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Investigating the High Attrition Rate of Boys in Iranian Schools: A Case Study of Key Stakeholders' Perspectives

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Education degree in Education

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by

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Abstract

For the first time in the history of Iran, the literacy levels of women are higher than that of men. However, males are culturally and socially preferred in positions of influence and decision making. Therefore, education in Iran is not having the beneficial effects that it should as the people who end up in positions of power may lack the needed education. This thesis investigates the reasons why boys choose to drop out of school, and the societal perceptions, influences, and consequences of boys dropping out of school. To conduct this research, I interviewed 8 dropouts, 5 teachers, and 1 administrator who attended or worked at various pre-college level state schools. This research is a qualitative case study, so the perceptions and opinions of the interviewees were of primary importance. The results of this study indicated that a combination of factors is responsible for the drop-out problem, including economic problems, poor quality of teachers and educational materials, and the Iran-Iraq war. Although the dropouts indicated they had difficulty with school material, and that the environment was not conducive to education, they all ultimately left school for financial reasons. Similarly, the teachers indicated that the war and the current economic problems of the country resulted in an education system with a lower quality and a lower emphasis on students who are not willing to pay extra. The administrator indicated that state schools suffer from poor funding and poor quality of teachers, and that these two factors are related.

Keywords

Iran, East-Azerbaijan Province, Boys' Dropout, Dropout Prevention, Dropout Solutions, Poverty, Language of Instruction, War and Education, Teacher Motivation, Top-Down Management.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to Samad Behrangi. Although we have never met, I grew up with his beautiful books. About 55 years ago, he graduated from university and went to teach in the small villages of East-Azerbaijan. His work was not motivated by money, but by the desire to educate children. His works have influenced me in two ways: first as a young child, where I learned numerous things about my cultural background and about life, and second as a young man, where I learned about education and specifically the education system of Iran.

"Death could come upon me very easily now. But as long as I'm able to live, I shouldn't go out to meet death. Of course, if someday I should be forced to face death-as I shall-it doesn't matter. What does matter is the influence that my life or death will have on the lives of others . . ." The Little Black Fish, by Samad Behrangi. Translated by the Iran Chamber Society.

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To my father and mother, who have supported and encouraged me in my work. Especially to my father, who unfortunately will not be able to see the results of this thesis. And to my best friend Helda, who has encouraged me, offered much of her educational experience to augment mine own, and for long but insightful conversations about my research.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends Rob, Mr. Bagheri and his family, Dr. Rohani and his family, Mrs. Saberi, Paul, Dr. Sedig and his family, Ramin, my brother Daryoush, Weissberg family, my sister Parvin, and numerous others who have all provided me with encouragement, guidance, support, and helpful criticisms of my work.

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1 Introduction and Background

Much research has been done about the educational situation of girls in Iran.[1] The situation of boys, however, has not received as much attention. For the first time in the history of Iran, the literacy levels of men are significantly lower the literacy levels of women among large, and growing, segments of the population (Khaz Ali, 2010). This situation requires investigation. My thesis examines critically the problem of school dropout rates of an ethno-linguistic minority of boys within a specific geographical region of Iran, namely the East-Azerbaijan province of Iran.

Dropping out of school is a serious issue, affecting both the individual and society. For individuals to have any reasonable employment prospects they need a high-school certificate (Richards & Megan, 2009). Thus, one of the strongest predictions associated with dropping out of school is increased probability of future unemployment and poverty (Richards & Megan, 2009).

Although much research concerning the West has been done on this subject,[2] there has been no systematic investigation in this area for Iran. The most recent and major work done for school dropouts in the East-Azerbaijan province is by Behrangi (1964). Only minimal research has been done in this regard in the Middle East (e.g., Grown, Gupta, and Kes, 2005; Mehran, 1995; Rihani, 1993; UNICEF, 2005); moreover, the issues of boys, in particular, have not received enough attention.

In general, male dropouts have relevant characteristics that differ systematically from those of female dropouts (Reynolds & Miller, 2003). Specifically, boys more frequently drop out of school and repeat grades than do girls. However, compared to boys, girls have less opportunity to repeat grades; in this situation girls who are held back are more likely to drop out than boys who are held back. Boys are more likely than girls to be labeled "problems" in need of assistance, to fail a course, or to repeat a grade. They are more likely to be identified for special-education programs and are more likely than girls to be labeled for their entire school career (Reynolds & Miller, 2003). Boys are likely to gain social status among their peers through disruptive classroom behavior, which can lead to

school failure. They are also more likely than girls to engage in high-risk behavior (e.g., experimenting with drugs and alcohol), and are more prone to accidents caused by violence. In addition, the misbehavior of boys is more frequently punished than is that of girls. This is reflected in the fact that more than 70% of students suspended from school are boys (Reynolds & Miller, 2003).

In Iran, the inequality seen in the education system is also prevalent in the wider society. A report conducted by UNICEF (2012) indicated inequalities in education as one aspect of wider inequality among various urban groups, separated by income, gender, ethnicity and citizenship.

In this research I investigate stakeholder perceptions of the reasons behind the high attrition rate of boys in Iranian schools, and seek to determine the extent to which study participants perceive the underlying issues surrounding high dropout rates to be reflective of those discussed in the literature. The theory and research method base therefore leans heavily on critical theory and qualitative research. Part of setting the context for this thesis involves a comparative analysis of characteristics of dropping out in different countries (see Chapter 2.2). Due to the increasing interconnectedness of societies, a brief comparative analysis is important and can help identify common problems in educational systems around the world (Arnove, 2007). Examining relevant features and experiences of countries with different income levels, educational methodologies, and social norms can shed light on some of the things that influence dropping out of school. A comparative analysis can help contextualize the interview process and data have been compiled (see Chapter 3).

I adopted a case-study methodology for this study. As Yin (2008) notes, the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. My focus is on understanding the issues surrounding male dropouts within a particular context (i.e., a select number of schools within the northwest of Iran). The many influences involved result in a complex social phenomenon, making a case study a natural choice. Furthermore, the case study is the preferred method when examining contemporary events over which the investigator has little or no control, and in situations

where behaviors cannot be manipulated as in a laboratory setting (Yin, 2008). Such are precisely the characteristics of this research.

In keeping with its case-study nature, this research adopts a qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach. Although this research is a qualitative case study, some results may reflect in varying degrees realities experienced in countries that share pertinent similarities with Iran, whether in the form of Islamic culture and/or an Islamic form of government or otherwise. Currently there are many political changes taking place in the Middle East and North Africa. As can be seen with the recent "Arab Spring," many countries (e.g., Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Syria) are going through critical changes in their social structures and political foundations. In particular, considerable possibility exists that countries living the upheaval of the Arab Spring might ultimately put in place structures similar to those adopted in Iran after their revolution in 1979. In such a case, we may witness effects on education systems (e.g., dropout rates) in these countries similar to those that have been seen in Iran over the past few decades. Therefore, this research may lead to an improved understanding of this issue not only for Iran, but also potentially for other countries in the Middle East and even beyond.

Education is very complex and offers many problems that can be examined through research (Brown, 2011; UNESCO, 1984, 2012). Waste in the form of student dropouts and repetition of courses is a problem in many school systems throughout the world. Its intensity varies from country to country, but where it is most prevalent, it is often associated with failure even to enroll in school students from particular segments of society (Brown, 2011; UNESCO, 1984). In some countries such discrimination and inequity takes the form of a lower percentage of girls than boys in the school system. Waste of human potential is also closely associated with socio-economic status (UNESCO, 1984, 2012). There seems to be a positive correlation between poverty and waste of human potential—where poverty is greatest, such waste is typically also greatest. The ideal towards which most countries/jurisdictions are striving is 100 per cent enrollment of both boys and girls, and 100 per cent retention at least up to the end of the primary-school stage of education, usually a minimum of five years. This is the presupposition upon which is based the drive for universal primary education (UPE).

Within that context, dropping-out is perhaps the most critical form of waste of human potential. It signals that, having enrolled a child, the school fails to retain her or him (UNESCO, 1984, 2012).

One of the issues related to waste of human potential is the difference between girls and boys. Even in developed countries such waste is a problem. For example, in the United States, over a million students drop out each year—a national problem most associated with boys. In fact, one in three boys, often black, Hispanic, and Native American, will fail to graduate from high school in four years (Keith, 2006; Sadkers & Zittleman, 2009). Moreover, one can examine risk factors for dropping out among males living in poverty — especially inter-generational poverty — by exploring personal, community, and school-system issues, including family dysfunction, disability, poor teaching, punitive discipline, and absence of differentiated instruction. In general, dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty, in prison, less healthy, divorced, single parents, or receiving government assistance (Whitman, Merluzzi, & White, 2009).

1.1 Dropping out as a general problem

Teenagers dropping out of high school before completion have been a challenge for educators, parents, and employers for at least 30 years (Haycock & Huang, 2001). As minimum-skill expectations have increased at every educational and employment entry point, so has the importance of attaining a high-school diploma. Despite this trend and the increased severity of the negative consequences of dropping out (McCaul, Donaldson, Coladarci, & Davis, 1992) for many public-school students—particularly male students from low-income or ethnic minority families—graduating from high school has remained problematic, even as the nation's general educational level has increased (Dillow, 2003).

Moreover, research in such contexts clearly identifies risk factors for dropping out among males living in poverty - especially inter-generational poverty - by exploring personal, community, and school-system issues, including family dysfunction, disability, poor teaching, punitive discipline, and absence of differentiated instruction. Alison Kepner of The News Journal reports that 69% of students in a Delaware survey said they were not motivated to work hard, 47% said classes were not interesting, 45% entered high school

poorly prepared by their earlier schooling, 43% missed too many days to catch up, 35% said they were failing, 32% said they left to get a job, 25% left to become parents, and 22% left to take care of a relative (2006). Furthermore, two-thirds said they would have tried harder if more was expected from them (Pytal, 2006). A report for the Government of Ontario by Radwanski (1986), titled *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issue of Dropouts,* also came to the same conclusion and suggested that low expectations may be a consistent problem across different jurisdictions. These statistics and conclusions are an important legacy of research that attempted to explain why students do not like school and end up dropping out.

1.2 Iran and the Iranian education system

Iran is a diverse country consisting of people of many religions and ethnic backgrounds overshadowed by the Persian culture. According to the 2011 Iranian Census, as shown in Table 1, the Iranian population was 75,149,669 persons in 2011 (SCI, 2011). Compared to 2006, the population had grown by around 4,653,887 people. The population of the East-Azerbaijan province in 2011 was 3,724,620, which comprised about 5% of the Iranian population (SCI, 2011). The population in this province was composed of 1,882,031 males and 1,842,589 females, such that the male:female ratio was 102:100. Between 2006 and 2011, the average annual growth rate of the East-Azerbaijan province was 0.66%, while the average annual growth rate for the country as a whole was 1.29% (SCI, 2011, p. 10).

Table 1: Population of Iran in 1976-2011.

Year	Population	Male	Female	M:F Ratio
2011	75,149,669	37,905,669	37,244,000	102:100
2006	70,495,782	35,866,362	34,629,420	104:100
1996	60,055,488	30,515,159	29,540,329	103:100
1986	49,445,010	25,280,961	24,164,049	105:100
1976	33,708,744	17,356,347	16,352,397	106:100

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

The majority of the population speaks the Persian language, which is also the official language of the country. Some other Iranian languages or dialects are also spoken. Turkic languages and dialects, most importantly the Azeri language, are spoken in different areas in Iran. Additionally, Arabic is spoken in the southwestern parts of the country (The CIA World Factbook, 2009). In addition, the term "literate person" in Iran means one who can read and write at an elementary level. Thus, literacy statistics only cover the ability to read and write, and not any other criteria. Just 33.4% of Iranian families had a computer in their home in 2011 (SCI, 2011). Only 11,221,810 persons in Iran were Internet users (about 15% of the total population) and the number in the East-Azerbaijan province was 502,813 persons (around 13% of the provincial population). By "Internet user" is meant a person who connected to the Internet at least one time in the last 12 months.

Although the Iranian constitution specifies that all non-Persian races in the education system can write and speak with their mother language in school, this law does not function in practice. The language-of-instruction issue is a fundamental reason for the academic failure of non-Persian language students, especially at the elementary level (only the Armenian minority group has an independent education system). The requirement to study in Persian has long been an underlying cause of dissatisfaction and schism (Behrangi, 1964), and, as will be shown in Chapter 4, continues to be a problem.

