

CHAPTER 3

EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH DROP-OUT AND DROP-IN BEHAVIOURS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The research problem and contextual background to the study are outlined in Chapter One. Chapter Two provides the theoretical perspective on youth drop-out and drop-in. This chapter describes the empirical literature reviewed on the experiences of youth dropping in and dropping out of school. Like Chapter Two, this chapter looks at the literature related to the questions posed in the study (cf. Chapter One).

The chapter begins with a critical view of empirical literature on the experiences of the youth in dropping out of and dropping into school or work, as reported in both local and international sources. Like the theoretical perspective, the empirical literature in South Africa is reviewed, and the implications for possible out-of-school youth experiences, policies and practices, and the appropriate research design for this study are discussed. This follows an extensive discussion of the various causes and consequences of dropping out of and into school. These provide a meaningful framework for the present study.

A central argument in the chapter comes from Borat and McCord (2003:32). They explain that ‘structural and technological changes in the economy over recent decades have led to increases in capital intensity, on the one hand, but a reduction in demand for unskilled labour on the other hand’. The tenet is that dropping out renders the youth unskilled, thus decreasing their chances of accessing the job market. Evidence from McCord’s work has been used in this study to make the point that rapid economic growth in South Africa has triggered a demand for skilled labour thus lowering the demand for unskilled labour. Much evidence indicates that the above situation comes with remuneration differentials for skilled and unskilled

young people. Chapter Two drew attention to this by arguing that the reduction in the demand for unskilled labour poses critical challenges for the youth who dropped out of school without the skills needed for reaching successful destinations.

The chapter draws on evidence in the international literature to show that dropping out of school is not peculiar to South African youth. The central sources relied upon in this case were UNESCO (2000), which reflected drop-out rates in many parts of the world; the work of Kaufman et al, as well as Dearden, Emmerson, Frayne and Merghir *et al* (2006) in the UK; as well as Aloise Young *et al* (2002) in the US. There was also useful evidence in Te Riele (2004) and Lee and Lee (2003), who reported on this phenomenon in Sydney. In South Africa, the work of Kraak (2003) was a major source. All of these sources dealt with the question of youths dropping out of and dropping into school and the labour market.

3.2. COMPARING LEARNER DROP-OUT CAUSES IN SOUTH AFRICA WITH THOSE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

In Pennsylvania in the United States of America, the phenomenon of learner drop-out from school is attributed to (i) the learners' poor preparation in their earlier schooling, (ii) the situation where they have missed too many days of school and are unable to catch-up, (iii) their failing their grades, (iv) falling pregnant, (v) being incarcerated, (vi) being admitted to a drug or alcohol rehabilitation programme, (vii) the situation where their parents or guardians are unemployed, (viii) physical or learning disabilities, and (ix) learners in the foster care system experiencing frequent school transfers, and hence inconsistency in the curricula.

Mgwangqa and Lawrence (2008) found that in some African societies, school attrition is sometimes consequent to traumatic social and educational experiences. Young people in their study reported sexual harassment, parental neglect, teacher abuse and HIV/Aids-related conditions as factors contributing to dropping out. Where these negative consequences of being in school were absent, learners showed interest in returning to school (Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008).

One study for the East and Southern African Region (ESAR, 2000) provides a statistical overview of the status of school drop-outs from member countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. All of these countries' reports, produced by ESAR, found that poverty was the major overriding factor in drop-outs, serving as an umbrella for related factors such as illness, the distance from school, family problems, a lack of parental support, pregnancies, and even truancy and delinquency.

Using a non-cause-specific hazard model for the factors associated with school drop-out, Fuller and Liang (1999) found an association between a family's financial strength, measured by the level of household expenditure and access to credit, and the likelihood that a daughter will remain in school. In an earlier study conducted in Botswana, they found that household-asset ownership and housing quality were also consistently related to girls' educational attainment; these reflected the accumulated wealth and investment attitude of the household better than did short-term measures of consumption (Fuller, in Fuller & Liang, 1999).

School failure is an attribute of school retention and a contributing factor to dropping out of school. Failure leaves learners with a particular view of what they can or cannot do and thus opens up options for them. For the youth without strong support within their context, wrong choices or alternatives may be taken as a result. Te Riele(2005) suggests that youth do not drop out of school mainly because they do not want to study, but because they are failing at their studies. Failure is associated with their home backgrounds, local contexts, state of health, and other socioeconomic issues. Learners from supportive and financially stable backgrounds are more likely to remain in the system and ultimately finish schooling than those from low-income backgrounds. The researchers suggest that learners who fail are more likely to be lost in the system and are at risk of dropping out of school.

According to Henry and Roseth (1985) youth who drop out are generally less satisfied with school than those who stay. Structural contributors to youth drop-out

have been identified. They are the climate of the school, school rules and regulations, and the learner's lack of commitment to schooling. Like the home climate, the school climate is a factor contributing to the progress of lack of progress of youth. Teenagers that feel unwanted have a much higher likelihood of rebelling and dropping out. Also youths who feel wanted are likely to try harder even in otherwise adverse circumstances. The school climate thus has a role to play in the retention of learners and limiting their desire to drop out.

School failure causes frustration that results in learners' being alienated from school (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002; and Ministerial Committee, 2007). Failure and how the school and parents handle failure has a role in determining whether learners stay and try harder or leave school. Failure on its own has psychological implications and how it is handled becomes critical for the person who has failed.

Other areas of school life that marginalise young people and cause them to drop out have been suggested in Batten and Russell (1995). These include the curriculum, teaching and learning processes, relationships and climate, assessment and credentials, discipline and control, school organisation and administration, environment and resources, external links and, finally, staffing. Thus, in schooling, the culture (relationships and climate, discipline and control, environment and resources, external links) and policies (curriculum, teaching and learning processes, assessment and credentials, school organisation and administration) are the most structurally marginalising aspects in the life of the learner.

Change in the environment and society manifests itself in how the youth expect their environment to be. If one lives in a democratic environment, one is likely to expect all aspects of one's life to be democratic. Social change is thus seen as one of the structural factors leading to youths' dropping out. Te Riele (2004) suggests that states' education policy remains too linear while society and young people live in a non-linear society with access to a lot of choices and a knowledge economy. Despite that, education continues to be structured in linear, discrete and hierarchical ways. While youths participate and interact, the authorities decide on the extent and paradigms of their interaction. Social change widens the scope of interaction and

options for the youth, but other areas of schooling and factors relating to progression minimise the possible ‘democratised’ expectations around the destination of the youth.

The family provides the basis of one’s development. Te Riele (2004) suggests that lack of family support and unstable families seriously affect a learner’s progress or lack of progress at school. Families who show little or no interest in the learner’s progress are least likely to know how the learner is progressing, and as such are the least likely to encourage the learner.

Culture can also drive youths out of school. This is mostly related to the expectations of their community. This could include gender stereotypes that suggest that girls need to get married and boys need to provide for their families, in some communities as early as in early teenage years. In addition, family ‘traditions’ have an effect. Some families might feel that as soon as a boy impregnates a woman he needs to start working and providing, while other families would opt to provide for the new baby themselves until the young father is economically active.

