



Dropout of Lebanese High School Students: Causes, Consequences and Prevention Strategies

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Abstract: Every year around 1.2 million students drop out of school in the US. According to a UNICEF report enrollment in educational institutions in Lebanon dropped from 60% in 2020-2021 to 43% in 2021-2022. The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) at Clemson University has identified an extensive set of risk factors organized into four domains: Individual factors, family factors, school factors, and community factors. This research investigates the causes, consequences of high school students' dropout rates in Lebanon, and the prevention methods implemented. The study aims to identify the primary push, pull and fall out factors contributing to this concerning phenomenon. A questionnaire administered to students, interviews with principals, and focus groups with parents and NGO representatives are used to gather comprehensive data on the multifaceted aspects encompassing individual, social, economic, and educational barriers. The rising concerns surrounding high school dropout rates in Lebanon, which have been steadily increasing over the past decade, provide the impetus for this study. By exploring the underlying causes, this research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the dropout rates among high school students in Lebanon and provide insights for targeted interventions and policies to address this critical issue.

Keywords: Dropout, High school students, pull factors, push factors, fall out factors

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Introduction

Background of the study

Education serves as the cornerstone of personal development, social mobility, and national progress, making the issue of dropout a matter of paramount importance. The path to a brighter future begins in the classrooms of our schools, where young minds are nurtured, dreams are conceived, and the foundations for success are laid. However, for a significant number of students in Lebanon, this path is interrupted prematurely, often before the

completion of their high school education. According to UNICEF report: enrollment in educational institutions in Lebanon dropped from 60% in 2020-2021 to 43% in 2021-2022 (Anadolu Agency website, 2022). Dropping out of school is a conclusion of a long process that started much before the day that a student actually stops attending school. According to a recent United Nations report, the education of at least 1.2 million students in Lebanon has been interrupted in 2020, leading to increased dropout rates (ERP, 2021). Lebanon has encountered since 2019 a number of social, economic, and political difficulties, and these issues have had an impact on the country's educational system. Lebanon is currently witnessing a series of strikes in various sectors, reflecting the severe level of needs in the country. The socio-economic crisis has pushed three-quarters of the population into poverty, with frequent power cuts and a worsening cash crisis deteriorating living conditions for millions of people (Save the Children, 2023). The Lebanese crisis since 2019 is increasingly forcing young people to drop out of learning and engage in work to help and support their families. Dropping out of school poses serious challenges not only at the individual level but also at the social and community level (Christle et al., 2007).

Literature Review

Numerous indicators have been identified across the literature to predict which students will dropout of school, including student background (e.g., socioeconomic status), family context (e.g., level of parent education, family stressors, parental involvement in schooling), early school experiences (e.g., reading level, academic achievement), and engagement behaviors (e.g., attendance, participation) (Barclay & Doll, 2001; Carter, 2010; Christenson et al., 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Reschly et al., 2010). The act of dropping out is influenced by an array of factors related to the individual students, their educational performance, behaviors, attitudes, and backgrounds; and to the family, school, and community settings in which the student lives (National Research Council, Committee on Increasing High School Students' Engagement and Motivation to Learn, 2004). According to many researches there is a statistically significant effect of academic achievement on the likelihood of dropping out or graduating from high school; student engagement is one of the most important behavioral precursors to dropping out; Peers may influence students' social and academic behaviors, and attitudes toward school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Moreover, several national and international studies emphasize the socio-economic status of the family as the main reason for school disengagement (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). The study of Crouch (2018) highlighted other factors leading to school dropout including: finding a high paying job with full-time hours; negative relationships with teachers and/or administrators; attendance issues; and discipline issues.

Moreover, Snyders (2013) reported that the number of school dropouts is shockingly high in developing countries due to many reasons: family background, lack of parental education, socio-economic status, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and poverty. Ergün and Demir (2017) emphasized two main factors leading to adolescence dropout: family factors like economic pressures, family's educational experience and sexism; and school factors like school discipline practices, behavioral problems, and peer influence. On the other hand Rouse (2019) identified four central influences that serve as both pull and push factors in the decision to drop

out: disinterest/disengagement, teacher connection, a sense of hopelessness, and an end to any desire to succeed in school.