Moreover, after the Islamic revolution in 1979, a patriarchal culture, with a resulting religious government, developed. Since then, all responsibility for the family belongs to the male; this exclusive responsibility to provide for the family is a basic reason that young men and boys drop out and try to learn a skill. The Iranian mother typically desires to see her daughter well married and enjoying the equality in marriage that she herself has been denied (Ahmad, 2001). This condition results in an apparent paradox, where boys are less educated but maintain positions of power and authority. However, there are reasons why this is the case. Although girls become more educated than boys, because of the patriarchal nature of the society, girls are not given the same opportunities as boys. There is much more control over the behavior of girls than that of boys. For example, girls are often not allowed to go out of the house and search for jobs. Boys, on the other hand, although less educated, are allowed and even expected to go out and get a job. In

addition, girls who have higher education are often seen as better candidates for marriage. Once they are educated, however, they are not expected to use their skills in the workforce, and are often given jobs as secretaries. Another factor is that boys are usually expected to make money to support the family. They often do not see any benefit to obtaining a high-school diploma since it does not provide any more qualifications for the simplest jobs. Most boys therefore prefer to leave school as soon as possible and learn a skill that will enable them to earn some money and thus "make a living." Moreover, the inflation problem in Iran is pushing more boys to seek employment at a young age. Therefore, although the situation of boys and girls in Iran seems paradoxical, there are many reasons why this is the case, most of which have to do with the cultural attitudes of the country.

A lot of research has been done on the situation of females in the Iranian education system (e.g., Rezai-Rashti, 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Rezai-Rashti & James, 2009; Rezai-Rashti & Moghadam, 2010; Shavarini & Robison, 2005). However, males, who make up half of society, do not receive the same attention. Based on the definition of literacy given above, namely the ability to read and write at an elementary level, more and more men have a lower degree of literacy than women. Since 2002, females could get more chairs than males in the universities, and now this proportion is 65 per cent to 35 per cent (Mehran, 1999; Shavarini, 2005). Many reasons have been proposed for why boys drop out of school. Many boys lack interest in school and do not find it relevant to their future (Witmine, 2010). For others, school is like a prison to them, and additionally, the teaching style is not attractive to students, and neither is the content of textbooks. One theory holds that many male students do not perceive courses to be practical, as they are more of a theoretical nature. The argument is that boys prefer more hands-on learning methods (UNESCO, 1984), yet there are limited possibilities for sports and few laboratories in Iranian schools. Lastly, many students, especially males, do not see any prospect for gaining economic success or respect in their society as a result of going to school (E-ZAN, 2005).

Many of the features of the general problem have been listed above. However, the basic problem for Iran has to do with the role that government plays in Iranian society and

Iranian education (E-ZAN, 2005). This lack of equality combined with high dropout rates on the part of boys promotes ignorance and more inequality, and has become a vicious circle (Shavarini & Robison, 2005).

One Iranian official who is familiar with the situation in Iran is Mostafa Eghlimi, the secretary of the Association of Iranian Social Workers. According to him the proportion of students dropping out of school is more than 25%; he also adds that the figure is especially worrisome because youth who drop out of school are at greater risk of getting involved in crime or drugs, already an epidemic in Iran (Mostaghim, 2011). Eghlimi blamed the educational establishment for the high dropout rates. He cited outdated textbooks, overworked teaching staff, lack of specialized care for exceptional students and personal problems outside the classroom as the reasons for the dropout problem.

In addition, two important issues regarding demographic change cause further problems for Iran in the near future (see Figure 1). In 2006, the number of people in the 10-to-24 age bracket was higher than the number in the same age brackets in 2011. In other words, the number of people between the ages of 10 to 24 decreased between 2006 and 2011. This decrease can be attributed to a "population wave." In 2006, the upper crest of the wave included the people between the ages of 15 and 24. By 2011, the same people moved into the 20-to-29 age bracket. The implication for Iranian schools is that they will see decreasing enrollment for several years.

However, the number of people in the 0-to-4 age bracket increased between 2006 and 2011. This suggests that a new wave is starting. This is consistent with changes in government policy regarding population, as the government has recently been encouraging population growth. The ultimate size of this wave cannot be seen in Figure 1, as it is just starting. However, at the very least it implies that the Iranian schools will, in the near future, see an increase in enrollment. How much of an increase will depend on the size of this new wave, which is still uncertain.

Therefore, the Iranian schools will see a significant decrease in enrollment in the very near future, which will be followed by an increase in enrollment that may be significant for several years afterward.

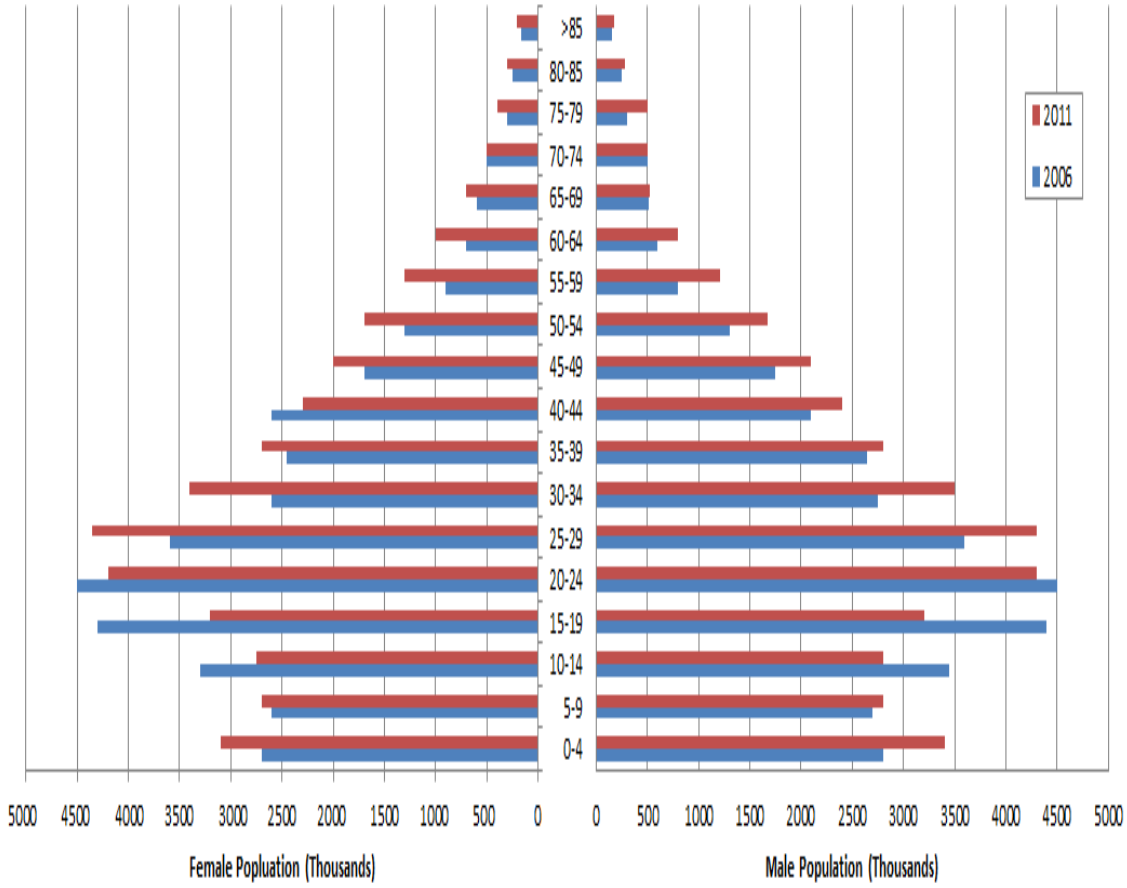

Figure 1: Sample Population distribution by age and sex, from 2006 to 2011 (adapted from SCI, 2011).

1.3 Research contributions

To make a contribution to this area of research I investigated the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding their perceptions of the impact of post-revolutionary patriarchal Iranian society on the average dropout rate of boys in the northwest region of Iran. I first analyzed trend/time-series data collected from official agencies such as the Department of Education of the East Azerbaijan Province Trend. Time-series data of interest are cohort data on the number of students that enrolled and the number of these who dropped out during the five years following their first enrollment. With these data I report trends of growth or decline in boys' dropout rates in this region. Subsequently, I conducted interviews to assess the perspectives of key stakeholders (e.g., dropouts, instructors) with regard to their perceptions of the causes and effects of boys' dropout rates. Specifically, I

interviewed 8 dropouts in this region with a view toward understanding their self-reported reasons for dropping-out. Additionally, I interviewed a number of other key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, and parents (see Chapter 3). Since only male principals and teachers are employed in all-boys schools, I will be interviewing only male principals and teachers.

2 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will provide a review of the relevant literature. I include definitions of dropping out, findings on who drops out, general factors related to dropping out, and drop-out factors specific to boys. Research regarding male student attrition in Iran is very limited, and is virtually non-existent for the East-Azerbaijan province of Iran. Therefore, research from other places will be examined and used to develop a model for analyzing the situation in Iran.

2.1 Defining dropout

The first step to understanding and finding a way to solve a problem is to identify the nature of the problem. According to Schargel and Smink (2001), different countries and even different provinces/states in the same country differ in their definitions of school dropouts. These different definitions arise from different methods and statistical standards which are used to collect data/information, track whether students are at school and especially whether they have definitively "dropped out," and from different strategies to solve dropout problems. Additionally, Schargel and Smink (2001) conceptualize four types of dropout: Event Dropout Rate, Status Dropout Rate, Cohort Dropout Rate, and High School Completion Rates.

2.1.1 Event dropout rate

The Event Dropout Rate is an annual rate that measures the percentage of students, in an entire cohort, who were enrolled at the start of a school year but dropped out before the school year ended (Chapman & Hoffman, 2007). For example, the event dropout rate for a high school would be calculated as the sum of all students in grades 9 to 12 who dropped out in a given year, divided by the number of students enrolled in that school from grades 9 to 12. This rate is useful for studying the events experienced by some groups of students which led to them dropping out of school.

2.1.2 Status dropout rate

The Status Dropout Rate measures the percentage of the civilian, non-institutionalized population, between the ages of 16 and 24, who were not enrolled in a high-school program and had not received a high-school diploma or equivalent certificate (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). This rate can be used to measure high-school outcomes. It can also show the extent of the dropout problem in a nation, suggesting the degree to which more effective education and training are needed to help dropouts participate in a nation's life and economy (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

2.1.3 Cohort dropout rate

The Cohort Dropout Rate measures what happens to a group of students from one age group or specific grade over some time period (Schargel & Smink, 2001). For example, one cohort could be the students who started grade 9 in 2002 and would graduate from grade 12 in 2006. The Cohort Dropout Rate would then measure the proportion of those students that dropped out between 2002 and 2006. This rate can provide an estimate of how many students do not complete high school (Hoffman, 1999). However, this rate excludes students who return to school at a later time, or who seek alternative certification, and thus may not accurately measure high-school completion.

2.1.4 High-school completion rate

"The high school completion rate represents the proportion of 18-to-24-year-olds who have completed a high school diploma or an equivalent credential, including a General Educational Development (GED) degree" (Schargel & Smink, 2001, p.18).

Of all these definitions of dropout, the Iranian education system uses the Event Dropout rate only. As such, only those statistics can be used in this study. However, this exclusive use of the Event Dropout rate already suggests other measures could be gathered to give Iranian decision makers a better understanding of the situation.

According to Schargel and Smink (2001), three types of dropouts have been distinguished: a) dropouts - students who are leaving or have left school; b) tune-outs - students who are at school but disengaged from learning; c) force-outs - students who are suspended or expelled from school.

The situation of the first group of students is highly and clearly visible, which makes this group easy to identify and estimate for all stakeholders. Therefore, these students are the ones most frequently addressed in recovery, retention, and prevention programs (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

Members of the second group of students are not readily perceptible. These students may stay in classes and may pass some courses with good grades, yet sometimes they cannot get relatively good grades in other courses. They have negative feelings about at least some teachers, about school in general, and/or about other aspects of formal schooling. For example, some students may find a school boring, but like certain teachers or students, while other students may like the school but not their teachers, or at least not certain teachers. Unless these students disrupt class or cause problems, however, they are ignored or tolerated by classmates and teachers (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

Finally, the third group confronts a critical situation; suspension or expulsion means they are “troublemakers,” or at least perceived by teachers and administrators as such, inside or outside of school. School administrators often see them as disruptive, rebellious, or alienated. Ordinarily, these students do not “fit into the system,” and most of the time they are encouraged (“pushed out”) or ordered to leave. Although removing these students from school will make schools safer place for other students and will solve the school’s problem with such students, society’s problem and the problems of these students will increase (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

These definitions reflect that dropping out is a multifaceted but systemic problem. Without the benefit of a systematic approach to solving this problem, we may experience great difficulty and ultimately never reach a satisfactory solution (Chaffee, 2012, p. 103).

2.2 Who drops out

According to Shaul (2002), “Dropout … [refers to those] who are not enrolled in school and who have not completed a high school diploma or obtained a high school equivalency certificate, however, dropout rate has varied considerably between regions of the country and ethnic groups” (p. 2).