Child-headed households have become relatively common since the nineties. As more and more adults become victims of HIV/Aids and die, children are left to head the households. Malaney (2000) suggests that as a result of HIV/Aids, children can be removed from school to care for their parents and family members. Paying school fees and other expenses becomes a problem. In the Central African Republic and Swaziland, school enrolment is reported to have fallen by 20% to 36% due to Aids and the children’s being orphaned, with girls being most affected¹. In most cases these young people leave school and try to find ways to provide for their siblings. These young people are more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts.

Lee and Lee (2003) employ a theoretical perspective on out-of-school youth. They suggest that dropping out has many contributory factors. They believe that the social system (the family, school and peers) influences dropping out. They suggest that

¹ <http://www.avert.org/aidsimpact.htm>

each system has a subsystem. The family subsystem includes interdependence, homeostasis and adaptability; the school subsystem includes the school climate, commitment to schooling, and rules and regulations and, lastly the peer subsystem include peer types and the peer culture.

The factors contributing to learners dropping out of school in South Africa are not dissimilar to those impacting on learners in other countries. In terms of the Mgwangqa and Lawrence (2008) analysis above, poverty is more severe in South Africa than in many other countries. Overall, the reasons for the youth dropping out of school can be viewed as structural, economic, emotional/psychological and social. These could be also intertwined.

3.3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF LEAVING SCHOOL

Almost universally, young people express great remorse for having left school. Many of these youth show interest in re-entering school with learners of their own age (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2009). But according to Bilchik (1997), too many drop-outs learn too late the terrible lesson of dropping out of school. This sentiment is echoed by Community Agency for Social Inquiry (2000), who maintains that too many drop-outs in later life regret the reckless decision they made to leave school prematurely.

Different themes relating to the consequences of dropping out are identifiable in the literature. They can be economic and non-economic in nature. Some of these are discussed below.

3.3.1. Economic consequences

3.3.1.1 Unemployment and employment instability

There are a number of consequences for dropping out of school. Dearden, Emmerson, Frayne and Meghir (2002) examine the effects of drop-out on access to

the labour market in North American countries. They report that of those who dropped out of school, more than one half were not employed. The school drop-out effect is quite pertinent in the United States. According to the US Census 2000, 90.4% of the 17-year-olds who dropped out of school lived with their parents, and 45% were not in the labour market. The National Center for Education Statistics in the US reported that in 2004 alone, 15% of all the 18- to 24-year-olds who dropped out of school were neither employed nor back in school.

Aloise-Young (2002) states that school dropouts are a serious problem for all European and North American countries, but this could be said for all countries affected by this phenomenon, because those who fail to complete school are more likely to be unemployed. Scholars like Coleman (1988), Angrist *et al* (1991), Barnicle *et al* (2006), and Bessant (2002) identify the challenges of dropping out and the implications for employability and earnings. Their research suggests that the relationship between dropping out of school and inability to find employment is strong.

Carleton (2009) examines drop-out experiences outside the school among teens, and reports that joblessness and social limitations are major problems. In Carleton's study, one participant described the effects well by noting that he/she did not have a job and "is broke...and can't make it or go anywhere without a job". Joblessness creates a kaleidoscope of social limitations.

In general, dropouts experience more difficulties in finding stable and productive employment than other young people. This is caused, amongst other things, by their lack of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies generally acquired in schools, including punctuality, perseverance, and the ability to get along with others. Dropouts also experience the unstable and rapidly changing youth labour market. About 61% of US learners who never dropped out were engaged in productive activities, compared with 39% for dropouts who completed high school and 34% who did not complete high school. About 33% of dropouts who completed and 43% who did not complete high school spent ten months or more in non-productive activities

compared with only 8% of learners who never dropped out. In Australia, dropouts were four times more likely to have spent ten months or more without work.

In countries around the world, high school drop-outs experience greater employment instability when they try to enter the workplace. In the US, for instance, dropouts work less than graduates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). In terms of wages, young people who drop out of school can expect their annual earnings to be less than half of those of a college or university graduate with a bachelor's degree (\$19,818 vs. \$43,368), and their likelihood of living in poverty is six times higher (21.5% vs. 3.6%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

Carleton (2009) asserts that the most obvious personal consequence of dropping out of school for youths in developed societies is the stark contrast between the incomes of dropouts and the incomes of those more educated. Using regression analysis, Carleton demonstrates that dropouts were as much as three times as likely to be unemployed than university or college graduates. The lower skills level of the dropout is a major contributory factor.

In Canada drop-outs experience greater difficulty than their peers in securing well-paying jobs. They also experience more vulnerability to economic shocks. Their wages are on average lower than those of workers with a high school diploma and their unemployment rate has been five to six percentage points above both the national average and the rate for high school graduates throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Raymond, 2008). Unemployment is also a challenge in the South African youth labour market. This involves more than 50% per cent of the learners who are registered in the system and drop out of school. According to the State of Skills Report in South Africa (DoL, 2003:5), youth unemployment continues to be one of the country's major challenges and is continuously escalating (DoE, 2001).

As in other countries, in South Africa unemployment is associated with a lack of skills and a low level of education. The skills bias of employment growth is evident in the rising rates of unemployment amongst the poorly educated groups of the labour force. Individuals with up to 9 years of education are more likely to be unemployed

than those with a matric certificate, whilst youth with 13 or more years of education are more likely to find employment than their counterparts with a matric qualification. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) (2003) indicates that most of the unemployed have no more than matric (grade 12 and below), whilst there is a lower level of unemployment amongst those with tertiary qualifications (Moleke, 2005). The Survey on Adult Basic Education and Training (Aitchison *et al*, 2000) also supports this observation by suggesting that most members of the unemployed cohort have a lower education level than their counterparts.

3.3.1.2 *Lost earnings*

In addition to the references above, a number of studies specifically examine the link between school drop-out and earnings (Angrist & Krueger, 1991; Acemoglu & Angrist, 2000; Harmon & Walker, 1995; Oreopoulos, 2003a; 2003b). Dropping out of school prematurely impacts negatively on future earnings. Oreopoulos (2003a) found that one additional year of being in school raises subsequent earnings by 10% to 14% for the youth in countries in North America and Europe. This conclusion is consistent with many previous studies, including Acemoglu and Angrist (2000), who uses differences in school leaving policies in various US states to show that learners compelled to take an extra year experience, on average, an increase of ten per cent in adult earnings.

One other study that demonstrates the relationship between dropping out of school and future earnings is the work of Angrist and Krueger (1991). They found from an analysis of a sample of US dropouts that learners who finish with a year of schooling less than their peers (because of school-entry policies) experience on average 9.2% lower adult earnings than those who leave school later. School policy can push some learners to leave school early. But also, when learners are pushed out for other reasons, such as economic factors, as in the case of many South African learners (as Mgwangqa and Lawrence (2008) state), the effect on future earnings potential is more or less the same.