According to the report published by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese secondary students always face many obstacles and challenges that limited their educational opportunities: economic and financial problems; social life difficulties, which include family problems and community norms; bullying from their teachers; irrelevance of the curriculum; teachers' skills, attitudes, and their lack of mentorship (Issam Faris Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2021).

High school students' dropout can have significant impacts at both the individual and societal levels (Carter, 2010). Dropping out of school is a serious problem, not only for the individual, the school system, and the community, but also for society (Gausel & Bourguignon, 2020). Without a high school diploma, individuals often face limited career options, they may be restricted to low-wage and unskilled jobs, which can lead to financial instability and reduced economic mobility (Carter, 2010). In their late teens and early 20s, young high school dropouts struggle with a variety of job market issues, compared to their educated peers they frequently face high unemployment rates (Sum et al., 2009). High school dropout carries significant economic costs for society, including reduced tax revenue, increased reliance on social services, and higher healthcare expenses. Unmarried mothers without high school diplomas lived in poverty or close to it, and were dependent on government assistance (Sum et al., 2009). High dropout rates contribute to social inequality by limiting opportunities for upward mobility, perpetuating disparities in income, education, and overall well-being. Every effort must be taken to stop the phenomena of school dropouts since no nation can afford to have a large portion of its population lacking an adequate education and unable to find decent employment (Snyders. 2013).

On the other hand, effective dropout prevention and intervention programs may spare students who are at a risk of dropping out from suffering the negative effects of leaving school without a diploma (Carter, 2010). According to the National Dropout Prevention Center there are many effective strategies that can prevent students' dropout: safe learning environment, individualized instruction, active learning, school community collaboration, family engagement, after school / out of school opportunities, and mentoring (NDPC, 2023). Moreover, When conceiving and developing dropout prevention and intervention techniques, the construct of student engagement has become a promising heuristic (Reschly & Christenson, 2006). Students' engagement serves as a link between environmental contexts (such as schools, families, and communities) and outcomes (such as academic achievement) by acting as a mediator between context and environment. Additionally, by defining predictive variables (such as push and pull factors) and alternative conceptualizations of risk (such as functional risk), which are inherent within the construct, engagement may help accurately identify students who are actually at risk (Carter, 2010).

The Statistics done by CRDP during the academic year of 2021-2022 shows a decrease in the number of students enrolled in secondary classes compared to the academic year of 2020-2021 (CRDP, 2021; CRDP,

2022). This might indicate dropout of school due the harsh economic situation in Lebanon. Moreover, the studies of Shaaban (2023) and Shehayeb (2023) showed massive learning loss in biology and mathematics among Lebanese secondary students during the period between 2019 and 2022, due to the economic crisis and teachers' strikes. According to CRDP (2022) the Ministry of Education should establish a recovery plan otherwise the number of dropouts will increase.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The framework of push, pull, and falling out factors, as set forth by Jordan, Lara, and McPartland (1994) and Watt and Roessingh (1994) was implemented in this study, according to Doll et al. (2013), dropout factors can be classified into three categories: push, pull, and fall out factors. Push factors are school-related experiences that cause students to feel alienated and unwelcome, or that make it difficult for them to succeed. Push factors include: Academic failure, bullying, discipline issues, lack of support from teachers or administrators, feeling unsafe or unwelcomed at school, school violence, and lack of engagement in the curriculum. while, factors, such as financial worries, out-of-school employment, family obligations, such as caring for younger siblings or working to support the family, or even family changes, such as early marriage, pull students away from school. Students are the main agent in the pull out factor, they are drawn away from school by attractions or distractions (Rouse, 2019).