“Before problem solving can commence, data need to be identified… and collected to set a standard and [one must] answer [with some precision] the question, what is expected. Without this, identifying what the problem is cannot be completed and a system emphasizing data-based accountability will fall flat on it[s] face” (Lionetti, Snyder, & Christner, 2011, p. 159). Schools need stronger and more accurate methods to identify students who have the greatest risk of dropping out. Schools also need to make provisions for interventions to keep at-risk students on track to graduate, and need to monitor the effectiveness of those interventions. Although appropriate methods can work as tools that help schools reduce dropping out, they can be complicated to implement (Lionetti, Snyder, & Christner, 2011). Proper training is needed for teachers and administrators in order to be aware of these methods and to properly apply them. As will be shown in Chapter 4, this is an area that requires work for Iranian schools.

Additionally, as Dillow (2003) notes, graduating from high school in the United States has remained problematic for students who are male and from low-income or ethnic-minority families, even as the general educational level of the U.S. increases.

2.3 General drop-out factors

Educators realize that dropping-out is a process and that it can start from primary school or, at least before high school (Lamb, Markussen, Teese, Sandberg, & Polesel, 2011; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Schargel, 2003). Analysis of dropping-out as a process is not conducted in Iran, as may be the case for other countries. Instead, Iranian educators focus on specific grade levels and do not look at continuous problems that may occur. As will be shown in Chapter 4.2, students reported cumulative problems that are indicative of dropping-out being a process.

Students may leave school for a variety of reasons, such as disciplinary problems, academic failure, or even opportunities for employment. The way in which these reasons overlap makes it particularly difficult to create a profile for at-risk students (Franklin, Harris, & Meares, 2008).

Table 2: Reasons for Dropping Out of School.

Individual Reasons	Family Reasons	School-Related Reasons
• Low grades • Poor daily attendance • Misbehavior • Alcohol and drug use • Feeling alienated from other students	• Parents not engaged in child's schooling • Teen pregnancy • Students getting married • Financial and work reasons • Permissive parenting style • Negative emotional reactions and sanctions for bad grades	• Quality of teachers • Student/teacher ratio • School size • School safety concerns • Not feeling welcomed at the school

This table is based on studies by Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002; Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990; Rumberger, 1987.

Three fundamental types of reasons are given to explain why students are dropping out of high school (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002; Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000): individual, family, and environment. These reasons have been organized and summarized in Table 2. This table was used in the formation of interview questions, whereby questions were based on one or more of the reasons and organized according to the categories (see also Chapter 2.4).

2.3.1 Individual reasons

Individual issues that can be the primary reason for dropping out include: low grades, poor daily attendance, misbehavior, drug use and alcohol, and feeling alienated from other students (Frakline, Harris, & Meares, 2008).

Low grades that result in retention are a very strong indicator of whether a student will drop out (Alexander, Entwistle, & Horsey, 1997). One key study indicated that more than half of sixth graders with the following three criteria eventually left school: attend school

less than 80 percent of the time; receive a low final grade from their teachers in behavior; and fail either math or English (Balfanz & Herzog, 2006). Eighth-graders who miss five weeks of school or fail math or English have at least a 75 percent chance of dropping out of high school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Ninth-grade students who receive more than one failure in core academic subjects, and thus cannot to proceed to the tenth grade, are 85 percent more likely than other students not to graduate on time (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Retention in middle grades, and even elementary school, is associated with dropping out. For example, one study on dropouts determined that 64 percent of students who had repeated a grade in elementary school and 63 percent of those who had been held back in middle school left school without a diploma (Alexander, Entwistle, & Horsey, 1997). Course grades and failure rates during the first semester indicate whether students are making progress in their courses, and thus are slightly better predictors of graduation than attendance rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Some researchers consider final grades to be the best predictive indicator of graduation, as they suggest who is likely to struggle in the later years of school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Although grades are a good indicator, tracking student absences can also be useful to determine who might be at risk of dropping out. As this is especially true in high school, it would be beneficial to follow ninth-grade students who miss 10 days or more in the first 30 days of school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). While the first month is particularly important, absences after that are still valuable to track. In a key Chicago study, merely being absent for one-to-two weeks was associated with a substantially reduced probability of graduating (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Research has also shown that students with prior behavior problems are most likely to fail during transition years and eventually drop out. Once a potential dropout reaches high school, course failure and poor behavior often combine so that the student eventually drops out of school (Balfanz & Herzog, 2006).

For drug and alcohol use, two groups of students exist: students who stay in school and are addicted or tend to use alcohol or drugs, and students who are suspended or are expelled for doing so (Siegel, 2011).

In some cases, particularly for students with average or above intelligence, Parker and Asher (1987) suggested that social factors such as peer alienation may predict whether such students will drop out better than cognitive or parental factors. Although a few studies have investigated the effect of peers on the likelihood of dropping out of school, these studies did not consider academic and familial factors (e.g., Elliott & Voss, 1974; Cairns et al., 1989). Two peer-related factors have been associated with dropping out of school: being rejected by "conventionally socialized" peers, and associating with deviant peers. In some studies, peer rejection has been predictively linked to dropping out of school (see Hymel et al., 1996). Many children with disruptive behaviors experience peer rejection (Coie, 1990). As children are rejected, they may have few or no friends in the classroom to provide support against negative social experiences. In addition, a lack of friends may increase the risk for disengagement from school. Peer rejection and lack of friends may worsen student frustration with low achievement, and this may lead to increased motivation to drop out of school (Kupersmidt et al., 1990). Kupersmidt (1983) has shown that later academic adjustment was significantly predicted by peer status, even after controlling for race, sex, grade point average, and the student's reputation for starting fights. Academic maladjustment included dropping out of school, grade retention, and truancy. Similarly, Ollendick and colleagues (1992) reported that 9-year-old children who experienced peer rejection failed more grades and were more likely to drop out of school after 5 years than non-rejected children. Thus, the negative experience of peer rejection may contribute to or mediate the relationship between disruptive behavior and eventual withdrawal from school. Peer acceptance may also be relevant, affecting the tendency of disruptive or learning-disabled children to drop out of school (Ryan & Ladd, 2012). However, some studies (Kupersmidt & Coie, 1990; Cairns et al., 1989) have suggested that peer rejection could just be a social indicator of behavioral or academic problems and may not contribute to withdrawal from school. In addition, Steinberg et al. (1992) showed that parental support for academic achievement supported unpopular children and helped to prevent the children from dropping out of school.

2.3.2 Family reasons

In most cases, parents are the first group of teachers who have the responsibility to nurture and guide children from infancy through to adolescence. Some important family factors affecting school dropouts include: ineffective or non-existent parental support in schooling, teen pregnancy, students getting married, work and financial problems of parents, negative emotional reaction and sanctions for bad grades, and indulgent parenting style (Frakline, Harris, & Meares, 2008).

Although parents can provide support for their children in school, this support should be dependent on the needs of the child. At Harvard University's Project Zero, Gardner (1993) developed a theory called Multiple Intelligences whereby human cognitive competence can be described as a set of abilities or skills that he calls "intelligences." Verbal/linguistic, visual/spatial, inter-personal, intra-personal, logical/mathematical, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, and naturalist intelligences are supposedly predictive criteria for evaluating the likelihood of students dropping out of school (Gardner, 1993). Traditionally, parents have emphasized and rewarded their children for strengths in verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical intelligence. The theory contends that many students fail or drop out because their strengths lie in one or more of the other six intelligence areas (Gardner, 1993). Therefore, the support parents give for such children is often not consistent with the child's areas of strength.

Teen pregnancy is considered a possible reason why a higher proportion of girls than boys aged 16 to 17 drop out of school than boys (Colclough, Rose, & Tembon, 2000; Leach, Fiscian, Kadzamira, Lemani, & Machakanja, 2003). Although it may affect the rate at which girls drop out of school, it is possible that teen pregnancy indirectly affects boys' decisions to drop out of school.

Marriage is a socio-cultural factor that can affect a child's access to school. According to Mohammed (2000), if the prospects of a good marriage arise then a girl may be withdrawn from school to marry. This is especially true in cultures where some parents will "give" their teenage daughter in a "planned marriage" to wealthy older friends to protect their daughter. It can also become dangerous for these girls to try to escape this

type of forced marriage. Families with low levels of education may not encourage their children to complete their education. However, the economic and social conditions of some countries can be improved through ensuring that girls complete their schooling and are retained if they are re-enrolled in school (Egbochuku, 2000).

Access to schooling and likelihood of dropping out can be affected by family income (Little, 2008). Colclough and colleagues (2000) have suggested that poverty influences the demand for schooling. Impoverished households have great difficulty paying school fees and other costs associated with education. However, the opportunity costs of education also need to be considered since they increase as children grow older. To help with rising costs, there is increasing pressure on children to work and earn an income for the household. Therefore, as these children begin to mature, they are more likely to work than go to school. Vulnerable and marginalized children experience a higher-than-average pressure to drop out of school, as poverty combines with other factors relating to social disadvantage (Hunt, 2008, p. 52). For example, wealthy parents may be able to avoid school-related problems for their children by sending them to schools likely to meet their specific needs (Colclough et al. 2000). However, families without such wealth may be unable to afford alternative and/or private schools and thus are required to send their children to schools with these problems. In addition, Neal and Hammer (2007) suggest that the likelihood of boys dropping out of school is related to worsening work and family situations. For example, many respondents in a survey provided reasons such as “Job situation unstable, material relationship growing more distant,” “spending more time with parent…, financial difficulties”, and “job more demanding-parent less competent and more miserable” (Neal & Hammer, 2007, pp. 191-192).

Another factor related to students dropping out of school is a negative emotional reaction from the inability to achieve good or excellent grades. According to Schargel and Smink (2001), families can help to improve children’s motivation, involvement at school, and the ability to overcome various problems. Some ways in which families can provide such help include: showing an interest in school policies, participation in school functions, providing a home where education is valued, volunteering in the school as often as possible, and giving appropriate feedback. All of these signs of engagement can help

children get good grades and can help teachers obtain more information about students (Schargel & Smink, 2001). There is a positive correlation between student success and family involvement: “When parents are involved in their students’ education, those students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete home work more consistently” (Schargel & Smink, 2001, p. 52). Additionally, students with a cultural background different from that of the school tend to do better when their parents collaborate with others – such as teachers, staff, and other families – to bridge the gap between the culture at home and at school (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

However, parents can also be indulgent rather than merely supportive. Diana Baumrind (cited in Edward, 1999) identifies two models of permissive parents: the disengaged parents, and the permissive-indulgent parents. In both cases, parents give up control to their children. Disengaged parents are indifferent to their children, and put little or no effort into controlling them (Edward, 1999). Permissive-indulgent parents make few, if any, rules for their children and do not consistently enforce these rules. Such parents also do not set clear boundaries or expectations for their children's behavior, and tend to warmly and lovingly accept any behavior from their children. In both cases, permissive parents give children choices even in situations where a child is not capable of making good choices. In other words, children are given control which they cannot handle. Given that permissive parents accept any behavior from children, these children have no way of knowing whether their behavior is beneficial or even acceptable. As a result, these parents cannot provide any real help for their children should problems at school arise.

2.3.3 School-related reasons

There are a number of factors which can affect the motivation of students to remain in school. These factors include the quality of teachers, student/teacher ratio, size of schools, safety of schools, and feeling of being welcomed at school (Frakline, Harris, & Meares, 2008).

Highly qualified and effective teachers have a strong influence on how successful students can be in school. The most significant factor affecting the 40 percent gap between African American and Caucasian student achievement was teacher expertise

(Ferguson, 1991). Teacher expertise includes such factors as how well teachers comprehend their subjects and how well teachers understand strategies for reaching different kinds of students. Low-performing students who face learning barriers can reach higher levels of achievement if they are taught by high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Haycock, 1998). It is important that effective teachers with a track record of success are available for at-risk students, to help prevent them from dropping out of school. A report from the National Partnership for Teaching in At-Risk Schools (2005) cites research indicating that achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged students and other students can be reduced if disadvantaged students are taught by highly motivated, successful, and experienced teachers. However, teachers who are inexperienced or unqualified are often assigned to schools with many challenges such as a high dropout rate. As a result, many underperforming and at-risk schools receive teachers who are unprepared, inexperienced, or less qualified than teachers at other schools.

Students can benefit from a low student/teacher ratio (Nation Master, 2012; Woods, 1995). A low ratio suggests that teachers may have more time to spend with each student, and thus this ratio can act as an indicator of the quality of education. However, this ratio needs to be quite low before any real effect on educational quality appears. As well, research regarding the student/teacher ratios for schools, districts, or states (e.g., Hanushek, 1998) can reach conclusions which are, within certain limits, independent of the effects of small or large classes. School statistics regarding student/teacher ratios can also be misleading, as many or most students may be in large classes for most of the time in a school with low student/teacher ratios (Lewit & Baker, 1997; Miles, 1995).

Additionally, a study conducted by Lee and Burkam (2003) showed that the structure and organization of high schools can influence students' decisions to stay in school or to drop out. They found that schools with fewer remedial or non-academic courses and more challenging courses kept students in school. Additionally, the size of a school influences the dropout rate. For example, schools which are not larger than 1,500 students are generally more effective at retaining students than schools which are very large (more

than 2,500 students) (Lee & Burkam, 2003). According to Ascher (1987), students who transition into small high schools have a reduced risk of dropping out.

