Investigating the Role of Family, Personal, School and Environmental Factors in the Academic Survival Rate of Students in Rural Areas of Fenuj Town (Quchan, Iran) from the Perspective of Teachers

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Abstract

The present descriptive survey was conducted to investigate the effects of some related factors on the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town (Quchan, Iran) from the perspective of teachers. According to Cochran formula and using stratified random sampling method, 224 teachers (57 females and 167 males) were selected as the study’s samples. The results indicated that teachers do believe that family, personal, school and environmental factors affect the academic survival rate of students in rural areas; thus, the identification of these factors can increase the survival rate and decrease the dropout rate of students in rural areas.

Keywords: Academic Survival Rate, Students in Rural Areas, Fenuj Town.
Introduction

Elementary school is the starting point in the process of education; however, in the course of education, there are issues slowing down or blocking the process. Academic failure, manifested in dropouts, repetitions and expulsions, causes a lot of financial and human resources losses and adversely affects personal and social lives of people. Reviewing literature, it was shown that the Iranian education system has not been successful in achieving its goals. This lack of success, revealed in high rates of premature dropouts and learning losses, has imposed great direct or indirect losses on money matters, societies, families and students and has reduced internal and external efficiency of the Iranian education system. These losses are even greater when imposing high per capita spending on education system (Javanbakht, 2014). Educational structures are not only essential for every society, but also found in every era of human life. Hence, they may have different form. For instance, human has a social and impressive nature then education is natural and inevitable affair. And for human perfection is unlimited, education is variable and indefinite in accordance with variable social circumstances.

Factors affecting the academic survival rate of students can be divided in four classes of personal, family-related, school-related and environmental factors (Taheri, et al., 2010). The most important factors that reduce the rate of academic survival in Iran are internal factors, related to the education system and schooling process, and external factors, related to social and family-related issues. In fact, these two broad categories of factors have no clear boundary and could interfere in each other (Rahbari Nejad, 2011). Although intelligence and talent are two important factors in academic achievement and survival, there are still other important factors, such as motivational beliefs. Motivation is an internal process governing behaviors over time. Students with high learning motivation usually use higher cognitive processes to learn new things. Generally, there are two general types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsicly motivated people do something for external rewards or to avoid negative consequences, whereas intrinsically motivated people do something because they enjoy it or find it interesting. Motivational beliefs are a set of personal and social criteria that people refer to when performing an action. These beliefs include personal logic concerning how to perform a task; they are usually changeable and affected by their possible consequences. Nonetheless, it must be noted that, factors affecting motivational beliefs of students are varied (Taheri, et al., 2010). One of the effective factors on educational progress and important of learning process is targeted motivation in students .In this theory , the goals such as recognition of individuals is one of the different goals to learn the developmental condition . Targeted motivation can explain the relationship between students’ beliefs regarding educational achievement and getting involved and pursuing to complete learning tasks and take home (Arbabisarjou and Sadeghian sourki, 2015, Arbabisarjou, 2012).

As a local teacher, the researcher in the present study witnessed students’ dropout in rural areas of Fenuj town. Accordingly, he tried to identify factors affecting the academic survival rate of those students and to provide practical recommendations to reduce the rate of dropout and increase the rate of academic survival in rural areas. Therefore, this study was conducted to
answer the question ‘what factors do affect the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town’?