On the other hand, fallout-related factors highlight a process in school dropout when the student progressively develops behaviors or desires related to academic disengagement, but without being coerced out of school (by push out factors) or enticed out by needs or wants (by pull factors). These can include: Sudden health issues; mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety; substance abuse, chronic health conditions, and unexpected pregnancy (Doll et al., 2013). Figure 1 below illustrates our conceptual framework:

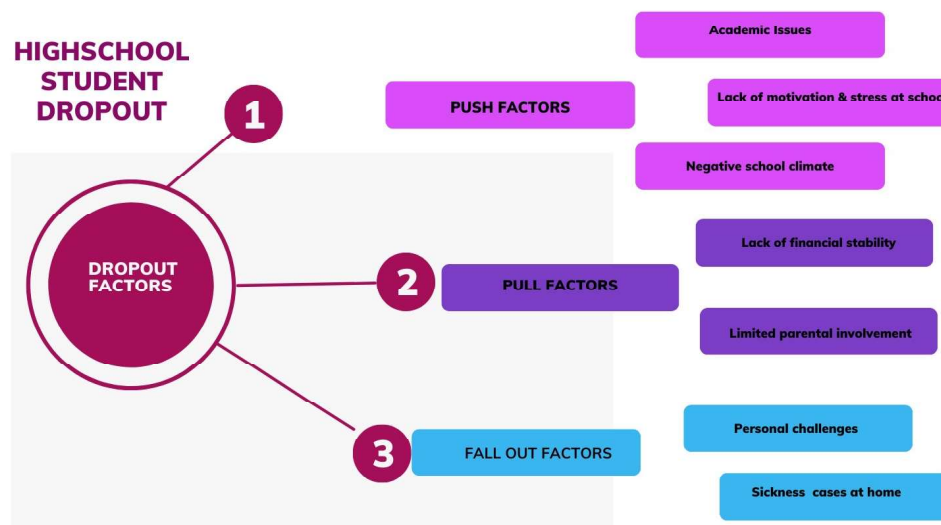


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

However, it is important to note that push, pull, and fall out factors often interact with each other. For example, a student who is struggling academically may be more likely to be bullied by other students. This can lead to the student feeling unsafe and unwelcome at school, which can make it more difficult for them to succeed. As a result, the student may become disengaged from school and eventually drop out.

Schools can play a role in preventing students from dropping out by addressing both push and pull factors. For example, schools can provide academic support to students who are struggling, create a positive school climate, and build relationships with students and their families. Schools can also work with community organizations to provide students with opportunities for economic and social support.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to delve deep into the multifaceted issue of Lebanese students' dropout, shedding light on the underlying factors that drive them to disengage from the educational journey. Beyond this, it explores the far-reaching consequences of dropout, not only for the individuals involved but also for the broader Lebanese society. Finally, we will navigate through the maze of prevention strategies and interventions that educators, policymakers, and communities are employing to keep students in school and ensure they achieve their full potential. The study will answer the following research questions:

- 1- What are the underlying factors leading Lebanese students to dropout from high school? How do public and private schools compare?
- 2- How do parents and school principals explain and evaluate the reasons for school dropout?
- 3- What are the strategies proposed and implemented by schools and NGOs to prevent students' dropout?

Significance of the study

Lebanon, like many other countries, struggles with the complex issue of early school dropout. This study is crucial because it explores the multifaceted factors influencing the phenomenon of dropping out within the unique socio-cultural context of Lebanon. This study aims to shed light on important insights by thoroughly investigating the causes, direct effects, and potential remedies of high school dropout in Lebanon.

In addition to providing a deeper awareness of the difficulties Lebanese students face, it also prepares the way for wise policy choices, focused interventions, and the creation of an environment conducive to learning so each student can reach their full potential. To our knowledge there is no research about secondary students' dropout in Lebanon, except statistical bulletin by CRDP (Center for Educational Research and Development). Addressing high school dropouts in Lebanon is not merely an educational concern; it is a fundamental step towards a more equitable and prosperous future for the nation and its youth.

Method

Research design

The purpose of this study is to investigate the causes of Lebanese high school students' dropout, its effects, and the efficacy of preventative measures. It utilizes a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both quantitative data from student questionnaires and qualitative data from interviews with school principals and focus groups with parents and NGO representatives. The combination of these approaches will provide a comprehensive understanding of the dropout phenomenon.