School safety is relevant for both boys and girls, though it seems to have a higher importance for girls staying in school than boys (Colclough et al., 2000; Leach et al., 2003). As well, there are numerous illnesses and health-related conditions, including nutritional deficiencies, which affect absenteeism and cognitive development of children (Pridmore, 2007). Thus, any governmental effort to improve school access and achievement, and to reduce dropout rates, requires early and continuous health intervention in order to be successful (Pridmore, 2007).

According to Mayer (2007), the same consequences arise when students go to an unwelcoming school as when they go to an unsafe school. Students will act as though a school is unsafe even if the school is "only" unwelcoming. In other words, students will close themselves off from the school, isolate themselves from teachers and staff, and try to stay inside a protective bubble. Students will also feel anxious and not fully participate in their education, regardless of how vigorously a school attempts to reach out to them. It is also common for students who do not feel welcomed to engage in vandalism, conflicts with other students, and negative behavior towards adults. Thus, creating a welcoming school goes hand-in-hand with ensuring a school is safe.

2.4 Drop-out factors specific to boys

Now that general drop-out factors have been discussed, I will elaborate on some factors with specific implications for boys. These factors include: 1) Gender and Social Factors, 2) the Gender Gap, 3) Success in Learning Language of Instruction, 4) Single-Sex Education, 5) School Atmosphere, 6) Influence of Parents, 7) Influence of Peer Groups, 8) Drug Addiction, and 9) Family Income. Given that Iran is a patriarchal society and that the focus of this study is on boys, it is useful to identify specific reasons that are applicable to male students. As such, these specific factors will be more appropriate for this study and will be used, when necessary, instead of more general factors

2.4.1 Gender and social factors

School access, particularly in higher grades, is different between boys and girls partially due to gendered social practices within households, communities, and schools (Colclough et al., 2000). In poor and urban environments, there seems to be increasing pressure on boys to drop out of school (Colclough et al., 2000; Leach et al., 2003). Graduating from public high school remains difficult for students, especially male students from low-income or ethnic-minority families (Dillow, 2003). As well, early disruptive behavior and low academic performance are clear indicators that a student is at risk of dropping out (Berndt & Keefe, 1995). Association with deviant peers can contribute to this process. However, peers with less deviant behavior may have a positive influence on others in the areas of school performance and attitudes towards staying in school. Based on these results, it seems that effective preventative intervention should attempt to reduce disruptive behavior and academic difficulties.

2.4.2 Gender gap

According to Demers and Bennett (2007), the academic achievement of boys seems to be a significant concern for a number of stakeholders in education since the mid-90s. In terms of academic achievement, boys face lower rates of achievement than girls in many subject areas. This difference in achievement has been a reality for many decades among all member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2004). However, the reasons for this difference are not well understood (Statistics Canada, 2004). As well, Baillargeon and Bissonnette (as cited in Demers & Bennett, 2007) describe how investigation is quite difficult since some consider investigation of disadvantages of boys in school to be an overt attack on feminism.

Yves Archambault (as cited in Demers & Bennett, 2007) reports on a number of problems in Quebec schools resulting from inadequate attention directed towards boys. Compared to girls, boys experience the following: twice as many referrals to youth centres, a dropout rate that is three times higher, a likelihood of developing behavioral and emotional problems that is four times higher, an incidence rate of hyperactivity that

is six times higher, an incidence rate of autism that is twice as high, and a likelihood to develop schizophrenia during their teenage years that is six times higher. According to the Conseil Canadien sur L'Apprentissage (as cited in Demers & Bennett, 2007), 12 percent of young men dropped out of high school in Quebec between 2004 and 2005 compared with 7 percent for young women for the same time period.

Marsolais (2003) studied some of the difficulties that boys experience in a school setting. Based on the assumption that boys are more active than girls, he determined that boys require challenges, sports, and electronic games. One of his conclusions is that boys need appropriate projects before they will become more involved in school, and that these projects may be considered instinctively different from those that educators would give to girls. Other authors acknowledge that stereotypes regarding masculinity and femininity discourage generalizations about the "best" teaching strategy for children, even when using such stereotypes to talk about gendered teaching strategies (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2004). The academic success of boys should be the concern of the entire school staff, as interventions for youth create new possibilities for solutions to this problem (Marsolais, 2003).

2.4.3 Success in learning the language of instruction

In regard to reading literacy, girls are ranked significantly higher than boys in all OECD countries (OECD, 2011). The ability to read, understand, and use information is crucial to cognitive development and personal fulfillment. As a result, reading literacy in all academic disciplines is considered quite important and is used as an identifier for learning difficulties. In deciding that students must repeat a grade, poor reading literacy is often a justification.

2.4.4 Single-sex education

A school can have a single-sex environment, in which only girls or only boys are enrolled. This might be done so as to improve the learning or academic success of students. However, such environments can be detrimental to the academic success of boys. Girls appear to be the ones who benefit the most from single-sex environments (Gautier, 2004). Thus, it seems that providing separate classrooms for boys and girls is

not an equitable solution to the dropout problem, as it does not significantly benefit boys (Asselin & Bourret, 2003). While this is not touched upon directly in my study, the effects of single-sex schools in Iran may be reflected in the difference of education levels between males and females (see Appendix A).

2.4.5 School atmosphere

A negative school experience is frequently cited as a reason why students drop out of school (Franklin & Streeter, 2005). Dropouts that Vallerand and Senecal (1992) examined perceived their teachers as being unsupportive, controlling, and showing a lack of interest in their development. Poor teacher-student relationships had a negative effect on the performance of students and their persistence in school. The relationships helped to engender the attitudes and behaviors that ultimately led to such effects. However, these relationships are only part of the school environment. There are other environmental factors that can negatively influence students, resulting in these students developing behavioral problems such as attention deficits and oppositional disorders (Kasen, Johnson, & Cohen, 1990).

2.4.6 Parental influence in education

A low level of education often goes hand-in-hand with unfavorable socioeconomic conditions (Lingard, Martino, & Mills, 2002). Yet, parents can still have a strong influence on the educational results of their children independent of such conditions. In Australia, boys often do well in school when their families prioritize education (Lingard et al, 2002). Moreover, this effect occurred even when the parents were socioeconomically disadvantaged. Children from such families performed just as well as those from a more advantaged environment provided that their families supported their educational endeavors. It seems that the effect of a socioeconomic background is reduced when parents place a high importance on education and assist their children in school. Such assistance though may be difficult for parents who have limited education themselves.

Studies carried out by the MEQ in Québec found that the academic success of students was related to their mother's level of education (Lingard et al, 2002). However,

economists Giovanni Gallipoli, David Green, and Kelly Foley from the University of British Columbia suggest that the value parents place on education is more important than their level of education. From a longitudinal survey of 15-year-olds and their parents, differences were detected in the likelihood of completing high school between children with similar or identical skill levels. The importance that parents placed on education and completing school, determined by their answers to the survey, seemed to be the factor which differed between these children. For example, children with median-level skills had a much lower likelihood of dropping out of school when their parents considered education to be very important (Foley, Gallipoli, & Green, 2009). As another example, consider two boys with similar skill levels but whose parents differ in their level of education. The parents of one boy never finished high school while the parents of the other boy both have a Bachelors' degree. Despite this difference in level of parental education, both boys had a similar likelihood of completing school provided that the parents of both boys placed a similar importance on education (Foley, Gallipoli, & Green, 2009).

2.4.7 Influence of peer groups

According to Lingard and colleagues (2002), many boys adopt negative attitudes toward school as a result of interacting with peers who hold such attitudes. These peers exhibit disruptive behavior and protest against the idea of working hard or studying in school. They encourage an oppositional attitude toward school and schoolwork and harass others who do not hold their attitudes. In other words, some boys create the perception that studying in school and achieving good marks is undesirable and harass students attempting to learn to ensure that such a perception remains dominant. Although one can also become popular through getting good marks without studying (Cloutier, 2003), such popularity still perpetuates the belief that hard work and studying is unnecessary for school. In order to maintain the idea that studying is unnecessary, boys who do study are harassed. One of the more common examples is the use of homophobic comments. As homosexual behavior is considered non-masculine and undesirable by those who accept a "macho" stereotype of boys and men, boys who study are labeled as homosexual so as to label their studious behavior inappropriate for males. Such harassment is an explicit form

of peer pressure, but can influence others who are not directly harassed to avoid the same kind of “un-masculine” behavior. As a result, this kind of peer pressure can strongly influence academic possibilities for boys and change their outlook and attitudes toward school. Attempts can be made to create positive social pressure among students or an atmosphere favorable to academic success, though it is unclear how successful the attempt will be if it must compete with negative social pressures (Lingard et al, 2002). However, students who study hard or get good grades in school can still remain popular or avoid undesirable harassment. This is achieved as a result of how they interact with and relate to their peers, the social groups to which they belong, and the kind of activities they participate in at school (such as sports) (Lingard et al., 2002).

2.4.8 Drug addiction

In a study by Goswami (2009), mothers reported that they believed drug addiction was the primary reason boys dropped out of school. This finding may be related to the influence that fathers have on their sons, or, more precisely, the lack of paternal influence in the case of boys who do not have a father present in the family. Boys without a father are at a much higher risk of drug and alcohol abuse than boys with a father (National Center for Health Statistics, 1993). Similarly, a study by Stanton and colleagues (1994) suggests that boys who live away from their fathers are 4.3 times more likely to smoke cigarettes when they reach their teenage years. As well, boys who grow up in a single-parent household have a much higher risk for drug abuse as teenagers (Denton & Kampfe, 1994). However, there could be other reasons why boys engage in drug or alcohol abuse. Boys in general are also more likely than girls to engage in high-risk behavior, such as experimenting with drugs and alcohol (Reynolds & Miller, 2003). Misbehavior of boys is also more commonly punished than misbehavior of girls, as more than 70% of students suspended from school are boys (Reynolds & Miller, 2003). In a particularly draconian example, Iranian students who drink alcohol or use drugs are expelled rather than suspended. The Education Ministry of Iran believes these students are ill, so they must be “under control” in hospitals whereas the cost of prevention is less than 40 cents per student (Khabaronline News, 2012). In addition, there is some evidence that dropping out of high school is associated with an increased risk of adult-onset

alcohol-dependence syndromes, even among persons whose dropping out could not have been caused by the consequences of starting to drink during the adolescent years (Rumberger, 1987; Hendren & Shen, 2008).

2.4.9 Family Income

One of the major factors influencing boys in their decision to drop out of school is family income (Dillow, 2003). Family income does not, however, have the same influence on girls. This difference is related to the surrounding social culture; in certain cultures, when families have difficulty with their income, boys are typically the ones who are expected to work in order to help support the family (Colclough et al., 2000; Leach et al., 2003). This cultural norm can be seen in the difficulty that males from low-income or some ethnic-minority families experience in graduating from public schools. This norm is highly dependent on the culture though, as some ethnic-minority students are, on average, more successful than mainstream students.

Data from the US National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Current Population Survey (CPS) suggest that there is a relationship between family income and the rate at which students drop out of school. From the 2000 CPS annual dropout-rate data, high-school students who came from families in the bottom income quintile experienced a dropout rate that was 6 times higher than students from families in the top income quintile. Of students whose families are in the top income quintile, only 1.6% dropped out of school (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). Of the students with families in the bottom income quintile, 10% dropped out (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). Of students with families in the other three income quintiles, only 5.2% dropped out of school (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). Similar statistics were found in a later survey (Wirt, Rooney, Choy, Provasnik, Sen, & Tobin, 2004).

However, Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004) suggest that there is a more disturbing trend in the dropout rates for students from low-income or minority families. They found that, in 2001, white students and Asian-American students experienced a graduation rate of 75% and 77% respectively. In comparison, the graduation rate for African-American students was only 50% while American Indians and Latinos had rates

of 51% and 53% respectively. The income and ethnic distribution of dropouts is more concerning given that about half of all dropouts never receive high-school credentials (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2002).

3 Methodology

In this chapter, I will discuss three issues related to the research methodology. First, I will discuss the meaning of case study and its advantages and disadvantages. Second, I will mention methods of data collection and their usefulness and purpose in a case study. Third, I will discuss the methodology I am using in this research.

3.1 Definition of case study

Concerning a case study it should be pointed out that there is no consensus on the precise nature of case studies and no comprehensive definition. Although case studies are different from other naturalistic inquiries, a bigger problem is the non-standardized way in which researchers use the term. For example, Simmsons (1996) defines case study as a selection of epistemological methods. Stake (1994) suggests a case study is a selection of subjects for study (cited in Hass, 2004, p. 59). In law, medicine and management, a case study is used for solving practical problems (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster as cited in Blooer & Wood 2006). Sometimes this term means the study of a bounded system, but this meaning is not correct. As Atkinson and Delamount (1995) suggest, specifying the time and place boundary of a case is difficult. Social systems rarely involve specified boundaries, and these boundaries could simply be imposed by the researchers.