With regard to the loss of earning potential, males are particularly affected. In a sample of US dropouts, Sum, Barnicle and Khatiwada (2006) found that male dropouts face a number of severe labour market difficulties, with steep declines in their real incomes and annual earnings. Their deteriorating labour market fortunes have reduced their ability to form independent households, to marry, to support their children, and to contribute positively to the fiscal position of the national government (Sum *et al*, 2006).

In the United Kingdom the effect on earning potential of dropping out of school is the same. Harmon and Walker (1995) examine the effects on earnings arising from changes made to the minimum school-leaving age in the UK. They estimate that adult earnings rose an average of 15.3% for each additional year of school a learner had taken. Dropping out of school prematurely, and a subsequent decision not to return, imply that the individual affected cannot access these income benefits.

Earnings in the US vary more by gender than by high school completion status. Male dropouts have higher monthly wages than either male non-drop-outs or female drop-outs. In Australia, at age 19, male drop-outs in full-time work receive higher monthly earnings on average than male high school graduates. This might be because of their longer exposure to the workforce and longer periods in employment. However, as soon as they acquire experience, the wages for graduates rise steeply. The gap is reversed for females, with female graduates earning more at age 19 than their counterparts who dropped out of school, even though they have been exposed to the labour market for a shorter period. This reveals the disadvantage female drop-outs experience in obtaining secure, well-paid work. They experience greater disadvantage in the transition to work (Carleton, 2009).

Carleton (2009) expands the literature on drop-out earnings potential by examining the lifetime earnings gaps between school drop-outs and non-drop-outs. Using an annual average income gap of \$9000 US dollars for the earnings of a secondary school graduate versus a drop-out, and an average income gap of \$35000 for a university/college graduate versus a drop-out, Carleton demonstrates that over the course of a lifetime drop-outs stand to earn about 1.6 million dollars less than

university/college graduates. He argues that this factor contributes to their poor general quality of life, as drop-outs are twice as likely to be situated below the poverty line.

But as in the case of many South African drop-outs, poverty is a reality in their lives even before they drop out of school. Dropping out merely exacerbates their poverty. Perhaps one over-arching lesson that can be drawn from the evidence above is that it supports the hypothesis that education is a worthwhile investment, at least in so far as employment and earning potential are concerned. Dropping out is the antithesis of making this investment (Oreopoulos, 2003b).

3.3.1.3 Restricted career and job options

In many societies there has been no great attempt to grapple with the problems of school drop-outs, such as the lack of job options and career paths. Eckstein and Wolpin (1999) examine the career options of drop-outs in European countries. They argue that the failure to leave school at the normal exit point severely limits drop-outs' career options and access to the job market. One area where this is evident is the limited number of jobs available to drop-outs (Carleton, 2009; Gatto, 2002).

Carleton (2009) found that as the job market becomes increasingly competitive, a growing number of high level jobs are demanding at least a grade 12 school-leaver's certificate as a pre-requisite for applying. When a learner drops out of school, therefore, he/she is automatically excluded from this market. Both monetary and long-term career success are contingent upon completing and graduating from secondary school but it seems that many adolescents fail to recognise this hard reality until it's too late (Oreopoulos, 2003a). Learners could offset the consequent feelings of regret at having a less than fulfilling career by staying in school.

But Rumberger and Lamb (1998) found in a cohort of dropouts in the US that male drop-outs hold similar jobs to those who never dropped out. About a third of each group – non drop-outs, drop-out-completers (those who re-entered and completed schooling), and dropout non-completers (those who re-entered and did not complete

schooling) – hold jobs in the skilled trades and another 17% of each group hold sales and service jobs. But drop-outs-non-completers are more likely than those from the other two groups to hold jobs as labourers (which generally pay lower wages) and less likely to hold jobs in managerial, professional, and technical areas (which generally pay higher wages) or the military. Females who never dropped out are more likely to be employed in clerical jobs, while female drop-outs who never completed are most likely to be employed in sales and service jobs. In Australia, the majority of male drop-outs in full-time work are in skilled trades at age 19.

The reality is that without a high school certificate these young people are likely to end up in low-wage jobs that have few career prospects and no benefits or job security (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2009; Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1997; Raymond, 2008).

But the drop-out evidence in many countries worldwide suggests that many learners do not have a choice of whether to stay at school or leave prematurely. Certainly, within the South African literature the opinion is expressed that economic and social barriers have kept many learners out of school (SAHRC, 2006; Motala et al, 2007). These forces have the effect of restricting the career pathways available to learners who drop out of school.

But the question of career pathway hinges upon other factors. In some countries, particularly countries in the developing south, formal sector economic activities have all but ground to a halt. In Somalia and Zimbabwe, for example, formal sector labour market activity is virtually nonexistent. In contexts such as Somalia, pursuing schooling to find jobs in the formal sector provides little or no motivation for learners. In terms of the rational decision-making model (cf. 2.2), dropping out of school is a more rational thing to do in such a context, as the current cost of investing in education is higher than the prospective future benefits. This implies that restricted career opportunities in the wider society can trigger drop-out decisions, as drop-outs choose what's best for them under the circumstances.

3.3.1.4 *Level of education and issues of access to the labour market*

Several studies assess the effects of education from additional schooling for learners who would otherwise have left sooner. These studies use the notion of compulsory schooling as a reference point. In terms of formal educational development, dropping out robs learners of appropriate cognitive development. Angrist and Krueger (1991) use differences in school-entry policies to identify learners dropping out with less education just because they were born before the entry cut-off date as opposed to just prior to the date. Learners who finish their schooling with a year less because of these policies experience on average much lower adult educational attainment than those dropping out later (Angrist & Krueger, 1991). As the sections above illustrate, having lower educational attainment has implications for participation in future labour market activity (Oreopoulos, 2003a; Schmidt, 1995; Lleras-Muney, 2001; Lochner & Moretti, 2003).

The level of education of a job seeker always proves to have a major impact on unemployment. ‘The South African economy’s increasing appetite for highly skilled labour ...lower skilled and poorly educated workers are likely to bear the brunt of unemployment rates by individuals’ highest level of education’ (Bhorat & Oosthuizen, 2005). Bhorat further suggest that there are now more people with matric and below who are seeking employment than previously. These numbers have increased in the post-apartheid era within the youth band. Why these disparities? Is dropping out of school the major reason for the lack of levels of skills required for employability?

Challenges to the youth associated with dropping out and consequent unemployability are more likely to happen to members of the Black groups than their white counterparts in South Africa. The race/class phenomena in dropping out, retention and employability have been suggested by scholars like Aloise-Young. She suggests that in the United States the problem of dropping out is higher for the Hispanic than for non-Hispanic white adolescents. In South Africa, Molete (2005) identifies higher numbers of Black graduates as being unemployed, and Du Toit

(2005) suggests that unemployment is more generally prevalent among Black youth in South Africa than among other South African groups.

Research (Moleté, 2005) shows that Blacks not only have the highest prevalence of dropping out of school in South Africa, but also have the highest prevalence of unemployment in the country. For some, underemployment is also a challenge, and is as a result of their low skills level.