Sample of the Study

The study investigated the factors underlying the increase in the number of Lebanese high school dropouts from the perspective of students, parents, school principals and NGO representatives. Moreover, prevention methods were discussed with principals and experts. 402 students from both public and private Lebanese high schools in different regions answered a google form questionnaire; 10 school principals from various Lebanese regions were interviewed; 5 parents of dropouts and 2 NGO representatives participated in the study.

Data collection tools

Several tools were utilized for triangulation purposes. The quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire administered to high school students from various Lebanese regions, and the qualitative data was collected from interviews with school principals and focus groups with parents and NGO representatives.

Questionnaire

The students' questionnaire was constructed by a collaborative work among the two researchers, and was validated by two other educators who are experts in the field. For reliability purposes, the questionnaire was piloted on 10 students, and Cronbach alpha was calculated. The questionnaire is composed mainly of closed ended questions and three open ended questions. The items of the questionnaire are classified into three constructs: Pull factors, push factors and fall out factors based on the theoretical framework. It is composed of the following parts:

- 1- Demographic information: Gender; age; grade level; region; type of school; marital status of the parents.
- 2- Pull factors: Education level of parents; economic status; financial stability; parents' involvement in students' education; need to work to support the family; family related issues that prevent attending school; insignificance of education to fulfill future goals.
- 3- Push factors: Academic performance; academic challenges; peer pressure; social life in school; involvement in extracurricular activities; support of teachers; stress and anxiety towards school; negative attitude towards

school.

4- Fall out factors: can be inferred from the open ended items of the questionnaire related to reasons for school absences; personal challenges or responsibilities that might affect ability to attend school; comments related to school experience, concerns, and suggestions related to school or the risk of dropping out.

Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the data, and inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and regression analysis, were employed to identify significant factors associated with student dropout.

Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with school principals from various Lebanese regions to explore their perspectives on the factors contributing to dropout, the consequences, and the prevention methods they proposed or have implemented. The principals were asked about the dropout rates at their schools; the primary reasons for dropout; strategies for identifying students at a high risk of dropping out and support services for these students; alternative pathways for students who already dropped out; school climate and engagement; and community partnership.

Focus groups

Two focus groups were performed in the study to investigate the factors that lead to students' dropout and its consequences on the individual and social level from the perspective of parents and experts. The first with a group of five parents of dropouts. The second with two representatives of NGO organizations that help students who dropped out or students at a high risk of dropping out.

Ethical Issues

The participants were informed that their responses will be used for the purpose of research only and their names will be anonymous. The purpose of research was explained by the researchers to the principals and NGO representatives and their informed consent was taken.

Results and Discussion

Factors Leading to Dropout from the Students' Perspective

To answer the first question of research related to the factors leading to students' dropout, statistical analysis of the questionnaire was performed. The questionnaire items were classified according to three constructs: push, pull, and fallout factors. Figure 2 shows the most important pull factors based on students' answers.

The results show that financial stability and other family related issues are the most important factors distracting

students from school and pulling them away. Elderly students are obliged to work to support their families or stay at home and take care of their younger siblings for their parents to work. In addition, the parents' background and their involvement in their childrens' education might lead to drop out.