In spite of the problem of a diversity of meanings of case study, considerable agreement exists on some characteristics of them. For example, one inference of a case study is that there is a specific case being studied, not some sample of a population to which the results will be generalizable.

Three main advantages of a case study are worth mentioning. First, it is a method for registering special characteristics of people and groups through the production of detailed inputs (Simmsons, 1996). Second, it has the capability of discovering new findings for research (Platt, 1998). Third, it has the capability of producing new ideas that can be used to fuel further research (Eishenhardt, 2002).

The main disadvantage of a case study is related to generalization, such as whether and under what circumstances the results of a case study might be generalized to a population and to other cases. Although new ideas are proposed through a case study, there is a risk of limitation and dependency of the findings on specific contexts or special cases. In other words, the results may be interesting but may not be useful for understanding other cases.

Advocates of case studies respond to this disadvantage by saying that the results of case studies are generalized on theoretical statements not populations (Yin, 1994). Gomm, Hammersley, and Foster (2000) suggest that results potentially shared across cases are extracted by theoretical inference and comparative analysis. Some scholars believe that it is unnecessary to consider holistic results in case studies; it is more accurate to say that case studies offer depth of detail (Lincoln & Guba 2002; Stake 1995; Stake 1994; Yin 1994). In conclusion, although case studies do not play an important role in the production of empirical results, they are important in the production of ideas and theoretical results.

3.2 Data collection

Yin (1994) suggests that categorization of the research questions and subject is the first and most important step in a case study. A case study is based on one or more issues, and these issues influence the selection of cases or steps of inquiry and methods (Gall, Borge, & Gal 1996; Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000; Scholz & Tietje, 2002). While designing a case study, one must decide whether a single case will be examined or multiple cases will be simultaneously examined and compared. Multiple cases are appropriate when the researcher wants to examine comparatively the results of different cases, while a single case offers the opportunity of increased depth. Yin (1994) suggests a typology for determining the type of case or cases to study:

1. Critical case: These are cases that examine required conditions of some theory in order to test it.

2. Extremist case: These are extraordinary cases that deserve further research and inquiry in order to understand how they are related to ordinary cases.

3. Revelatory case: These are cases that provide opportunities for inquiry of a phenomenon that is beyond scientific investigation.

A case study is defined according to the purpose of the study from which the study method and its methodology of data collection should derive. Therefore, the various types of data collection are not specific methods of a case study but rather are part of the case study itself (Hass, 2004). Different case studies use different data collection methods such as participatory observation, interview, concentrated collective discussion, observations, recordings of sound and video, and so on. However, the methods chosen are dependent on the research goal or purpose. Regardless of the methods chosen, there are three rules for data collection that are necessary for all cases studies: Triangulation of the research findings, building of case- study database, and a rational chain of documents and witnesses (Hass, 2004).

3.2.1 Triangulation

Using multiple methodological resources can help to create converging lines of thought (Yin, 1994). If a research finding with more than three resources is confirmed, then it will also be comprehensive. This can be done through employing different data collection methods, or through studying multiple cases. For example, data are obtained from one resource or interview but it is necessary to use participatory observation for collection of that data.

3.2.2 Building of database

Case-study researchers should establish an official database for the documentation and organization of all collected data (Yin, 1994; Patton, 2002). By separating documentation into a database and final report, the researcher could review the documents in such a way that he is not confined to one report. As a result, the reliability of the study may be increased.

3.2.3 Rational chain of documents

It is necessary to determine and describe the relationship among questions, collected data, and results. The external observer or reader of the case study should be allowed to infer the research questions and the final results, so that the steps conducted by the researcher can be clearly identified and followed.

3.3 Chosen methodology

The central problem I examined in this study is why, in the view of key stakeholders, male students in the East-Azerbaijan province of Northwest Iran are dropping out of school at a much higher rate than their female counterparts. The main questions that I investigated were:

1. Do key stakeholders interviewed in the study perceive boys' dropout rate as a current problem in Iranian society? Why or why not?

2. What do key stakeholders interviewed perceive to be the role of the Iranian government with regard to the dropout rate for boys?

3. What do key stakeholders interviewed perceive to be the role of the family and other educational stakeholders in boys' dropout rates in the Northwest of Iran?

4. Do the key stakeholders interviewed tend to be in agreement about perceptions of boys' dropout rates?

5. What do key stakeholders interviewed perceive to be the solution and/or the ideal model of education for retaining students?

According to Jarvie, "whatever understanding is, explanation is the process of deducing one statement from others in accordance with some formal and also some material requirements" (Jarvie, 1970, cited in Borger & Cioffi, 1970). In other words, leaning heavily on the work of Winch (1964), the basic approach in this study is one of seeking to understand stakeholder perceptions rather than proving causality. My approach is guided by the words of Borger and Cioffi, that "[t]he road to understanding is nevertheless to

seek out the universal problems of human life; but not to give them universal solution, since these would be outside language and culture, which is impossible" (p. 191). When performing social research, our curiosity drives us to attempt to explain the world by making true universal statements. However, it is important to remember that what we find - good and bad, or true and false - depends on our culture and knowledge (Borger & Cioffi, 1970). My approach to conducting this research is qualitative. Qualitative researchers aim to gather in-depth understandings of human actions and the possible reasons that govern such actions. Qualitative methods investigate the why and how of human action, not just the what, where, and/or when (Mariampolski, 2001). I gathered data by interviews (both formal and informal). It is clear that the quality of research depends to a large extent on the quality of the data-collection tools. Interviewing and survey questionnaires are commonly used research techniques. In sociology and related disciplines, interviewing is a well-established research technique. Since I am from Iran and have worked in the education system there, the costs and resources to conduct interviews were easily manageable. There were no practical, political, or ethical problems with conducting this research. I traveled to Iran and conducted interviews with key stakeholders: male dropouts, teachers, and a school administrator.

As with any type of research of this nature, the quality of data depends on the truthfulness and accuracy of what the interviewees report. Although one can never be 100% sure of the veracity of what they say, I believe I have a unique opportunity that other researchers from Western countries may not have. This is due to two basic reasons. First, I am from Iran. This gives me insight not available to non-Iranians into the cultural problems of the country and the social protocols of conducting interviews. I also know how to navigate various hidden and subtle political issues current in Iran, to ensure that such issues do not affect the accuracy or detail of the interview responses. Second, I was a university instructor in Iran for 14 years. This experience provides me with an 'insider' perspective on some aspects of the educational situation, which can guide and structure the interview questions, the interviews themselves, and the analysis of interview responses. Additionally, I have a number of established professional relationships with key stakeholders in the Iranian educational system. For these two basic reasons, there is also an element of trust between myself and the interviewees that would not exist if the

interviewer was perceived as an “outsider.” I believe that these personal-background issues helped me to attain a high degree of accuracy and truthfulness in the interview process.

First, I analyzed trend/time-series data collected from official agencies such as the Department of Education of the East Azerbaijan Province Trend. The time-series data of interest includes cohort data on the number of students enrolled and the number of these who dropped out during the five years following their first enrollment. With these data I can report trends of growth or decline of boys’ dropout in this region. Subsequently, I conducted interviews to assess the perspectives of key stakeholders (e.g., dropouts, instructors) with regard to the causes and effects of boys' dropout rates. Specifically, I interviewed eight dropouts with a view toward understanding their self-reported reasons for dropping-out in this region. Additionally, other stakeholders were interviewed including five teachers, and one school administrator. Since only male principals and teachers are employed in all-boys schools, I interviewed only male principal and teachers.

I selected multiple schools, from a different education levels. These schools were randomly chosen from one area (i.e., the East-Azerbaijan province, in the northwest) of Iran. All schools that have been chosen are state schools, rather than private or semi-private schools. Rich families often prefer to send their children to private schools and they support them at least until they obtain a high-school diploma. Therefore, students from these types of schools do not face the same challenges and pressures that the general student population faces.

Interviews were partly formal and informal. The rationale for including stakeholders from multiple schools is that, unlike some countries in the West, the quality of the schools is highly variable even within the same geographical area and social level. Students in state schools were generally in the lower social class. I think it is important to study students in this social class, since students in the middle and upper classes often receive extra financial and educational support (e.g., from extra-curricular tutors) and are not affected by social contexts in the same way as people who rely on state support. My interviewees were all 20 years or older and the language of questions is therefore geared towards

adults. The languages of interview were Turkish and Persian. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and translated into English, and then analyzed. The questions that were asked during the interview process were primarily open-ended. For example, teachers were asked about their strategy for dealing with potential dropouts. Although the closed-ended questions (e.g., what is your age?) provided minimal information, they may be useful for providing some insight into correlative influences. For example, the level of education of one's parents might strongly influence the probability of dropping out. Other researchers have demonstrated this effect using large-scale survey data. Lloyd, El Tawila, Clark, and Mensch (2003), for instance, have analyzed data from a national survey and found that family income has a direct effect on dropping out. Open-ended questions make up the bulk of any case study that is attempting to understand phenomena within some particular context. Compiling this type of data allowed me to compare and contrast numerous qualitative aspects of the research questions and helped to identify dominant themes. This type of research was not as narrow and precise as a quantitative analysis but allows for more breadth to handle some of the complexities that are involved.

I integrate the findings of the data analysis into prevalent ideas about dropping out in the literature. Additionally, I make cautious and contextually respectful inferences about how this research may be applicable to other countries. Finally, I assess shortcomings or missing components in the research and provide suggestions for future directions for this line of research.

3.4 Analysis of interview data

Stake (1995) proposes two strategies that are necessary for case-study research: categorical aggregation and direct interpretation. Direct interpretation is made of each instance (e.g., each interviewee, question, etc.) while at the same time the researcher aggregates each instance so that something meaningful can be said about them as a class. Another method discussed by Stake (1995) is pattern correspondence. The two methods mentioned above both depend on detecting and understanding patterns (also often referred to as “themes” in qualitative research). I attempted to identify and understand various patterns within the perceptions of the key stakeholders. To find patterns requires reflection, triangulation, and being skeptical about first impressions (Stake, 1995).

Therefore, I isolated observed patterns and triangulated them, through the convergence of data to remove unreliable instances and detect reliable patterns. Furthermore, I used Yin's (1994) four principles for case-study research to conduct my analysis:

1. Show that the analysis relied on all the relevant evidence
2. Include all major rival interpretations in the analysis
3. Address the most significant aspect of the case study
4. Use the researcher's prior knowledge to further the analysis

4 Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze the data from my study and perform some basic triangulation on the results. The analysis will be divided into five main sub-sections: participant description, dropout responses, teacher responses, administrator responses, and an integrated analysis.

4.1 Participant description

As was previously mentioned, the education system of Iran is divided into three levels: elementary (E), secondary (S), and high-school (H). There are twelve grades through which students progress: five at the elementary level, three at the secondary level, and four at the high-school level. Each grade level is numbered, such as E1 for first elementary grade and H2 for second high-school grade, rather than a continuous grade numbering system as used in the United States or Canada. A total of twelve years are thus needed to obtain a high-school diploma, with students starting. One can then obtain a two-year associate diploma at a university, which is similar to a certificate from a community college, or a four-year Bachelor's degree. This information is relevant for observing the amount of education obtained by the participants. A more detailed description of each of the participants, and rationale for choosing them, is given in the sub-sections below.

4.1.1 Dropout participants

All of the dropout participants currently live in poor neighborhoods of their city, and lived in poor neighborhoods while in school as a child. All are currently working, though only in manual-labour jobs. Six of the eight dropouts were married. Of those who were married, all are married to spouses who have a higher level of education. However, almost all the parents of the participants have lower or equal (in the sole case of D4) levels of education; only D1 has a father with one year more of education, but still no high-school diploma. None of the mothers have more education than the fathers though. Two of the participants (D2 and D7) have one child, while D8 has two children. None of

the other participants have children. All the participants have one or more brothers, with D2 living in the smallest family (three children in total) and D8 having the largest family (14 children in total). All the participants also self-identified as being religious, and as practicing Islam. Specific details for each participant are summarized in Table 3 below.

These dropouts were chosen for a number of reasons. First, each of them went to different schools as a child, so that a larger cross-section of schools could be examined. As well, they all went to state schools. Since these are the schools attended by the vast majority of the population, and are the schools that children from low socio-economic classes attend, the experiences of these students are more relevant to a wider range of the population than those of any private-school student. There was also a range to the grades at which the participant left school, rather than choosing students who left school at the same grade. This was done to get a wider range of experiences, and to see whether there were different reasons depending given for dropping out depending on the exit grade level or if there were general patterns that transcended the grade at which the participants left school.