3.3.1.5 Geographic location and issues of access to the labour market

In addition, the geographic location of the job seekers also plays a role in the unemployment rate in the country. This suggests that individuals from the rural areas are more likely to be unemployed than their counterparts in urban areas. While unemployment is more frequently experienced in rural than in urban areas, there is a trend towards an increase in urban unemployment as a result of the youth moving from the rural to the urban areas.

The recurring nature of unemployment in South Africa can also be associated with the background of the unemployed. As Bhorat and Oosthuizen (2005) put it, a large proportion of the broad unemployed are members of households with few or no wage earners. This results in the continued marginalisation of the poor; making the poor even poorer.

The literature above suggests that the lack of access to the labour market for South African youth still marginalises particular groups. The labour market is still characterised by gate-keeping relating to the education level, skills level, race, social background, geographic location, and gender. The less qualified you are the fewer are your chances of getting employment. For those who are qualified there is still another gate-keeping characteristic of the labour market to act as a barrier to employment, in that potential employers look at experience in addition to qualifications to determine whether or not the candidate can perform a job well.

3.3.1.6 Youth demographic factors and issues of access to the labour market

Race, social background, geographic location and gender are some of the issues relevant to failing to gain access to the labour market. South African policies like the Employment Equity Act (1998) have been developed to address these characteristics of the labour market. The implementation of these Acts is affected by the disparities between the policies' intentions and their implementation. This is mainly because the likely beneficiaries are the people with better educational qualifications. This is mirrored by the nature and character of school-to-work transition. While Acts like these have good intentions, without skilled labour the implementation is challenged and the need for redress is prolonged.

Household labour demands also influence the likelihood that a young woman will remain in school, as will whether or not she becomes pregnant. Fuller and Liang (1999) found that a mother's participation in the formal wage sector might depress a daughter's likelihood of remaining in school, perhaps as a result of increased household labour demands. Grant *et al* (2006) found that urban mothers of preschoolers in Guatemala are more likely to work for pay and work longer hours when their 15-18-year-old daughters are co-resident. Evidently, youth demographic factors must also be considered in considering the consequences of dropping out of school.

3.3.2 Non-pecuniary consequences

3.3.2.1 Crime

Research also demonstrates that youth who are not in school and not in the labour force are at high risk of delinquency and crime (Synder & Sickmund, in Ingersoll & LeBoeuf, 1997). Lochner & Moretti (2003) find that in some European societies compelling children to remain in school decreases the likelihood of their committing crime and going to jail. In the US, Harlow (2003) provides evidence that shows that three quarters of state prison inmates and 59% of federal prison inmates were school drop-outs. According to Catterall (1985), drop-outs are 3.5 times more likely than

grade 12 completers to be imprisoned at some stage in their life. In a recent analysis, Carleton (2009) puts this figure at eight times more likely than grade 12 graduates. The chances of becoming social deviants decrease with the duration of schooling.

3.3.2.2 *Poverty*

The fact that school dropouts stand to earn substantially less in annual income than those who complete schooling (Angrist & Krueger, 1991) puts drop-outs at risk of poverty. Carleton (2009) estimates that in the US, drop-outs are twice as likely as graduates (university or college) to live below the national poverty line. Although limited, this evidence draws attention to the serious consequences of living a life as a school drop-out.

But Carleton's argument presupposes that the individual concerned was not already poor. In many developing countries such as South Africa poverty conditions define the lives and households of many learners prior to their dropping out of school. One half of the learners who drop out of primary and secondary school in rural South Africa do so for economic reasons (HRW, 2004). For the poor, dropping out of school can have an intergenerational effect: it can impact not just on the present but also on future generations.

3.3.2.3 *Life expectancy*

Lleras-Muney (2001) examines the effects of education on mortality. She estimates that an additional year of schooling substantially lowers the probability of dying among elderly people. This suggests that dropping out of school decreases one's life expectancy. The findings of Lleras-Muney correspond to those of Oreopoulos (2003a), who reports that staying in school one additional year improves subsequent life factor variables such as one's health and chance of employment.

Carleton (2009) reports that among the 3000 plus learners who call it quits from school every day in the US, the majority experience remorse for their decision to drop out prematurely. Many of these individuals say that they would return to school if they could. In health research, remorse is a source of psychological stress

(American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Psychological stress impacts negatively on life expectancy. It is not clear how many of these consequences for drop-outs are taken into consideration prior to their making the decision to quit school.

3.3.2.4 *Societal consequences*

Not only are there personal consequences for each individual who drops out of school prematurely, but there are heavy social costs as well. Wolf (2000) and others (Carleton, 2009; Oreopoulos, 2003a) estimate that North American countries will lose 3 trillion dollars in the next decade as a result of school drop-outs. In Canada, Lafleur (1992) estimates that for 140 000 drop-outs it costs the state \$4 billion over their working lifetime in 1989, which corresponds to \$58.7 billion 2005 (Raymond, 2008).

Moretti (2005) submits that drop-outs reduce the productivity of their communities by incurring a high social cost and contribute minimally to the development of these communities. Furthermore, there is evidence that drop-outs are less engaged in civic activities than grade 12 or high-level graduates. Graduates tend to live longer and raise happier, better educated children (Moretti, 2005). This implies that many generations are affected each time a child drops out of school prematurely (www.silentepidemic.org; www.americaspromise.org). When a learner drops out of school he/she misses out on the prospect of living longer and raising happier, better educated children.

As drop-outs go into adulthood with a lower level of education, they stand a higher chance of being involved in criminal activities and being imprisoned (Carleton, 2009; Oreopoulos, 2003a). Dropouts cost communities in the form of government assistance, jail charges, crime, violence, and drug money (Moretti, 2005; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). They also cost the communities in terms of cash, public assistance income, and in-kind transfers such as food stamps, rental subsidies, energy assistance, and medical aid to support themselves and their families (Sum *et al*, 2007). These cost factors are common not only in developed countries such as in

Europe and North America but in many developing nations as well (Moretti, 2005; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Sum et al, 2007).

In the US in 2001, Carleton (2009) found that 40% of young people without secondary school leaver-certificates receive some form of government assistance. The cost of this assistance can be quite high in states with abnormally high school drop-out rates. Each instance of dropping out means that society is losing a potentially valuable, fully contributing member.

3.4. THE EXTENT OF AND MOTIVES FOR SCHOOL DROP-INS

While there is a proliferation of literature showing the nature and extent of the learner drop-out phenomenon in South Africa (ESAR 2000; Hanushek, 2003; HRW, 2006; Motala et al, 2007; Mgwangqa & Lawrence, 2008), less has been written about the volume of the drop-outs who actually return to school. Regardless of the context, not all school drop-outs remain out of the education system forever. There is evidence that some dropouts do return to school to complete their schooling (e.g. Barro in McLaughlin, 1990). Illinois Task Force (2008) submits that in different countries around the world, many of the youth who dropped out of school are in fact learners who would like to return to earn their school-leaving certificates.