Literature review
Azari (2012) showed that the consideration of students’ vitality, gender and socioeconomic status (SES) is an important factor in educational planning, especially for increasing high school students’ academic achievement and reducing academic failure and dropout rates. Alizadeh and colleagues (2012) showed that the rate of academic success is higher among guidance school female students and that the academic performance of students in urban areas is higher than the academic performance of students in rural areas resulting in a higher academic survival rate among urban students. Ahmadi and Yousefi (2012) found that motivation-related variables play an important role in students’ decision-makings regarding quitting or continuing their education. They also stated that these variables can be reinforced by teachers’ support of self-regulation and high perceived value of education and weakened by teachers’ strict control and low perceived value of education. Results of various studies (Aghdasi & Zeinalfam, 2011; Asgari, 2003; Naderi Beldachi, 2002; Sakhaei, 2003; Mohseni, 2000; Motahhari, 2002; Amjadian & Seidie, 2001; Soltani, 1999; Seif, 1999; Torkashvand, 1997; Mehran, 2003; Motamedian & Mousavi, 1991; Anzabi, 1993; Hoseini, 1996; McMillan, et al., 2007) indicated that the most important factors affecting the rate of first-grade guidance school students’ dropout are the loss of parents, family/cultural/educational poverty, lack of teachers’ ability to manage their classes, lack of educational space, crowded classrooms, family problems (e.g. addiction and divorce), having a lot of siblings, lack of teachers’ attention to weak students, lack of students’ interest to educational contents, poor nutrition, lack of continuous homework control and poor teacher-student relationships. Mbuva (2011) put an emphasis on the development of methods to help students develop the desire for staying in school. He also specified that teachers who focus on personal and academic needs of their students can also increase positive attitude toward academic survival. Sullins (2010) showed that government-sponsored vocational-technical high schools in new residential areas are the first and the most basic educational and social places for students to prepare themselves for college and job markets. Burney and Othman (2009) reported that Kuwait’s public education system is not efficient. They found that analysis length was short and the rate of repetition was high in all school grades resulting in a low rate of academic survival. Tinto (2008) indicated that research, practice and exploration are essential needs of all students. These three areas are related to organizational behaviors aiming at improving low SES students’ academic success. He believed that economic problems decrease the rate of academic survival. Rumberger (2001) believed that students’ ranks in their classrooms and their scores are among the main predictors of dropout. Chow (2003) conducted a study on students at risk of school dropout and found that negative experiences, personal problems and loneliness of low SES students are the most important causes of dropout. Janosz and colleagues (2000) specified that school performance and school behavior are the main predictors of students’ dropout and that cultural gap is one of the most important causes of dropout. In other words, they supposed that when cultural gap is greater, the probability of school dropout is higher.
Wells (1989) focused on interschool factors leading to school dropout and found that the structure and size of educational groups can affect students’ willingness to leave their school. He concluded that poor teacher-student relationships, unspecialized teachers and low self-valuation of minority students can be considered as other important causes of dropout.

**Research questions**

Q1: Do teachers believe that family-related, personal, school-related and environmental factors affect the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town?

Q2: What is the ranking of each effective factor in the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town?

**Methodology**

The present study was a descriptive survey. The characteristics and features of current situation were examined and systematically described (Delavar, 2010). The population consisted of all teachers working in rural areas of Fenuj town in the academic year 2014-15. According to Fenuj department of education, the number of teachers was 537 (401 male, 136 female). According to Cochran formula and using stratified random sampling method, 224 teachers (57 females and 167 males) were selected as the study’s samples. To collect data, a researcher-made questionnaire assessing factors related to the rate of academic survival was used. The questionnaire consisted of 35 items: 5 items for cultural factors, 5 items for family-related factors, 5 items for personal factors, 5 items for economic factors, 5 items for social factors, 5 items for school-related factors and 5 items for environmental factors. The questionnaire was scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very much (5) to very little (1). To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach’s alpha was used (0.841 for the total scale and 0.776, 0.837, 0.725, 0.836, 0.802, 0.788 and 0.807 for the subscales). Content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by a group of experts and professors in the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology at the University of Sistan and Baluchistan. Using the SPSS-21 software, the collected data were analyzed via one-sample t-test and Friedman’s test.

**Results**

**Demographic characteristics of the samples**

224 teachers participated in the present study. The demographic characteristics (gender, marital status, education level, years of service and employment status) of the participants are presented in table (1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>167</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>109</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BS degree</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA/MS degree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 10 years</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 20 years</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 20 years</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractual</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the samples

Q1: Do teachers believe that family-related, personal, school-related and environmental factors affect the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town?

To answer this question, a one-sample t-test was conducted for each variable. The results are presented in table (2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.945</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>18.89</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal factors</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td></td>
<td>30.23</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School factors</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.79</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td></td>
<td>21.78</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Results of one-sample t-test

As shown in table (1), all t values were significant at %99 confidence interval (p=0.000) confirming that, from the perspective of teachers, family-related, personal, school-related and environmental factors significantly affected the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town. The results also indicated that school-related (t=41.79) and personal factors (t=30.23) played more important roles in the academic survival rate of students, whereas family-related factors were the least important factors (t=18.89).