Second, these students all come from poor neighborhoods and attended schools that were also in poor neighborhoods. This was done to get an opinion of those students who face the greater social and economic hurdles when it comes to school, so as to understand the most difficult experiences students may have. In addition, families in the low socio-economic classes are less educated. Since I was interested in investigating the influence that family has on the choice to leave school, these families provide an example of the impacts of low-parental education and this background context of relative poverty is common amongst all the dropout participants. As well, the culture of the low socio-economic classes in Iran is more closely associated with a socially-conservative implementation of Islam. Children in poor families are thus more likely to be influenced by related social pressures, such as the need to be married young or the necessity of men to work and the women to stay at home.

Third and lastly, participants were chosen who had left school many years ago. I did not want participants who just left school, as they would not have had time to reflect on why

they left school or on the consequences leaving school has had on their lives. One who has just left school lacks sufficient life experience and information about the job market and could not provide a balanced set of reasons for leaving school. The dropout participants now have jobs and may have families to take care of, and they have had plenty of time to reflect on their decisions. The participants also vary in their social status, such as whether they are married, how many children they have, their age, and so on. All of these help to increase the diversity of possible experiences and situations the participants may have had.

Table 3: Personal Statistics for Dropout Participants

Dropout	**D1**	**D2**	**D3**	**D4**	**D5**	**D6**	**D7**	**D8**
Age	30	31	30	24	26	27	34	42
Education[1]	H2 (10)	H2 (10)	H1 (9)	E5 (5)	H1 (9)	H1 (9)	H3 (11)	S3 (8)
Status[2]	S	M	M	S	M	M	M	M
Spousal Education[1]	-	A	D	-	D	A	B	A
Children	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
Siblings[3]	4 / 3	2 / 0	6 / 3	2 / 2	1 / 2	2 / 1	1 / 3	8 / 5
Father's Education[1]	H3 (11)	E5 (5)	S1 (6)	E5 (5)	E5 (5)	E2 (2)	S1 (6)	0
Mother's Education[1]	E4 (4)	E5 (5)	0	E5 (5)	E2 (2)	E2 (2)	0	0

1. Education lists the number of years in school, using the Iranian system of Level + Grade first and the equivalent Western level in parenthesis afterward. HSD means "High-School Diploma", 12 years of Iranian education and the equivalent of a Western High-School diploma or completion of Grade 12. A means Associate Certificate; 15 years of schooling and the equivalent time of a U.S. Community College. B means a Bachelor's Degree; 17 years of schooling and the equivalent time of a U.S. Bachelor's Degree. All other values are the last grade in which the student finished (i.e., 3 means the student completed 3 years and left before completing his 4th year). A 0 means no schooling was ever completed.

2. This row lists marital status. M means "married" and S means "single or unmarried".

3. This row lists the number of siblings the participant has or had while in school. The format is "brothers / sisters"; thus, a value of "1 / 2" means "one brother, two sisters". A 0 means he has no brother or no sister.

4.1.2 Teacher participants

All teachers graduated from a university with a Bachelor's degree. Three of them had more than 26 years of experience, and two of them graduated after the Iran-Iraq war ended (T3 & T5). All of them are married; their spouses graduated from university with at least an Associate Certificate, and their spouses are active in society with a job in their field. All of the teachers had an equal or greater amount of education than their spouses. Specific details for each participant are summarized in Table 4.

The teacher participants were chosen from different schools from those of the dropout participants and the administrator. Although all of the schools were state schools, for the same reasons previously discussed, a variety of grade levels were chosen. In this way, experiences of teachers of all grade levels could be examined though each grade itself was not covered. As well, I wanted to interview teachers who entered university and began their teacher education before and after the Revolution, so as to see the differences in approach or opinion that these groups may have.

Table 4: Personal Statistics for Teacher Participants.

Participant	**T1**	**T2**	**T3**	**T4**	**T5**
Age	61	55	40	56	42
Education[1]	M	B	B	B	M
Experience (Years)	30	28	17	29	18
Previous Schools[2]	H	E	E, S	E, S	H
Current School[2]	H	S	S	H	H
Taught before Iran-Iraq War	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

1. B means a Bachelor's Degree and M means a Master's Degree.

2. These rows refer to the grade levels at which he taught. E means elementary levels, S means secondary levels, and H means high-school levels. A combination means he has taught at several different levels, and possibly different schools. The current school is the level at which he is currently teaching, while previous schools are previous levels at which he has taught.

4.1.3 Administrator participant

The only administrator participant graduated from university with a Bachelor's Degree. He is married and has two children. His spouse has a Bachelor's Degree and teaches at a local high school. He self-identifies as a religious person, practicing Islam. He has approximately 27 years of experience in the education system, and was a teacher for many years in a high school before being appointed to an administrative position. The total amount of time he taught was not specified. He stated that he did enjoy his job, and liked what he did for a living.

The administrator was chosen from a state school, again for the reasons discussed above. However, an additional reason is that the administrator of a state school should be more aware of public policy decisions and of the effects of governmental decisions on state schools. I chose a high-school administrator for two reasons. First, students at a high school are older than those in elementary or secondary school, but high-school students can also be more difficult to manage. Second, a number of authors indicate the importance of grades 9 and 10 on dropping out (Schargel & Smink, 2001) and this is also reflected in the higher number of students who leave school in grade 10 (see Appendix A). While this may be indicative of a problem at earlier grades, the effects are most obvious at the high-school level, and one would assume that it would be at this level that overt attempts to reduce drop-out rates would be carried out.

Only one administrator was interviewed though. The position of a school administrator is political by default, as administrators are typically appointed by other government officials. In addition, few administrators of state schools are willing to talk about their job when they know they are being recorded, even if their data remains anonymous. They may be fearful that they will be labeled as opposing the government for openly discussing their job, and may be unwilling to say negative things. In such a context, it was difficult to find participants willing to engage in even an anonymous interview.

4.2 Dropout analysis

All of the dropouts interviewed felt that parents are currently very motivated to send their children to school. They also felt that this motivation is higher now than when they were

children in school. As D1 observed, “I think people are more motivated to send their children to school now, and keep them in school, than when I was younger.” Echoing this sentiment, D6 stated that “[i]n my opinion, Iranian families’ knowledge has increased and a majority of them know the importance of literacy.” In other words, as parents their generation is more interested in educating their child than their parents’ generation was in educating them. This sentiment was expressed regardless of whether the dropout being interviewed had children. Those without children expressed the desire to have educated children; thus, if they had any children they presumably would send them to school. This desire to educate their children was independent of the child’s gender; the parent wanted his children educated regardless of whether the child was a boy or girl. When explaining that it was impossible for him to re-enroll in school, D3 emphasized that “[h]owever, if I had any children I would want them to go to university, even daughters.” Despite this desire, many of the dropouts (six) described the current educational situation as no better than when they went to school. For example, D6 complained that “[t]he schools are not as good now, with decreasing teacher motivation, student confidence, and director responsibility. Additionally, there is a focus on the Islamic approach to education rather than one that follows the approaches of developed countries.” Only two felt the situation had improved (D1 & D8), but this improvement, in their view, was only in decreasing the severity of punishment. After explaining a severe punishment he received, D1 then stated with confidence that “[n]ow, I don’t think this would happen at any urban school, and this is an improvement.” In their opinion, there is increasing social change towards a push for education since the school system has not improved in the past two to three decades.

Of the dropouts who were married, all were married to women with a higher level of education (see Table 3). For example, one dropout was educated up to a grade-10 level while his spouse had the equivalent of a community-college degree. Another one dropped out of school one year before finishing high school, while his wife has a Bachelor’s degree and was in graduate school before leaving to get married. That such a gap in education may cause a disconnect between spouses, and between parent and child, was noticed by some of the dropouts. As D3 explained:

> My wife and her family are more educated than I am; she even has a university degree. I try to learn more things from media and colleagues in my workplace, but sometimes I think that I am not at her level. Now I do not have any children, but in the future I am sure our children will accept my wife more than I.

Despite the possible disconnect, an educated wife was considered desirable. This is most clearly shown with D3, who stated that "I am happy with my marriage though, because my spouse is an educated person." Similarly, some of the dropouts explained that it was important to them for their daughters to be educated. Both of these points are quite interesting, given that Iran is a patriarchal society and that the dropout participants are low socio-economic status. However, none of the married dropouts had a wife with a job. In explaining social pressures on him, D7 clarified that "[m]y spouse is educated, and has a university degree, but she is a housewife."

Many of the dropouts described their education facilities as poor in quality. Many were not impressed with the course content that they learned, complaining, in particular, that some of this material was impractical and irrelevant. For instance, when discussing the content of courses, D2 explained that "I found some of them interesting, like English language, mathematics, and physics, but there were other courses that I didn't like at all such as history and Islamic approaches." Similarly, D5 insisted that "[i]n my opinion, the materials [subject matter] were not very good. Some of the courses did not seem necessary, and now I still think they are unnecessary. A lot of the courses were also not practical." Despite being an important class, mathematics was one course that was difficult. When discussing his courses, D3 explained that "I had the most difficulty with mathematics, especially in high school. In my opinion, many of the students had a lot of difficulty with mathematics, so it would have been good if we had teachers that helped us better." This is very similar to the problems experienced with mathematics in other countries (Schoen, Ziebarth, Hirsch, & Brckalorenz, 2010). Many of the dropouts went to a school that did not have a library, and even those schools with libraries had very limited ones. D4 mentioned that he wanted to read novels and fiction books as a child, but "[o]ur library didn't have these kinds of books, so I didn't borrow anything." Similarly, D5 explained that he "… did not have a library, just some Islamic books that we could not understand." Lastly, D8 described the value of a library for schools but then added

tellingly that "… I don't remember if our schools had a library." In terms of sports, the schools were very limited. D4 explained that, "[a]s a child, we did not have any sports programmes at school either, which might have been nice." This comment was echoed by D1, who said that "[t]he schools that I attended didn't have much in the way of a sports program …." Football, or soccer, was the main sport they all played, primarily because the only equipment needed was a ball. In one case though, "[w]e just took a ball to a small place and a number of students played with it, and we called that 'Football'."

Many of the dropouts also felt that the relationship between their parents and the school was non-existent or very poor in quality. As D1 put it, "[m]y parents were also never invited to the school to speak with any of my teachers..." It seemed that the school only contacted parents when a student had behavioral problems, and occasionally when he was failing a course. For instance, D7 explained that "my parents were invited to my school" because of his poor performance, "but I had my older brother come instead" since the school only asked him to tell his parents to stop by. The school did not attempt to contact his parents directly. As another example, D6 described how his "parents were sometimes invited to my school because of my poor academic standing, but there were no suggestions for improvement given or any kind of support. The whole purpose of those meetings was to complain."

In terms of cultural pressures, some of the dropouts mentioned the cultural pressure on them that influenced their decision to leave school. For instance, D6 explained that cultural pressures such as "being in a family of an Islamic background" gave him "the impression that I must marry at a young age." As a consequence, "I knew that I had to marry someone, and in order to do this I needed a job and money." A similar story was given by D7: "I and my brothers have to practice Islam and we had to follow its roles. So, we married at a young age and I had to have a job to support our life." The implications were best described by D1, who explained that "[m]en are expected to get a job, have a family and a house of some sort." As a result, "[t]he majority of us have to leave school to find a job" because otherwise you could not get married, and "to be a single man for a long time is not acceptable in our culture, especially in the religious sections." Another

form of social pressure was bullying. D5 mentioned that bullying occurred in his school, though he never claimed to be bullied himself:

> It was very bad. As boys, we knew and were familiar with all the bullying that happened at school, and is still happening. Some of the older students would harass the younger ones about sexual topics, since the younger students didn't understand. … Our school did not have the proper programs to deal with any of these problems or provide guidance for students, and this made for an even worse environment for some students.

This is a crucial point, because bullying is rarely discussed in Iran even within one's own family. Given this taboo status of the whole topic of bullying, it is very difficult to determine how frequently bullying occurs and its effects on students' educational experience.

However, all of the dropouts stated that the economic situation of their family was a fundamental reason that they left school. For instance, D3 specified that "[t]he basic reason I dropped out of school was my family's income," and furthermore that, because of his family's financial situation, "my other siblings and I were unable to continue our education." Similarly, D6 explained that "[m]y family was in a bad situation financially, and that was the main reason that I decided to drop-out." Thus, all the dropouts eventually left school to work so that they could fulfill their obligation to help the family. This was true regardless of whether or not they had brothers who could be working. Echoing sentiments from D3, D8 explained that "my brothers and I had to work with [my father] in every season," but that, after his father passed away, "I dropped out so that I could focus all of my attention on work." The size of their families was, in any case, often too large for their father on his own to support, which is a common problem experienced in other areas of the world (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011).