As mentioned before, the number of studies that have investigated drop-outs' re-enrolment is limited. Raymond (2008) makes this point well, noting that there are few studies in literature that address school returns by drop-outs. The few exceptions include the study conducted by Bushnik (2004), Brown (2008), Grant and Hallman (2006), and Maharaj, Kaufman, and Richter (2000) in South Africa. The rest were done in the United States: Sum; Khatiwada; McLaughlin; Tobar; Motroni; and Palma (2007), Illinois Task Force (2008), Berliner; Barrat; Fong; and Shirk (2008), Chuang (1997), De Vos (2005), Wayman (2001), Barro (1987)), and Betty (1986).

3.4.1. Pathways back into education: proportion of and motives for drop-outs' return to school

3.4.1.1 Proportion of dropout return to school

It has been mentioned in previous sections most dropouts do not necessarily stay out of school forever. In the High School and Beyond Longitudinal Survey conducted between 1981 and 1986 in the US, Barro (1987) found that among the 40 000 drop-out cohort, nearly half (46.5%) dropped back into school and completed their secondary schooling or received an equivalent school-leaver certificate. Berliner, Barrat, Fong and Shirk (2008) found that about one third of the drop-outs in a large urban US district return to schools. Work by Illinois Task Force (2008) in districts in other states produced similar findings.

In Canada, Bowlby and McMullen (2002) reported that in 1999 approximately 15% of young men and 9% of young women aged 20 years had not completed their secondary schooling, but by the end of 2000/01 approximately 20% of them had returned to school. Between 1991 and 2005, the national rate of dropouts returning to school in Canada gradually increased over the 15-year period (Raymond, 2008). In the same country, Bushnik, Barr-Telford and Bussiere (2004) used regression models on data collected from a sample of 2 350 drop-outs to show particular geographic areas more or less likely to experience school drop-ins, with drop-ins more likely in large cities such as Quebec and less likely in small towns such as Alberta.

Ball and Lamb (2001) examine vocational education and training activities and the experiences of non-completers of Grade 12 in the initial post-school years in Australia. Their sample of 2 067 respondents included young people who did not continue at secondary school beyond Grade 10 and Grade 11 as well as those who left during Grade 12 without obtaining a Grade 12 certificate. The study was a Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) and Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS)

mainly for 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998. The researchers found that over 40% of all non-completers re-enter trade-related courses. A quarter re-enrol in non-trade skills courses.

The study by Rumberger and Lamb (1998) examined the experiences of high school dropouts from the United States and Australia. The study analysed longitudinal surveys in both countries. In the former, 25 000 Grade 8 learners in 1998 were used, and in the latter 5 500. In the US, 44% of dropouts returned to complete the high school equivalency certificate. In Australia, only 2% returned to complete their schooling. However, the majority of these dropouts in Australia re-entered Technical and Further Education College, courses including apprenticeships, traineeships, and other certificate courses which do not require a Grade 12 certificate for entry. More recently, cross-country work by Oreopoulos (2003a; 2003b) which drew on samples from three countries – the US, Canada, and the United Kingdom – refers to the re-enrolment of school dropouts, but the precise proportion returning to school is not given.

Evidence of dropouts re-enrolling in school in South Africa is also documented, but there is a dearth of literature on the subject. Large-scale surveys are notably absent. Grant and Hallman (2003; 2006) used data collected in 2001 in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, to examine youth schooling, work, and childbearing, and the factors associated with schoolgirl pregnancy. The study further explored the likelihood of school drop-out and subsequent re-enrolment among pregnant schoolgirls. It found, *inter alia*, that 32% of 14–19-year-olds who had ever been pregnant were currently attending school (Hallman and Grant 2003). Maharaj *et al* (2000) used the 1993 SALDRU data to examine transitions and tensions in household and communities regarding children's schooling (Maharaj, Kaufman, & Richter, 2000). They found that approximately 35% of African girls aged 19 and younger who had given birth at least once were currently attending school.

There is no South African study as far as could be ascertained that investigated male drop-out re-enrolment in school. This limitation hinders gender comparison, for instance. A study by Brown (2008) in the Eastern Cape examines the experiences of

ex-drop-outs in school after re-enrolment in schools in the province. The study uses both male and female ex-drop-outs in the sample, but it is a case study of ten individuals. More importantly, however, this study provides some evidence that both male and female drop-outs re-enrol in schools.

In other African countries, evidence of the re-enrolment of dropouts in school has been reported (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; SADOH, 1999; Johnson-Hanks, 2002; Grant & Hallman, 2006;). For instance, an ethnographic study in Cameroon indicated that young women sent their children to live in the father's household or otherwise relinquished parental rights to other relatives in order to continue their education (Johnson-Hanks 2002). The wealth of evidence in different countries on these learners' return to school shows that while the proportion that returned varies across contexts, the phenomenon remains a reality in the school system inside and outside South Africa.

3.4.1.2 Motives for the decision to return to school

There are both 'push' and 'pull' factors in learners' motivation to drop-out and return to school. The literature describes labour market experiences that push learners back into school to complete their education – wider employment prospects, higher earnings, higher skills demands, disappointing labour market experiences, recognition of the economic benefits obtained from completing school – while principals, teachers, sports coaches, and counsellors help to pull drop-outs back to primary and secondary school by offering to immediately re-enrol them and by providing counselling and academic assistance on their return. This is particularly the case in developed countries (Berliner et al, 2008; Rumberger & Lamb, 1998; Bushnik, Barr-Telford & Bussiere, 2004; Raymond, 2008).

In general, Raymond summarises some of the common characteristics that are shown to 'influence the decision to return to school' (Raymond, 2008:15). These are displayed in Table 1:

Table 1: Characteristics that influence the decision to return to school

NO	CHARACTERISTIC	EXAMPLES OF DIMENSIONS	INTENDED VARIABLE
1	Personal and family characteristic	Has one or more children	Captures financial constraint
		Lives alone	Captures financial constraint
		Main parent has postsecondary education diploma, certificate or degree	Captures individual's notion of the value of education
		Main parents' education unknown	
2	Educational experience and aspirations	Repeated a grade in primary school	Captures costs for returning to school, having lower ability, having lower self-confidence
		Last maths course was postsecondary education preparatory	Captures intentionally-temporary drop-out
		Last maths course was Grade 9 level or below	Captures intentionally-temporary drop-out
		Wants to get postsecondary education	Captures intentionally-temporary drop-out
3	Dropout circumstances (last grade completed)	Grade 10	Captures the cost of returning to school
		Grade 11	
		Grade 12	
		Numbers of years since left school	Captures the cost of returning to school
4	Reason for leaving school	Academic	
		Personal	
		Wishes to work/money	
		Other	
5	Labour market activities and conditions	Did not work in the autumn of 1999	Captures the cost of returning to school
		Greatest number of hours worked per month in one job in autumn 1999	Captures the cost of returning to school
		Local unemployment rate for 15-year-olds and over (gender-specific, by economic region)	Captures the potential supply of jobs
6	Location	Township	
		Town	
		Farm	
		Village	

Source: Raymond, 2008

The Table shows that many of the factors that triggered dropping out also influence dropping in. Personal and family background, educational experiences and aspirations, drop-out circumstances, reasons for dropping out, labour market activities and conditions and location are the main characteristics that influence a youth's decision to return to schooling.