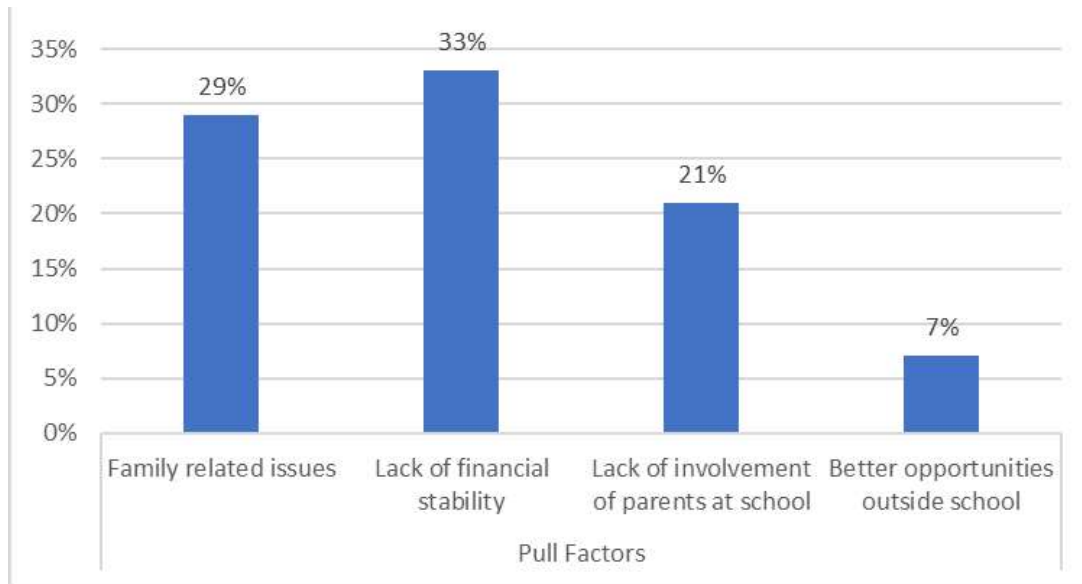


Figure 2. Percentages of some Pull Factors

Figure 3 reveals some of the important push factors related to school. The results show that 68 % face problems with specific subjects or assignments, 65 % of participants are anxious about school, only 19 % feel a sense of belonging at school and 12% have an active social life at school. These factors are risk factors that might push students out of school.

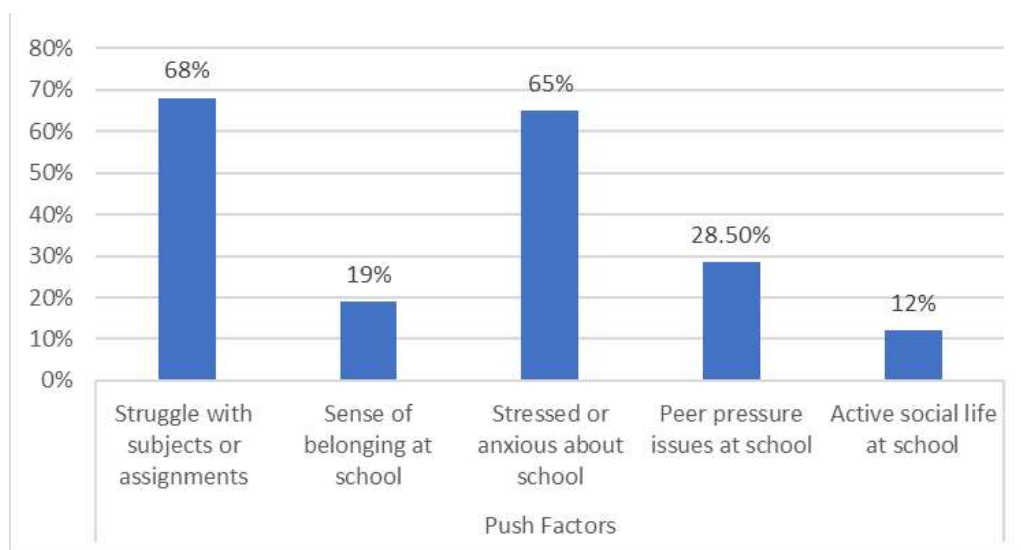


Figure 3. Percentages of some Push Factors

On the other hand, the analysis of the open-ended questions revealed that: sickness; family issues; personal problems; transportation problems; teachers strikes; and financial problems are the main reasons behind their frequent absence from school. Family responsibility and their need to work in order to support their families; relocation; economic status; and death of family members, were highlighted by students as personal challenges or responsibilities outside of school that affect their ability to attend or focus on school. The factors related to Fall out construct were quantified and the highest percentages were for the personal challenges that faces students, and sickness or health issues of students themselves or of members of their families, as presented in Figure 4 below.