When asked whether they wanted to go back to school to get a high-school diploma, all of the dropouts agreed that they want to do so. However, only two were actually able to do so (D6 & D7). D6 explained that "Six years ago I changed my mind, and wanted to get my high school diploma. I've continued my education while still working. Hopefully I will get my diploma in the next two years." D7 started to go back to school, and "[m]y wife helped me with this, since she went through high school already before her

university degree." However, once he realized the costs for going back to school he stopped: "I told myself that I could use this money to give my children better help and support their education." The others were not able to go back to school, citing economic reasons. For instance, D3 confessed that "education is so important to me but my economic situation does not allow to me re-enroll in school again." They did not have the funds required to pay for school, nor could they afford the time away from work in order to attend school. Additionally, many of them felt that they could not get a better job even with a higher level of education. D2 believed that "I have little work experience outside of low level jobs, and I am too old to apply to jobs that require a higher level of education." He saw little reason to go back to school, since employers "would prefer to hire younger men with a Bachelor's degree." Comments from D4 gave a good impression of the futility that some of them associated with re-enrolling in school:

> I am certain that I cannot re-enroll in school, and the basic reason is my economic situation. If the government supports me, and I am confident that I will find a job after getting a high-school diploma, then I will go back to school. Otherwise, it is not possible.

Finally, the issue of language was very important for all of the dropouts. In the Iranian education system, all students are taught in Persian (Farsi) at every level. Students also must take Arabic and English classes starting in secondary school, though they are taught the Qur'an in Arabic from grade 1. However, the native language for all of the dropouts is Turkish and they all went to school in predominantly Turkish areas. As explained by D5, students have spent "seven years talking with their family, and even the rest of society," but then when the students go to school "they end up having to speak and write with another language which they had not practiced yet." Thus, given that their schools functioned with Persian as its language-of-instruction, they all experienced difficulty in school with learning in a completely different language. This difficulty ranged from mere complications all the way to extreme frustration. For instance, D1 said that "I didn't have much trouble using only Persian in school, even though I prefer speaking in Turkish, but it is a problem for a lot of students." However, this response is vastly different from that of D4 who said of his early schooling experience:

> Imagine a child that has to speak and write with a non-native language, even though he has no background with it. I remember in grade one, in which we had to tell a story about a dog and a cat, almost all the students could not make a sentence. It is funny that I believed that I had a problem, but I did not recognize what the issue really was back then.

As a result, students had an increasingly negative impression of school and the course material mainly because they had difficulty with the language.

4.3 Teacher analysis

All of the teacher participants stated that the Iranian education system has some fundamental problems. To put it broadly, T4 explained that the education system has changed many times after the Islamic revolution, but "for every change the ministry of education performed they, consciously or unconsciously, have made things worse." Some of the teachers complained that one of the problems has to do with course content. T1 thought that "we should teach students material that is practical" while T4 described that he taught "sociology and psychology, but most of these courses just cover the Islamic perspective of this material. These courses won't be useful for students." Another complaint was that courses are disconnected from the rest of the world. As T1 explained, "[w]e do not focus on the market or practical things and we do not look at global issues; it is not our target. We just keep our students in theoretical debates, especially in the human sciences." Students thus graduate from school without understanding the political, social, or economic world in which they must now find a job.

Some of the teachers also focused on other government policy issues. One of the biggest issues had to do with limited government investment in education on the one hand and population growth on the other. T4 talked extensively about how one improves an education system through managing "the amount of investment and population." However, "the leaders of Iran have [recently] started talking about increasing the country's population" (see Table 9 and Figure 1) and, thus, T4 was concerned that "if Iranian citizens accept this policy we will see the education system get worse; since we will have more students but less money." The teachers acknowledged that poor families cannot afford to have their children in school, or pay some of the additional costs needed to stay in school. However, many of the participants explained that the economic

situation of teachers is similarly challenging. As T2 put it, "[n]early all teachers have to find a second job, because we cannot balance our life with the amount teachers are paid." This economic situation is frustrating for teachers. T3 explained that "a teacher is always just a teacher with a limited income, but other training fields have more opportunity for a career", and that "[u]ntil the ministry of education pays us something realistic, teachers cannot have an effective position in this society." Although some of the teacher participants mentioned that they, and other teachers, have second jobs, none of the participants described their other jobs. However, D8 mentioned that "teachers are not serious in class. The teachers prefer to accept students in their private classes." These private classes were paid by the students, so that if a student wanted extra help from his teacher he needed to go to these classes and pay for it. For instance, D5 explained that he failed mathematics and that his family "could not send me to private classes." Whether any of the interviewed teachers engaged in such practices is unknown, however, though responses from the dropout participants suggest that it is a common practice.

Another prominent issue that the teachers discussed was their responsibility for student problems. As explained by T1, each state school "has one advisor, who gives advice to students that are having trouble in school, and it is the advisor's responsibility to keep students in school." T5 believed that, if a teacher sees that a student is struggling, their schools "have an advisor who can help students with this issue, so our responsibility is to talk with him about students who want to drop out." In other words, the teacher is supposed to leave the problem in the advisor's hands. This can be very problematic though if a student is to get help. As T4 described it, "timely diagnosis is so important but the school advisors are the only ones who can do this, and they do not have enough information about the students." Thus, while some of the teachers complained that they there is nothing they can do to help students stay in school, the rest said that teachers should be working to help such students. Yet, T3 explained poignantly that "I cannot do anything; I do not have the training for such things… The most I can do is talk to them, but doing so is not useful… Their problem is money, and I cannot help them solve that because it is my problem too."

Despite this lack of interest though, all of the teachers had some initial strategy they pursued when dealing with struggling students. For instance, T1's strategy is to "talk with him, and ask easy questions to increase his motivation," while T2 prefers to "divide the class between four groups, with different levels, and most of the time I prefer to give some responsibilities to struggling students such as a team speaker." In other words, most of the teachers do not immediately relinquish the student to the advisor but rather try to provide some initial support. T3's strategy sums this up: "I prefer to talk with him or his family and try to figure out his problem. If I can, then that is enough. Otherwise, as an administrative rule, we have to report him to an advisor or administrator."

T5 described a significant phenomenon within Iranian society that affected the education system: the Islamic Revolution. Primarily, two events happened after the Revolution. First, urban restructuring that had started before the Revolution increased. Significant numbers of people moved from rural areas to urban ones (which did occur, see Figure 3). However, as T5 explained, "a lot of people from the rural areas immigrated to cities and got good positions in the education system and courts." The result was that people from a rural background were placed in positions of power and influence, and had control over decisions made regarding people from an urban background. This trend was problematic, "because of their effect on the culture of cities." These two backgrounds are significantly different in the importance they place on various issues. With people from a rural culture in positions of power, an urban culture becomes more rural. In T5 opinion's, "Teachers from a rural culture can never create a successful system, so to improve this system we should change our curriculum and improve the social class of teachers." Regardless of the accuracy of this teacher's opinion, that a teacher has such an opinion is in itself a significant indicator of public perception of the administration education in Iran.

T4 talked extensively about a second major event. This was the Iran-Iraq war, from 1980 to 1988, in which "all male citizens who were between 17-40 years old had to go to war." Despite the draft, "[o]nce the universities started to open up again in 1982, university students were not required to go to war." In this teacher's opinion, a number of students applied for University programs and just accepted anything so that they could avoid fighting in the war:

> In those days, more male high-school students preferred to go to university to escape military service and the war. On the other hand, the Iranian State Universities Entrance Examination (ISUEE) was (and remains) very hard. Additionally, in Iranian society, two fields of university education are considered particularly important: medicine and engineering. However, some students got a high enough score on ISUEE to get into university, but not high enough for medicine or engineering. These students preferred to go study secretary-ship to become a high-school teacher.

Although some of these students ended up in teaching jobs, they were not motivated to teach well. According to T4, this was because they "compared their own situation, consciously and unconsciously, with other classmates, such as those in engineering. Engineers definitely have a higher income than teachers, so these teachers do not have enough motivation to spend extra time with students." In T4's opinion then, the Iranian education system hired a bunch of new teachers who lacked motivation because they only chose a teaching career to avoid being conscripted into a war and because their income was too low compared to their friends. Of the five teachers interviewed, two started teaching after the war ended and were in University during the war (T3 & T5). The other three started teaching before or during the war, and thus had graduated from University before people started fleeing to the Universities (T1, T2, & T4). One can thus see a difference in attitude, as is clear when comparing T5 and T1's responses about how to motivate their students. T5's response was simply that, "[u]nmotivated teachers cannot successfully motivate students. I do not like my job, so how can I motivate students?" In contrast, T1's response was that "[a]lthough, most of the time, our cultural structures and administrative rules restrict us, we should find some logical methods to increase students' attraction to school."

All the teacher participants were asked to rank three factors in order of importance with respect to the problem of boys' dropout (see Table 5). All of them gave the same order: they saw family factors as the most important, followed by individual factors, and then the school environment. For family-related factors, 80% of the teachers said that the family income was the most important factor affecting student attrition. For individual-related factors as well, 80% of the teachers said that the low motivation of students was the most important factor. For school-related factors, there was no majority agreement among the teachers as to what was the most important. The one school-related factor that

garnered much support from the participants was that teachers could not motivate their students, though the participants disagreed on how important this factor was.

Table 5: Teacher Opinions about the Importance of Individual, Family, and Environmental Factors on Male Attrition from School

		Teachers Ranking				
Factors	**Influences**	**T1**	**T2**	**T3**	**T4**	**T5**
Individual	Lack of compatibility of student with teachers and students	1	3	3	3	3
	Low motivation of student	2	1	1	1	1
	Low ability of student	3	2	2	2	2
Family	Parent support	1	-	-	-	-
	Parent education	2	-	3	-	2
	Family income	3	1	1	1	1
	Patriarchal culture	-	2	-	-	-
	Number of children in family	-	3	2	2	3
	Neighborhood	-	-	-	3	-
Environment	Teachers cannot create positive motivation among students	1	2	3	2	1
	Students must take unrelated subject or experience an irrelevant curriculum	2	1	1	-	-
	Uncertain future for educated individual	3	3	2	1	3
	Majority of schools' staff are from low levels of society	-	-	-	3	2

Related to motivation though, three of the teachers discussed negative stereotypes that have recently emerged. T2 was concerned about a prevalent stereotype of small business or factory owners as professionals who make moderate-to-high incomes. T2 explained that:

> if you monitor the owner of a small private business, you will see that most of them have a low education or that they continued their education in some private schools.

> They needed to pay for their high-school diplomas. A lot of them are not entrepreneurs, and some of them even have a close relationship with some governors.

In other words, T2 is concerned that students are looking up to "professionals" who are financially successful without much education and possibly due to corruption. In such circumstances, the argument that education is needed for a good-paying job does not motivate such students since the stereotype they admire and wish to follow provides contrary evidence – at least in their minds. Whether there are actually large numbers of such individuals, or whether they exist solely in the public imagination, was not discussed by the teacher participants. The dropout participants were all concerned about an inability to find a better job, *even with a high-school diploma*, so it is possible that the stereotype lacks reality or exists solely due to corruption.

4.4 Administrator analysis

One of the big issues that the administrator participant discussed was the division of education into private and state schools. According to him, the rising dropout rate "is an issue for the government" and "[t]he government's response has been to create private and semi-private schools." He was not strongly against this division, explaining that "Having non-state schools can help with this situation [dropout rate], but the state schools should not be neglected as a result." He was primarily concerned with the effects encouraging private-school development has had on state schools, since the private and semi-private schools "have a higher quality of education than what the state schools could provide." The state schools "need more support from the government", since "[m]ore than 90% of students have to go to state schools, so most of the time we sacrifice the majority instead of the minority." When the administrator was asked what could be done to alleviate the dropout problem among boys, he went into great detail about the problem and causes but did not directly answer the question. For him, the biggest issue is the difference in quality between state and private schools and that until this difference is addressed there can be no solution for student attrition. It seemed as though this administrator did not perceive male dropouts to be as significant as other problems.

Another issue that was important for the administrator participant is the way in which the education system is organized and managed. As he explained:

> In our education system, management is [structured and carried out in] a top-down style especially for non-Persian provinces. The center [the capital of Iran, Tehran], which is Persian, tries to dictate educational policies to other non-Persian provinces. With this model, we have not been successful in developing a good education system.

Since all major administrative and curriculum decisions are made in the capital, without sufficient input from anyone outside that group, the administrator and his colleagues have little ability to address real problems because they cannot get support from higher levels of the system.

When asked about the various factors that influence boys to leave school, his responses were the same as the teachers. He felt that family factors were the most important, followed by individual factors, and lastly the school environment. In the case of family-related factors, "the family income is most important". He explained that "[w]e know that the main problem is the economic situation of a family, and that it can encourage students to drop out of school." In the case of individual-related factors, "the most important is the low motivation of students." Both of these responses are consistent with the majority responses from the teacher participants. However, the administrator also said that the second most important family-related factor was "the parents' education level." In his mind, if the parents are poorly educated then they will have a difficult time supporting their children academically and may not value education as much as more educated parents. In the case of school-related factors, the most important was that "teachers cannot create positive motivation among students," echoing a common though not unanimous response from the teacher participants. Interestingly, the administrator said that the second most influential school-related factor is that "a majority of schools' staff are from a low socio-economic class, so dropping out of school is not important for them." This opinion is in agreement with T5's observation regarding the movement of people from the rural culture into the urban one.