Family-related pressure factors push drop-outs back into school. Evidence to this effect has been reported in some Africa-based studies. In South Africa, Grant and Hallman (2006) found that 29% of 14–19-year-olds who drop out of school when they are pregnant had returned to school at the time of the survey, compared with 52% of 20–24-year-olds. But with every year that passes after dropping out of school, young women are significantly less likely to return to school. The likelihood of return to school decreases with each higher grade, particularly after Grade 9. This difference most likely relates to the longer period of time that the older cohort has had to return to school after the pregnancy. Younger girls who have dropped out of school because of pregnancy may return to school in the future, perhaps at a postsecondary level.

The extent of household assets and the education levels of adult family members are not determinants of South African females' return to school after a pregnancy. In the cohort of dropouts that Grant and Hallman (2006) studied, household wealth, as measured by asset ownership, is not significantly associated with a return to schooling, nor is the level of education of adult household members. But the composition of the household is significantly associated with a return to school. Young women living in households where an adult female aged 25 to 49 or aged 60 and older is present are more likely to return to school than are young women living in households that lack an adult woman. The rationale for the age disaggregation is that 25–49-year-olds are normally considered of prime age and as economically active adults in terms of either market or home production, whereas South African women aged 60 and older are eligible for the state old-age pension (Grant & Hallman, 2006). The older member often plays the role of caregiver.

Apart from household factors, age at school entry and grade repetition influence South African female drop-outs' re-enrolment. In the Grant and Hallman study,

neither age at school entry nor ever having repeated a grade is significantly associated with the likelihood of returning to school. Young women who had previously withdrawn from school for non-pregnancy-related reasons are half as likely to return to school as are young women who had never withdrawn for pregnancy related reasons. This finding may indicate a young woman's motivation and interest in school, independent of her current circumstances.

3.4.1.3 Demographic factors in motives for the decision to return to school

Furthermore, certain demographic factors are common among dropouts who return, or do not return, to school. These include whether or not the parents have postsecondary education, the dropout's academic ability, his/her age, the duration of the period out of school, and the perceived cost of returning (Raymond, 2008; Berliner *et al*, 2008; Oreopoulos, Page, & Stevens, 2003).

- Race/ethnicity variation in re-enrolment

There is evidence of race/ethnicity variation in drop-out re-enrolment in school. This is the case in different contexts. Among US drop-outs, Berliner *et al* (2008) found that re-enrolment rates are lowest for Asian learners (13.3%), who also had the lowest drop-out rate (22.6%). In contrast, Hispanic, English language learners and male learners also had low re-enrolment rates but are more likely to drop out than are other learners. The fact that the learner population in many South African schools is multiracial makes an understanding of this race dimension particularly important in this study.

In the US, Hispanic learners had a higher drop-out rate (39.0%) and a lower re-enrolment rate (27.9%) than learners of other races/ethnicities. English language learners dropped out at a higher rate (43.3%) than did other learners (32.5%) and re-enrolled at a lower rate (25.6%) (Berliner *et al*, 2008).

The highest re-enrolment rates were found for Grade 9 drop-outs (49.4%), Black drop-outs (43.4%), female drop-outs (34.7%), and learner drop-outs not classified as English-language learners (33.7%). But the majority of re-enrolees in the US drop out in their first year of school (Berliner et al, 2008). The higher re-enrolment rates, especially for Grade 9 and Black learner drop-outs, demonstrate how drop-out events can be a temporary interruption rather than a permanent high school outcome. Grant and Hallman (2006) argue that the time horizon explains the greater re-enrolment in Grade 9, compared with higher grades.

- Gender

School drop-in is also varied by gender. Berliner et al (2008) report that male learners are more likely to drop out than are female learners (39.5% compared with 30.7%) and less likely to re-enrol (28.1% compared with 34.7%). Work by Raymond (2008) in Canada echoed these findings. Raymond submits that fewer women than men drop out from school and more women drop back into school. Also, the reasons that drove young men to drop out do not affect their decision to drop in. In contrast, the reasons for dropping out distinguish which young women return. Of the utmost importance is Raymond's finding that more than 50% to 60% of drop-outs who re-entered the education system failed.

The gender gap in returns to school may be the product of differences in school-return aspirations, particularly at the time of dropping out. For the male and female learner subgroups low re-enrolment rates mean that drop-out events become permanent exits from schools. This kind of outcome is particularly negative in contexts where labour market activities are limited.

School performance disaggregates gender group re-enrolment. Prior poor school performance, measured as grade repetition or temporary withdrawal from school, is highly predictive of which young women will drop out and show disinterest in dropping in (Raymond, 2008; Berliner et al, 2008; Meekers & Ahmed, 1999). Meekers and Ahmed (1999) found that among young women in Botswana who dropped out of school following a pregnancy and subsequently returned to school,

the majority of returnees stayed in school until they received their matriculation certificate. This is in contrast to Berliner *et al* (2008), who found in the US that drop-outs stay in school about a year after re-enrolment and are unlikely to stay until they finish schooling.

Meekers and Ahmed (1999) speculate that highly motivated learners with good school performance prior to pregnancy are those most likely to return, but also that any learner who manages to return to school following a pregnancy is likely to have the impetus to advance her education. This is consistent with the hypothesis that there is a greater urgency to re-enrol among females than among males.

The eagerness shown by females to return to school as reported in studies conducted in Europe and North America does not necessarily apply across contexts. Qualitative research in South Africa has found that some young women marry or move into their partner's home following a pregnancy, and are thereby subject to the financial and labour priorities of their new household, which may not place a priority on their continuing education (Kaufman, 2001). Maharaj *et al* (2000) demonstrate that adolescent mothers whose children are not co-resident are more likely to be attending school currently.

A further factor influencing school continuation by gender is women's fertility subsequent to the birth of their first child. Although South Africa's total fertility rate is low (2.9 children per woman of reproductive age in 1998) compared with that of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and the median birth interval for second and third births is nearly 50 months (SADOH, 1999), young women who have a second child shortly after the first is born may, for practical reasons, no longer have the option of returning to school. Disentangling a woman's education and fertility objectives is difficult, however. The possibility of returning to school may lead women to postpone their second birth if they can (Kaufman *et al*, 2001).

Bushnik *et al* (2002) investigated the phenomenon of return-to-school by gender in a sample of 2 350 school drop-outs aged 18 to 20 years in Canada. They found that both male and female drop-outs return to school but report qualitative differences in

their motives. While very few factors influence young women's decisions to return to school such as (a) the circumstances that brought them to leave school in the first place, (b) their aspirations to obtain a postsecondary education, and (c) the time elapsed since they left school, young men on the other hand, returned to school because of (a) their negative labour experience, (b) their past academic experience and decisions (those with good experiences being the more likely to return), and (c) their aspirations to obtain a postsecondary education. For both men and women, the results suggest that '

major determinant of returning to school is whether the absence from school was considered temporary, as captured by their long-term postsecondary aspirations' (Raymond, 2008:8).