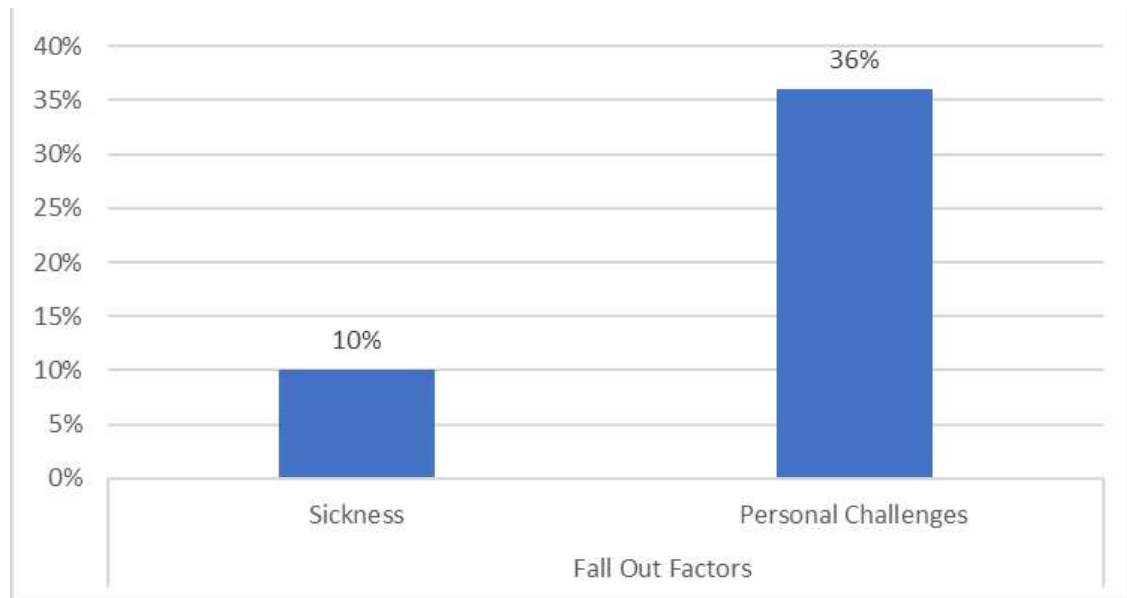


Figure 4. Percentages of some Fall out Factors

Lebanon has a dual education system, public and private. Public education in Lebanon attracts lower middle-class and disadvantaged social groups, whereas private education attracts middle-class and upper middle-class groups. However, there are notable quality differences between the two systems (Frayha, 2009). Based on the Lebanese context secondary students are enrolled in both public and private schools. According to the statistical bulletin 68.66 % of students were enrolled in private schools during the academic year 2021-2022 (CRDP, 2022). Table 1 below compares between private and public schools based on push and pull factors and p value calculated to infer if the differences are statistically significant.

The results show that students are experiencing peer pressure at public school more than in private school with p value = $0.011 < 0.05$ which is significantly different. However, surprisingly 62 % of public school students feel a sense of belonging compared to 12 % in private schools. On the other hand, related to the pull factors, the results show that students in public schools are facing economic and financial problems, need to work to support their families, and have family issues that affect their regular attendance to school more than students in private schools with significant differences with p values < 0.05 .

Table 1. Comparison between Public and Private Schools with respect to push and pull factors

	Type of school	Percentage	Significance
Push	Private	14%	0.161
	Public	53%	
	Private	4%	0.011*
	Public	25%	
	Private	18%	0.083
	Public	62%	
Pull	Private	0.4%	0.007*
	Public	25.4%	
	Private	10.4%	0.000*
	Public	56.7%	
	Private	16%	0.02*
	Public	62%	

Principals', Parents', and NGO representatives' Perspectives of Reasons behind Dropout

To answer the second question of research semi-structured interviews were performed with 10 school principals from all Lebanese regions and from both public and private schools; and focus groups with 5 parents of dropouts and two NGO representatives.