Q2: What is the ranking of each effective factor in the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town?

To answer this question, Friedman’s test was conducted. The results are presented in table (3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Average rank</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors affecting academic</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td></td>
<td>143.208</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>survival</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Friedman test results for ranking factors affecting students’ academic survival

As presented in table (3), the most important factors affecting the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town were respectively school-related factors (average rank=5.04), personal factors (average rank=4.12), family-related factors (average rank=3.81) and environmental factors (average rank=3.79).

Discussion and conclusions

According to the results of this study, t value of school-related factors was significant at %99 confidence interval (t=79.41; M=4.63; SD=0.59; p=0.000) confirming that, from the perspective of teachers, school-related factors (i.e. the availability of committed and compassionate teachers, teachers’ mastery of contents, the availability of appropriate facilities, effective teacher-student relationships and appropriate class size) significantly affected the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town. The other important factors in academic survival are
educational factors. Results of a study conducted by Salsabili and Ghasemi (2005) indicated that lack of teachers’ mastery of subject matters and using traditional, memorization-based teaching methods negatively affect students’ academic success. Taheri and colleagues (2010) indicated that educational factors including teaching methods, curriculum, educational objectives and expectations, educational facilities, reward and punishment systems, emotional supports, mutual respect between teachers and students, teachers’ behaviors, teacher-student interactions and assessment methods play important roles in students’ academic success. Rumberger (2001) studied personal and school characteristics of students via a hierarchical linear model and found that students’ ranks in their classrooms and their scores are among the main predictors of dropout. Chow (2003) conducted a study on students at risk of school dropout and found that negative experiences, personal problems and loneliness of low SES students are the most important causes of dropout. In another study, wells (1989) examined interschool factors leading to school dropout and found that the structure and size of educational groups can affect students’ willingness to leave their schools. He also concluded that poor teacher-student relationships, unspecialized teachers and low self-value of minority students can be considered as other important causes of dropout. Motahhari (2002) examined the roles of interschool factors in guidance school students’ dropout. The examined factors included the type of teacher-student relationships, teaching methods, school’s regulations and policies, space and school facilities, educational contents, students’ security and academic failure. He found significant relationships between the mentioned factors and the rate of school dropout.

According to the results of this study, t value of personal factors was significant at 99% confidence interval (t=30.23; M=4.33; SD=0.661; p=0.000) confirming that, from the perspective of teachers, personal factors (i.e. students’ learning ability and willingness to learn, lack of academic failure, lack of personal problems and negative experiences in school and effective teacher-student relationships) significantly affected the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town. Amjadian and Seidie (2001) believed that lack of interest to school and learning is the most important cause of school dropout. Mohseni (2000) showed that exam failure, non-participation at exams and failure to proceed to the next grade are the most important causes of school dropout among guidance school students in Gol Tappe region. In another study, successful and unsuccessful students were compared. Accordingly, 30 ninth grade male students with higher than 120 IQ level and GPA above 15 were compared to another group of students with similar IQ level, gender, age, school and courses and GPA below 12. The results indicated that successful students had higher achievement motivation compared to unsuccessful ones (Rashid, et al., 2012). A student’s perception of his/her academic competence has an important role in his/her academic success. Studies have shown that there are significant positive relationships between students’ perceived competence, perceived locus of control and academic success (Burkes, et al., 2004). Similarly, students’ attitude towards their school has a significant relationship with their academic success (Dugas, et al., 1995). Academic failure and negative school experiences can lead to dropout (Chaw & Stanley, 1996; quoted by Aghdasi & Zeinalfam, 2012). Multivariate analyses have shown that behavioral problems (e.g. irregularity and delinquency), poor academic performance (e.g. low GPA) and low cognitive abilities can predict school dropout (Junes, et al., 2000). Researchers have found that successful students
usually have a sense of belonging to their schools and experience less academic failures. Junes et al. (2000) found that variables related to school experiences are the best predictors of academic failure and no other variable is as authentic as those variables in predicting academic failure (quoted by Aghdasi & Zeinalfam, 2012).