But while drop-outs return to school, their completion rate seems to vary. Also, the analysis found that 'as a greater proportion of leavers return to school, fewer return to complete their high school diploma, instead choosing to seek a postsecondary diploma or degree' (Raymond, 2008:11). The largest increase was in university programmes, most likely [sic] university certificates targeted to mature learners.

There are limitations to the above study. The analysis does not provide clear pathways to the workplace, and like the Ball and Lamb (2001) study, it does not trace newly graduated drop-outs to the workplace in terms of enhanced opportunities and performance. There is a need for further research in workplace pathways. There is also a need for research into why the majority of dropping-in youth are not making it in the system.

This study has several implications for both the policy and practice of rescuing drop-outs in South Africa.

3.5. DROP-OUTS AND THE LABOUR MARKET CHALLENGES IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.5.1 The labour market challenges

Although education is a primary investment strategy used by poor families to escape poverty in less developed countries, evidence from South Africa indicates that labour-market incentives for youths 15–24 years old to complete secondary school are not high and may even be declining. In terms of employment, trends have not kept pace with the growth in the South African economy. Between 2000 and 2007, the average annual economic growth was 4.1% while the growth in the employment rate was 1.8% (DoL, 2008). Growth in the economy over the period has not translated into an equivalent growth in employment rate in the labour market in South Africa (Pollin, Epstein, Heintz, & Ndikumana, 2006). About 26% of the labour force in the country is currently unemployed (Pollin *et al*, 2006). A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study (Pollin *et al*, 2006) states that there is a severe problem of mass unemployment in South Africa today and cautions that if the South African economy continues to operate with its existing policy package along its current trajectory, the likelihood is high that the official unemployment rate will be substantially above 30% by 2014.

The above assessment does not augur well for South African youth in general, and those who dropped out of school in particular. Young people make up the majority of those who have never worked (Banerjee, Galiani, Levinsohn, McLaren, & Woolard, 2008). Employment is the most important source of potential income for the majority of South Africans. This fact establishes a fundamental link between unemployment and poverty: that joblessness is the single greatest cause of mass poverty and, correspondingly, reducing unemployment would be the single most effective means of reducing poverty. As the discussion in sections 2.4 and 2.5 above indicates, poverty-related conditions push many youths out of school. When these drop-outs find themselves out of school, they are faced with the prospect of living

without being formally engaged in livelihood activities in the labour market. In this way, many young drop-outs are caught in an education and unemployment trap.

Like the drop-out statistics (cf. section 2.4), the severity of unemployment in South Africa differs by gender and population group. Women consistently experience substantially higher rates of joblessness than do men (Pollin *et al*, 2006). But more men drop out of school than women. Female unemployment rates are about 50% higher than those for males (Banerjee, Galiani, Levinsohn, McLaren & Woolard, 2008). Even though fewer females drop out of school than males, females are less likely to find employment.

Banerjee *et al* (2008) found that among the different population groups, white South Africans have the lowest unemployment rates (an average of 5.1%) and Africans have the highest unemployment rates (an average of 31.6%). The unemployment rates for the Coloured and Indian/Asian populations are significantly higher than those of Whites (averaging 19.8% and 19.0% respectively). As section 2.4 shows, unemployment among drop-outs tends to follow a similar pattern, which reinforces the cycle of problems drop-outs experience in the labour market.

The burden of unemployment also differs geographically in South Africa, with the highest concentration of unemployed workers being in rural areas (Banerjee *et al*, 2008). As of March 2005 unemployment by province - using the official definition - ranged from 17.6% in the Western Cape to 32.4% in Limpopo - a difference of 14.8 percentage points. The Western Cape is the second most heavily urbanised province in the country, while Limpopo is the most rural.

The differences between the regions are still sharper with respect to the numbers of discouraged worker seekers. Thus, in the Western Cape only 6.3% of the working-age population is discouraged, whereas in Limpopo, discouraged worker seekers account for 21.9% of the working-age population. Overall, discouraged worker seekers are even more heavily concentrated in rural areas than are the official unemployed. Of all the unemployed who have never worked in the past, 76% are aged from 15 to 30

years old. The lower end of this age range shows that unemployment features strongly among youths of school-going age.

Finding an easy pathway into the labour market after dropping out of school is rare in South Africa, at least in as far as the formal sector economy is concerned. The fact that many of the unemployed who have never worked are young and that many of these young people remain unemployed for long periods of time is representative of South Africa's serious problem of youth unemployment (Bhorat & McCord, 2003).

Even young people who have completed their secondary education have high unemployment rates. In 2002, 34% of the young unemployed were Black Africans between 15 and 24 years old, with grade 12 or tertiary qualifications (Emmett *et al*, 2004).

3.5.2 The prospect of returning to school

In addition to improving their employment prospects, education for women offers potential returns beyond the labour market. In conducting focus-group research in South Africa, Kaufman *et al* (2001) found that education is strongly associated with the valuation of a woman's bride-price, a fact which often encourages parents to support their daughters' return to school following early pregnancy and childbirth.

Moreover, because job opportunities are so scarce for young African women, popular attention has turned recently to the availability of the child-support grant (HSRC, 2005). Rather than continuing with their schooling or seeking employment, some girls 14 years old or younger in poor households in South Africa reportedly fall pregnant as a means of getting access to the child-support grants provided by government (HSRC 2005). This survival strategy further complicates the range of factors drop-outs often consider regarding whether or not to drop back in.

3.6 POLICY AND PROGRAMMES SUPPORTING SCHOOL DROP-IN IN SOUTH AFRICA

3.6.1 Primary/secondary schooling

3.6.1.1 Policy supporting post pregnancy girls' return to school

Although in many settings having a child marks the end of schooling for girls, a policy formalised in South Africa in 1996 but informally upheld previously by some school principals allows pregnant girls to stay in school and also allows young mothers to do so if they can manage logistically and financially (Kaufman *et al*, 2001). This policy, although not universally enforced, is credited with the observed lack of gender differences in total educational attainment and is believed to contribute to the observed long delay before the birth of a second child to adolescent mothers in South Africa (Grant & Hallman, 2006). The policy has encouraged several females to return to school after giving birth to complete pre-tertiary education (Maharaj *et al*, 2000; Hallman & Grant, 2003).

3.6.1.2 No-fee school

A no-fee school policy was implemented in South Africa in 2007. The no-fee policy empowers the Minister of Education to exempt certain schools from charging fees, based on the poverty levels of the area they serve. The government determines which schools qualify to be no-fee schools using data from the Poverty Index supplied by Statistics South Africa (DoE, 2006). The three poverty indicators utilised for this purpose are the income, unemployment rate and level of education of the community. These are weighted to assign a poverty score for the community and school. In terms of this policy, a school drop-out who wishes to return to school cannot be denied entry on the basis of his/her inability to pay the fees charged by the school. In this way, the policy supports the return of drop-outs to the formal education system.