The main reasons cited by parents: financial and economic problems, low family income; school system and inadequate teaching strategies; weak academic performance; disengagement and negative attitude towards school; work to support their families; discrimination and bad treatment for students; and early marriage. This agrees with the Issam Faris Institution report which stated that Lebanese secondary students face many obstacles and challenges that stood in their way of education, like financial problems, family problems and community

norms, and teachers' skills and attitudes (Issam Faris Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2021).

All the interviewed parents emphasized on the financial problems they are facing due to the Lebanese economic crisis since 2019 which lead to: the increase of prices for goods and services and specifically in the fuel prices; the decline of the Lebanese pound against the dollar. This leads older students to drop out of school and work to support the family. According to Save the Children (2023) The Lebanese economic crisis has pushed three-quarters of the population into poverty.

Similarly, school principals emphasized that socio-economic status is the main cause of students' dropout, in addition to other factors like early marriage, weak academic achievement, and lack of belief in education. These results are in congruence with other studies that investigated reasons of dropout (Carter, 2010; Christenson et al., 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Reschly et al., 2010; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000).

A principal of a big public secondary school in Beirut declared that the number of high school students dropped to quarter from the academic year of 2020-2021 till 2022-2023. According to her, many students went to private schools, others to vocational education and few left school to work. The main reason is the economic crisis. Another principal of a public high school in a remote area of North Lebanon, highlighted two main reasons for students' dropout: low family income and early marriage.

On the other hand, NGO representatives highlighted the parents' literacy, and lack of belief in education as the main reasons behind students' dropout. Similar results were obtained in the study of Ergün and Demir (2017).

Cross analysis of the data collected from interviews and focus groups led to the emergence of specific themes related to students' dropout: socio-economic status; the Lebanese economic crisis; teacher student relation; disengagement/disinterest; better job opportunities; lack of belief in education; early marriage; and weak academic achievement, as presented in table 2.

Table 2. Themes about Factors of Dropouts Emerged from Interviews and Focus Groups

Theme	Principals	Parents	NGO representatives
Socio-economic status	Low family income; financial issues; family background	The elder siblings work; Transportation issues.	Literacy of parents; the high number of children;

Lebanese economic crisis	Inflation and increase of fuel prices; Bad living conditions. Teachers' strikes	Increase of fuel prices; Bad living conditions.	NGOs are supporting students in registration, stationery and transportation
School-student relation	Engagement of discrimination parents in their children's conduct at school	and bad treatment for students	Students need support from their teachers
Early marriage	Parents oblige their daughters to get married at an early age		In remote regions of Lebanon girls get married at an early age.
Job opportunities	Students between ages of 14-17 year are leaving school to work to earn money	My elder child is working and earning lot of money	
Weak academic achievement	Students that are weak and fail their classes are at higher risk to dropout	My child repeated his class two times.	Homework support programs for weak students.
Lack of belief in education	Some parents do not see that education is important for their children		

Strategies Proposed and Implemented to Prevent Students' Dropout

To answer the third question of research about the methods to prevent students' dropout, the data collected from the interviews with principals revealed the implementation of specific strategies inside and outside school to decrease this risk. The following are the main strategies implemented according to principals:

1. Meet with parents to discuss the situation of their children.
2. Support programs inside the school for students with weak academic performance.
3. Provide financial support from NGOs and organizations to help families with low income to pay the students' tuition, school supplements, and transportations.
4. Provide remedial courses for students funded by local organizations.
5. Involving students with extracurricular activities and projects to enhance their skills.
6. Provide financial support from Local organizations and NGOs for students and teachers with the consent of the ministry of education to prevent both students' and teachers' dropout.
7. Implement activities to help students to set objectives, put plans, and steps to be followed. Having an objective and a goal helps students who are at a risk of dropping out.
8. Invite high school graduates to share their experience with students and emphasize the importance of education.
9. Direct students to vocational education or to NGOs that provide quick training for certain professions for them to be skillful and be able to work.
10. Provide students with school supplies from NGO and give them money for transportation.
11. Implement new teaching strategies that allow high achievers to help low achievers, and help students to acquire skills.
12. Provide psychological support for students at a risk of dropout by their teachers or from experts when possible.