According to the results of this study, t value of family-related factors was significant at %99 confidence interval ($t=18.89$; $M=4.19$; $SD=0.945$; $p=0.000$) confirming that, from the perspective of teachers, family-related factors (i.e. parental education, small number of siblings, lack of family problems such as parental death, divorce, addiction,...., parental involvement in children’s homework and effective parents-teachers interactions) significantly affected the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town. Families provide situations influential in children’s academic lives. Family history (e.g. broken families, parental authoritarian behaviors, parental education levels and SES) can significantly affect children’s academic performance. Parents who establish unfriendly relationships with their children have also a tendency to scold, insult and punish their children and parents who do not ask their children to take responsibilities do not follow any special discipline in instructing their children (Dadfar, et al., 2013). The other family-related factors that affect students’ motivational beliefs are parental control, parental expectations of success, parenting style, the quality of parent-children relationships and SES. Results of previous studies have indicated that encouraging children to learn at home and having realistic expectations of children’s academic performance have significant impacts on students’ academic success (Mezaros, et al., 2002). Excessive expectations may damage children’s self-esteem and self-concept. Children whose parents have excessive expectations of their performance eventually lose their motivation and may fail to continue their education (Downy, et al., 2008). Authoritarian parenting style accompanied by intimacy and friendly relationships plays an important role in motivating children. The behaviors of permissive or dictator parents have negative impacts on children’s academic performance (Fernandez et al., 2005). Many studies have been conducted on the differences in parenting styles between working-class and middle-class families. Middle-class parents expect their children to achieve success, whereas working-class parents expect their children to behave well and obey (Summerfeld, et al., 2006). The quality of parents-children relationships significantly affects children’s perceived academic competence and academic motivation (Mennin, et al., 2002). Results of previous studies have indicated a significant relationship between family psycho-emotional atmosphere and parental attitude towards children’s education. Researchers believe that parenting style and parental attitude play important roles in the development of achievement motivation in children (Summerfeld, et al., 2006). Parents and their attitudes toward education are important factors in shaping and nurturing academic motivation in children. Parental negative attitudes towards education reduce children’s academic motivation while parental positive attitudes followed by realistic expectations of success enhance children’s academic motivation (Rashid, et al., 2012).

According to the results of this study, t value of environmental factors was significant at %99 confidence interval ($t=21.78$; $M=4.22$; $SD=0.834$; $p=0.000$) confirming that, from the perspective of teachers, environmental factors (i.e. cultural, political, economic and educational possession, the availability of schools in all residential areas, the availability of free
transportation services for students, the availability of separate schools for male and female students and the possibility of academic development) significantly affected the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town. Seif (1999) showed that the main cause of school dropout among fifth grade students in Firuzan area is the long distance between their homes and the nearest guidance school. Talesh and colleagues (1993) showed that there are significant relationships between geographical location, natural condition, immigration status, household size and social status of nomads and their education status (quoted in Gholi Zadeh, et al., 2000). Mehr Alizade (1991) conducted a study on 200 illiterate people living in 8 cities and 51 villages of Isfahan province and found that most of villagers are not willing to learn due to many financial, family-related and occupational issues. In Iran, especially in disadvantaged, marginal and rural areas, environmental factors such as regional poverty, inequalities, malnutrition, large family size and students’ working due to poverty are the main causes of school burnout (Salsabili & Ghasemi, 2005).

Schooling process in each society is done within a framework called the education system. One of the most challenging issues in every education system is school dropout. School dropout imposes many financial and human resources losses on human societies and adversely affects students’ and their families’ lives (Azad Yekta, 2012). Like the education systems in many developing countries, the Iranian education system involves in the issue of school dropout and academic failure (Ghasemi, Hasanvand & Valizadeh, 2014). The rate of school dropout is very high in Sistan and Baluchistan Province; thus, the identification of factors affecting the rate of academic survival, especially among elementary school students, is very important. Accordingly, the present descriptive survey was conducted to investigate the effects of some related factors on the academic survival rate of students in rural areas of Fenuj town from the perspective of teachers. The results indicated that teachers believed that family, personal, school and environmental factors affect the academic survival rate of students in rural areas.

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References