Ahmed and Sayed (2009) point out that the no-fee school allocation is developed using five considerations. These are linked to the rights of learners, the minimum basic package to ensure quality education, the prices of goods and services, the national distribution of income difference and poverty, and finally the state budget (DoE, 2006). The emphasis is on allowing poor and disadvantaged learners access to education, regardless of whether the learners are attempting access for the first time or not. Sayed and Ahmed (2008) support this position by asserting that the fee exemption policy is a way of ensuring that access is not denied to any learner.

The form of exemptions differs. Parents of learners have the opportunity to apply for a full or partial exemption of fees at any school, regardless of whether the school serves a richer or poorer community (DoE 1998). Drop-outs are therefore given a wide range of schools from which to choose. This could be interpreted as meaning that drop-outs have the flexibility of returning to their previous schools or starting at new ones, as they wish, particularly if the reason for their dropping out of school is linked to their geographic location.

Two major categories of learners are catered for in the no-fee policy. The first is learners who are orphans or abandoned children, and those receiving a poverty-linked state social grant (Sayed & Ahmed, 2008). Learners in this group qualify for a full exemption of fees. The second category requires learners to apply for inclusion. Learners may be granted a full or partial exemption based on their parents' income in relation to school fees. The relation of parental income to the full school fee is determined by a set formula that schools need to utilise upon receiving a written application from a parent. In theory these exemptions permit even the poor to attend rich or fee-charging schools (DoE, 2006).

3.6.1.3 South Africa School Act

The South Africa School Act (SASA, 1996) sets out a framework for school governance that allows for the existence of democratically elected School Governing Bodies as juristic persons in charge of a school. All children have a right to education, particularly education up to Grade 9, which in the South African context is deemed

basic education. The Act establishes compulsory education, allows schools the right to charge school fees, and cedes a great deal of autonomy to schools. But the SASA supports a linear transition in the formal education system from Grade R to Grade 12. It does not give consideration to other pathways such as non-formal schooling.

3.6.2 Postsecondary schooling

Some policies are linked to strategies for connecting secondary school drop-outs between the ages of 16 and 24 to pathways to the attainment of postsecondary credentials that have value in the labour market.

3.6.2.1 Education White Paper 4: A Programme for the Transformation of the Further Education (FET) Sector 1998

The Education White Paper 4 resulted in the establishment of a new FET system. The policy outlines close collaboration with the Ministry of Labour in the governance of the FET sector. The central objective is to build the policy foundation and scaffolding for a new FET system that is responsive to the skills-related needs of the youth and that is efficient, effective and accountable to its learners and stakeholders.

The establishment of the FET system provides an alternative education pathway to learners who dropped out of secondary schools and who wish to re-enter the education system. One provision of the FET policy is that learners with a Grade 9 level of education can enrol to continue their education (Reddy, 2007). For learners who dropped out of secondary school before reaching Grade 12, the FET schools are an alternative pathway to gain credentials that have value in the labour market.

The FET sector consists of technical colleges that provide education and training in specialised fields such as Engineering, Business Studies, and the Arts (Gewer, 2002). In these colleges, training is provided up to the National Qualification Framework levels 2 to 4 for the National Certificate Vocational NATED programmes (Gewer,

2002). FET colleges were formed through the merging of several former technical colleges and training centres (DoE, 2001). The FET schools are pathways for drop-outs to drop into the education system, where they can gain the skills needed for the labour market.

3.6.2.2 *SETAs' learnership programmes*

The Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) is another South African mechanism that provides school drop-outs with a pathway into education and training and work. The SETAs were established in 2000 through the Skills Development Act of 1998. The SETAs are supported by a levy taken from employers' annual payrolls (Skills Development Act, 1998). They are structures that seek to assist both employed and unemployed out-of-school youth in skills development through training (Butler, Bell, & Murray, 2007).

Butler *et al* (2007) describe this system well by noting that there are twenty-three SETAs, each representing one sector or industry cluster – and each is to ensure that the skills requirements of the various sectors are identified, and that the adequate and appropriate skills are readily available. They are also to ensure that training is of the appropriate quality, meets agreed standards as laid out by the national framework, and caters for the training needs of new entrants to the labour market as well as the currently employed work force.

The SETA programmes are of direct significance in the school drop-out debate in South Africa because SETA training links drop-outs directly to the labour market. One of the reasons drop-outs are challenged to access the job market is that they are unskilled (Banerjee *et al*, 2008). The SETA training is able to develop the skills capacity of drop-outs, thereby improving their level of education. Because of this, the SETA programmes open a pathway for dropouts to re-access the education and training system en route to the labour market.

Each SETA is tasked with distributing the money that is raised from skills levies back to their sector, developing learning programmes that are relevant for its sector and

maintaining the highest standards of training. Drop-outs who access SETA programmes can be assured of quality skills development because quality assurance is conducted via a SETA Education and Training Quality Assurance body (Butler *et al*, 2007).

The programmes that the SETAs are responsible for are 'learnership programmes'. Learnerships are contractual agreements between a learner, a training provider and an employer. In practice, a significant portion of the learning and the subsequent assessment are conducted in the workplace. How sufficient the learnership programmes are by themselves for opening up access to higher-wage opportunities for drop-outs who gain access to them remains an open question. An equally important question is whether or not these programmes are bringing the majority of the youth served to any level of postsecondary readiness. Despite these questions, the SETA programmes are intended to provide an alternative pathway for secondary school drop-outs to improve their education.

3.6.2.3 *UMsobomvu youth funds*

Umsobomvu Youth Fund is a government-backed organisation that provides training and monetary assistance to South Africans between the ages of 18 and 35 to start a business (Shinn, 2008). Umsobomvu was established by government in 2001. Umsobomvu has relevance to the school drop-out situation in South Africa as its aim is to reverse the unemployment trends in the country by supporting entrepreneurs and giving training and consulting services to hopeful young business people.

Umsobomvu Youth Fund organisation offers counselling to young people and delivers various training programmes focusing on life and job skills, entrepreneurship, and assisting youth with school to the work contexts (Shinn, 2008). Sometimes school dropouts wish to have access to training that links them directly to employment (Harris & Ganzglass, 2008). This is the pathway that Umsobomvu programmes provide.

Like Umsobomvu Youth Organisation, the National Youth Commission is a branch of government that deals with issues affecting youths between the ages of 14 and 35 years. The two organisations are now in the process of merging (Gabara, 2009).

3.7 SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature relating to empirical perspectives on learner school drop-out and drop-in behaviours. Policies and programmes aimed at providing pathways for drop-outs to re-enrol in school or access the labour market have also been reviewed. The review showed that various factors can contribute to drop-out and drop-in to school, but these factors are not as fully understood in South Africa as in other countries. Regardless of the national context, access to the job market for drop-outs is not easy. While South Africa makes provision for out-of-school youths to improve their education and skills, the extent to which these young people are aware of these opportunities is unclear. Also, clarity is needed regarding whether or not these pathways are actually followed by school drop-outs.

The next chapter develops the methodology for the study, which is an empirical investigation of the pathways followed by drop-outs back into the ETD system or the job market.