Moreover, data analysis of the focus group with NGO representatives highlighted some strategies implemented by NGOs to help students at risk of dropping out:

1. Awareness sessions for parents and students. about issues like early marriage and the importance of education.
2. Referring students either to the social worker or the psychologist.
3. Tutoring and homework support.
4. Direct follow up with the school and principal if possible.
5. Involving parents in decision-making in order to work in tandem to create a bright future for their children.
6. Orienting parents to support their children.

In addition, the NGO representatives proposed specific recommendations to decrease the risk of dropouts:

1. Develop National Qualification Framework (NQF) that outlines the pathways between academic education and technical and vocational education and training. This will allow students to transition

between non-formal education and general education. More programs should be designed to support students make this transition.

2. Provide homework support programs for cycle one students, who need further support at home.
3. Work with parents of cycle one students to engage them in building a conducive learning environment at home.
4. Provide cash transfers or livelihood opportunities for low-income families who have children in school and cannot afford the cost of education.
- 5.

On the other hand, based on the open ended items in the questionnaire, students recommended:

- support for public schools in Lebanon since they are marginalized by the government;
- hiring psychiatrists to help students at schools;
- using more effective teaching strategies;
- the teachers should be more supportive and approachable;
- the school environment should be comfortable and welcoming;
- the teachers should use good communication methods; less homework; more school activities; give more freedom for students; provide more information and support about university;
- the teachers should help with university suggestions; schools should provide music sessions and support talented students; avoid teachers' strikes; make school trips; make more projects.

Moreover, parents also recommended that teacher orientation sessions should be held to teach them how to treat students; set up a committee from the Ministry of Education to monitor schools and ensure that students are being treated well; should enhance school accountability; no discrimination between students; teachers should be better trained. Some rules are irrelevant at school and should be reduced.

Similar strategies were proposed by the National Prevention Center (2023) which emphasized on: school-community collaboration; safe learning environment; family engagement; Mentoring/tutoring; and Individualized instruction, as effective strategies that can prevent dropouts.

Conclusion and Future Recommendations

This study aims to shed light on the factors leading to dropout of Lebanese high school students from the perspective of: principals; parents; NGO representatives, and students themselves. 402 students, 10 principals, 5 parents, and two NGO representatives participated in the study. The factors were classified into three constructs: pull out, push out and fall out factors. The main pull factors deduced from cross analysis of the data collected were: financial instability due the economic Lebanese crisis since 2019; family issues and the need to work to support their families;parents' educational background and their involvement in children's education. The main push factors extracted were: the negative school environment; weak academic achievement; and their feeling that they do not belong to school. In addition, personal challenges and sickness were the two main fall out

factors. The main themes related to factors underlying Lebanese secondary students' dropout: The economic Lebanese crises; the bad school-students relation; and lack of belief in education. On the other hand, the main preventive methods implemented or proposed by participants are: school and parents support; parents' involvement; active teaching strategies; academic, psychological and social support for students at a risk of dropping out; comfortable and welcoming school environment; support from local and international NGOs.

As a future recommendation, in the Lebanese context, there should be an urgent plan for catch up programs to mitigate learning loss which in turn will help students engage in school activities. The Lebanese government and Ministry of Education and Higher education (MEHE) should pay more attention to the education sector: Implement early warning systems that identify students at risk of dropping out based on various indicators such as attendance, grades, and behavior; Develop personalized intervention plans for at-risk students, taking into account their specific challenges and needs, this may include academic tutoring, counseling, mentoring, or addressing issues related to housing, transportation, or health; . support schools, teachers and students; Help students develop educational and career goals, recognize the importance of their education, and see a clear way forward by offering them comprehensive career counseling and advice; Provide students with resources to assist them deal with personal issues, stress management programs, and counseling services to address their mental health and well-being; Foster collaborations between local organizations and parents to involve families and communities in the educational process, this may foster an environment where students feel supported both inside and outside of the school.

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