour market or higher education. None or very few of them focus on the experiences of pre-grade 12 out-of-school youth in their endeavours to re-enter the ETD system or to enter the labour market. This is the major gap in the literature that this dissertation has sought to address.

The study thus:

- challenges the disjuncture between SASA and compulsory education in relation to how dropping out is addressed
- advocates for the development of a stronger strategy or policy aimed at second-chance education in South Africa, which could eventually lead these youth into the labour market;
- brings together the relevant theoretical perspectives associated with dropping out and dropping in; and finally
- asks for further national research into the dilemma, advocating for clearer re-entry alternatives in the ETD system and the labour market.

7.3.4. Further research

While there are studies on the school-to-work transitions, these tend to look at the reasons and factors leading to youth drop-out and the relationships between educational attainment and employability. None or very few of these focus on the experiences and pathways of pre-grade twelve out-of-school youth as they seek positive destinations. This area of concern needs further research. This study

addresses the experiences of some young people in transition between school and the workplace and proposes the establishment of an appropriate second-chance education and training system, but this is a case study and it is therefore not possible to generalise from its findings in such a manner as to be able to apply it to the whole of South Africa. Further research on the experiences of young drop-outs and their transition between school and work is necessary.

Secondly, while there is academic research arguing for the relationship between the quality of education and dropping out in South Africa, the research does not address this issue directly. The young participants in the study alluded to the change in the curriculum as contributing to the challenges they face after dropping back in, leading to their dropping out yet again, but this evidence is not enough to categorically argue that curriculum change is a cause of repeated dropping out.

Thirdly, if research is to inform policy and strategies, there is a need for research into alternatives in the provision of second-chance education designed to accommodate the cohort of young people who have dropped out of school and have no work experience. This research would assist with the development or co-ordination of models for such education and training on a national scale.

Fourthly, for comparative purposes, further research on the views of managers in the labour market, to get their opinions on school-to-work transitions, would be beneficial. The purpose of that study would be to investigate their experiences, as managers who employ workers who have dropped out of school.

It is clear that families with little education capital are likely to experience a higher incidence of youth drop-out. This study suggests that these families and their children should understand the value and benefits of investing in education.

7.4. CONCLUSION

The study was informed by the high drop-out rate of learners between Grades 1 and 11 in South African schools. While the social, structural and economic reasons for dropping out were explored, the study concerned itself mainly with re-entry into to the ETD system and entry into the labour market. As stated in Chapter One, many out-of-school youth want to re-enter the ETD system and to enter the labour market. Their experience as they attempt entry is rarely documented and less understood. This study therefore, sought to explore the push and pull factors in the pathways of these representative youths, giving them the opportunity to articulate their experiences.

The study examines some of the models and theories applicable to this theme. Those are the human capital theory, rational decision-making theory, the social environment model and the congruence model. The study is positioned within the congruence model, which provides the researcher with an holistic paradigm which integrates the human capital theory, the rational-decision making theory and the social environment model. It further suggests that people have agency and that there are various explanations for why youth drop out of and re-enter school. This model is accommodative of what was shared by the participants in terms of their reasons for dropping out of school and the decisions to re-enter.

It is notable that the consequences for dropping out are similar all over the globe. Young people who drop out of school are more likely to be unemployable or underemployed than those who complete their schooling. When they realise that this phenomenon occurs as a result of their lower levels of education, they either re-enter or attempt to re-enter schooling. The study notes that there is a disjuncture between the policies and programmes aimed at supporting school drop-in in South Africa and the implementation thereof.

The study concludes that reasons for the youth's dropping out of school are complex and intertwined. They include social and structural reasons, the nature of the

individual's family background, his/her financial status and his/her academic self esteem or lack of esteem. After dropping out, the individuals are inclined to recognise the value of education by associating education with accessing employment. They thus drop-in again or attempt to drop-in to school or to enter the labour market.

While attempting to re-enter the system, these individuals experience challenges associated with information poverty including a lack of knowledge of the pathways available to them. These include skills development initiatives, entrepreneur support initiatives, and FET options.

The study also suggests that there are psychological effects associated with prolonged absence from the ETD system, the labour market and inexperienced transitions. Lastly the study tables second-chance education as a strategy which should be central to policy making and implementation in South Africa.

School-to-work transitions remain complex matters both in developing and in developed countries. Policy and change within the context of education and labour need to operate inside the assumption that it is necessary to enhance the quality of individual involvement in education so as to maximise eventual economic participation for the majority. The ageing of the labour force threatens the government's financial resources. It is against this backdrop that policy makers and implementers need to recognise that the decreased participation of the young in the political economy of the nation is a socioeconomic crisis, and to provide strategies that maximise their participation. This would enhance skills levels and economic self-sufficiency in South Africa.