4.5 Integrated analysis

In this sub-section, I will discuss four main issues that link the perceptions of all the participants. These issues include: education quality, management of the education system, direct influences on dropping-out, and strategies for addressing student attrition.

4.5.1 Education quality

The dropout participants explained that teachers are not sufficiently motivated to teach, and this lack of motivation negatively affected the students' learning experience. As D5 put it, "[t]he number of students and teachers who had low motivation just resulted in more problems for students." Some of the teacher participants agreed that teachers are not motivated, with T5 being the most blunt in saying "I do not like my job, so how can I motivate students?" However, most of the teachers explained that their economic situation is such that their extra jobs prevent them from spending additional time in school and on school-related tasks. To these teachers, they do not have motivational problems so much as teaching is only one job they need to do among multiple jobs and they lack time to do it properly. For instance, T5 complained that "I, like other teachers, do not have enough time to focus on a group of students. Imagine having at least 35 students in a class, and I can only spend around two minutes for each one." Similarly, T3 complained that "I only have 90 minutes for 40 students. This is around 2 minutes per pupil, provided that I do not teach a new lesson." However, T4 explained that, at least for newer teachers who compare their income to that of an engineer, "these teachers do not have enough motivation to spend extra time with students." In addition, some of the teachers explained that they are not trained to deal with student problems. In other words, they do not know how to help students with non-academic problems and thus cannot provide any support for those issues. The administrator agreed with the teachers' complaint regarding their economic situation, in the sense that the state schools need more government support. The administrator also agreed with the dropouts regarding teacher motivation, stating that the most important school-related influence on the dropout rate is that "teachers cannot create positive motivation among students."

4.5.2 Management of the education system

D8 explained that he heard "teachers are not serious in class" because they "prefer to accept students in their private classes." As such, students who have academic problems need to go to the teachers' private classes in order to have them solved. As D6 put it, some of his teachers "seemed to be having financial problems, and they were unwilling to give us any help beyond what they were paid for." Many of the teacher participants

explained that they do not have responsibility when it comes to addressing student problems; it is the advisor's job to deal with them. For these teachers, their job is just to teach for the specified amount of time and that even doing this is difficult due to the number of students and short class times. Additionally, T4 explained that it is the new group of teachers that have this problem. Those teachers who went to university during the Iran-Iraq war are the ones not motivated to teach because they are only thinking in terms of money. The administrator participant explained that management is top-down, and that he can only implement the guidelines given to him but cannot ask for help that is outside such guidelines. As such, from the administrator's perspective, there is much inflexibility in the education system when it comes to problems not identified by the upper levels of the administration hierarchy. This attitude is consistent with that of T4, who explained that "Teachers have low flexibility" when it comes to dealing with struggling students because of a "curriculum that does not provide enough responsibility for teachers."

4.5.3 Participant perceptions of main influences on dropping out

All of the participants were asked about factors they thought were most important in affecting student dropout. These factors were placed into three categories: individual-related factors, family-related factors, and school-related factors. All of the participants ranked the categories of these factors in the same way: family-related factors were the most important, followed by individual-related factors, and lastly school-related factors.

For family-related factors, all of the dropout participants agreed with D3: "The basic reason I dropped out of school was my family's income." Their family could not afford to survive unless they left school and looked for a job, so they did. Of the teacher participants, 80% of them also thought that the main reason a student dropped out of school was due to the economic situation of his family. The administrator also agreed with this perception, stating that the main reason a student left school was due to the economic situation of his family.

For individual-related factors, most of the dropouts explained that the main factors are the difficulties they faced with their courses. For instance, D3 stated that he "had the most

difficulty with mathematics, especially in high school" and that "many of the students had a lot of difficulty with mathematics." Others complained that the courses were not practical. Most of the teachers thought that students did not have enough motivation in their classes, and that is why they dropped out of school. The administrator was in agreement with the teachers in this respect; "the most important [individual-related factor] is the low motivation of students."

Finally, with respect to school-related factors, many of the dropouts were concerned with their uncertain future. For instance, D2 is working but has "little work experience outside of low level jobs, and I am too old to apply to jobs that require a higher level of education." In addition, there were some problematic stereotypes held by students. D6 was one who believed in the stereotype of the "sports men," describing them as "people [who] were successful and had a perfect life with low education, and we wanted to be like them." The teacher participants did not agree on which school-related factors were most important. Some felt that the uncertain future which students faced was the most important, while others thought that the most important factor was the inability of teachers to motivate students. Negative stereotypes were also on the mind of some teachers. T2 described the stereotype of the "owner of a small private business," who "[has] a low education or… continued… [His] education in some private schools." Such people, however, are "not entrepreneurs", and "some of them even have a close relationship with some governors." More telling though was T3's concern that "a society with a low level of education is a non-democratic society, and non-democratic societies prefer to have uneducated citizens." The administrator thought that the most important school-related factor was that teachers could not positively motivate students. The second most important factor was that the education system itself was staffed with too many people from a rural background, and the issues they wanted to solve were inconsistent with the issues the administrator felt was important. The administrator also thought that the third most important factor was "the uncertain future for educated individuals," echoing the concerns of the some of the current dropouts.

4.5.4 Strategies for addressing student attrition

Teacher approach or school policies for reducing student attrition still need improvement. As way of reducing student attrition, D1 stated that the "behavior of teachers and administrators can be changed so that they are better able to help students, or encourage them to stay in school." Most of the dropout participants explained that, from their perspective, there has been little change in the teacher approach or school policies toward reducing student attrition. For instance, D4 said that "[i]n the state schools the situation is same as when I went to school." They also discussed how the same form of punishment which they were given for misbehavior is still used. Although, as D4 stated, "Punishment is illegal in any school," D7 mentioned that "in rural areas it is still common." On the positive side, D1 described how, although he was "punished once in elementary school so badly that I fainted for about 10 minutes," he is also confident that "[n]ow, I don't think this would happen at any urban school".

The teachers had little to say regarding punishment, and when asked about students struggling with material two of them said they have too little to help those students. All of the teachers explained that they have no training for dealing with non-academic problems, and they consider encouraging or motivating students to be part of this. Each has different strategies for helping students based on personal experience. For instance, T3 prefers "to talk with him or his family and try to figure out his problem," T1 may "ask easy questions to increase his motivation," while T4 prefers to "give some responsibility to the academically weak students and pair them with other students who have a better educational situation." Ultimately though, as T1 said, "it is that advisor's responsibility to help keep students in school" and, as T3 mentioned, if early attempts fail "we have to report him to an advisor or administrator."

The administrator agreed that "administrators, like the advisor, [should preferably] control and manage these situations," such that "[w]hen I notice a student has a problem in his learning, I invite the advisor to look into it." However, "[i]n a serious situation, I invite the student's parents to have a discussion with me so that we can find the fundamental problem." Significantly though, in contrast to the teacher's position though, he prefers to "get feedback from teachers, and then have the teachers get involved,

because they are the best ones to work with students provided that they use a logical and up-to-date approach.”

5 Findings

This chapter will briefly discuss some important findings that resulted from this study. These findings are in no particular order, though the first finding is the most important.

5.1 Primary dropout factor

The first, and most important, finding is that the primary reason why boys left school was their family's economic situation. This reason was identified by all participants, and was more critical than other socio-cultural influences. For instance, while there is cultural pressure for the men to work so as to provide for the family, boys do not need to leave school for this reason unless their family is suffering financial difficulties. Similarly, the education level of the parents affects the degree to which they can help their child in school but the dropouts interviewed still all left school for financial reasons regardless of how educated their parents were.

5.2 Cultural pressures

A second finding is that there are cultural pressures in Iranian society, stemming from the way Islam is implemented in the rural areas and in the education system, that affect decisions regarding school. For example, one pressure cited by the dropout participants was that the men are expected to work, and thus they choose to leave school for work when it is necessary for the family's income. Another pervasive cultural norm shapes that expectation, namely that men are expected to marry as soon as possible after they reach a certain age – generally between 20 and 26 years of age – and having a job is a necessary cultural prerequisite.

5.3 Education administration

Another finding is that the Iranian ministry of education implements, or at least study participants likely to know perceive it to implement, policies in a top-down manner, such that the main decisions are made by central administration. This centralized decision-

making would imply that problems specific to provinces outside the capital of the country could be ignored and furthermore that non-Persian individuals have little or no say in the decision-making process. However, the administrator gave no clear examples of how this management structure functioned. In the case of specific schools, the management style also seems very much like a top-down system. The teachers are trained only to teach classes, and are not trained or expected to or help the students. Advisors, who are school staff with a different role from that of teachers, are solely responsible for helping struggling students and are the ones to whom the teachers should refer struggling students.

5.4 Private and state schools

Another finding is that there is a perceived quality gap between the state schools and the private schools. The state schools apparently have insufficient funding in comparison to the private schools. In addition, it seems that a number of the courses, at least in the state schools, are non-practical or unrelated to a global society.

5.5 Funding and class sizes

Additionally, the size of the population has a direct and negative effect on the education system when compared to the amount of investment. Schools already lack funds to teach effectively the current number of students and the quality of the education they receive will continue to drop as more students enter the schools. Hence, if the average number of students per class increases, quality will be reduced unless there is greater investment. Currently, it seems that the Iranian government is pursuing a policy of increasing the population size of the country without increasing funding for state schools. One of the teachers described how this behavior is expected for non-democratic countries, as leaders in those kinds of countries prefer to have a less educated populace than leaders in democratic countries.

5.6 Teacher motivation

Another finding is that many of the teachers are only motivated to teach within the time period assigned to their classes. They consider any additional time that might need to be

spent, such as helping students outside of class time, as too much work. Even during class time they reported feeling pressed for time and unable to help individual students, which eis reflected in the perceived low quality of the education and the impression students have of their teachers. This poor teacher motivation is partially connected to salaries, as the teachers often need second or third jobs to survive. Since teachers perceive themselves as overworked and underpaid, they are uninterested in helping students outside of the time for which they are paid. Many of the more experienced teachers, moreover, some of whom are interested in helping students outside of class time despite not being paid, will soon be retiring.

5.7 Language of instruction

Another finding relates to language of instruction. Learning in one's native tongue is a more effective than learning in languages with which a student is less familiar. All of the dropout participants explained that their native language was Turkish, and the area in which they lived was predominantly Turkish. However, they were taught and expected to learn in Persian, right from the beginning of their schooling. Almost all of the dropout participants explained that they preferred to use Turkish than Persian, and had difficulty understanding the material taught as a result.

5.8 Iran-Iraq war

Another finding is that there has been, and continues to be, a negative effect on the Iranian education system as a result of the Iran-Iraq war from 1980 to 1988. In addition to the number of people who were killed, there is a perception among participants that many people fled to the universities for any kind of education so as to avoid going to the war. Should this be the case, the inescapable corollary is that a number of people got a degree simply to avoid serving in the war rather than because they wanted the degree, much less wanted to become a teacher. Their motivation in using that degree as a teacher may be lower than those who got the same degree because they actually wanted have that kind of job. Teaching was one degree which was apparently popular precisely for avoiding the draft. Should this be true, it could be another reason why several younger teachers did not have much motivation to teach.

6 Discussion and recommendations

Currently, the Iranian education system faces three main problems: a large and growing population, a non-democratic approach to policies, and suffering from effects of a long war. These are not problems restricted to just Iran. In any non-democratic society, there is a relationship between the education that its populace receives and the kind of government which results. This is evident when comparing various countries across the world. Non-democratic countries place less emphasis on educating most people so that they can be independent, capable, and critical thinkers, but may still educate people to gain technical skills. In more democratic countries, there is increasing emphasis on higher academic standards even if such standards, in practice, are nothing more than lowered dropout rates. Consequently high dropout rates attract attention and active efforts are usually made to reduce them.

Regardless of whether a country is democratic though, a number of problems can still arise in its education system. Based on the interview responses, some general patterns of problems that relate specifically to the state of the country can be identified. Three areas or sources of problems affecting Iranian education emerge from the interview data collected in this study: the surrounding culture, the role of government, and the way in which schools are managed.

Iran is a country in which the culture of its poor socio-economic classes and rural classes are heavily intertwined with the religion which they practice, in this case a specific version of Islam. The culture of these groups happens to be patriarchal in nature, and this patriarchy is associated in their minds with practicing Islam. In other words, the necessity of the male to marry before age 26, to be the primary breadwinner of the family, and so on, are all assumed to be part of “practicing Islam” regardless of whether this is true in general. As there is also the assumption that males must be the decision makers, and this assumption is prevalent amongst the people with influence and power in the society, there will inevitably be inequity between men and women. Such inequity can become worse

when the men who run a society are not well-educated. Thus, while lack of education for women in a patriarchal society is problematic, the men are ultimately tasked with running the country; the education of the men is thus particularly important and consequential to government and governance. In addition, various stereotypes emerge from the culture that influence the decisions of individuals. When poor education is the norm among leaders and decision makers, individuals tend to pursue illusory popular stereotypes and role-models without examining whether such stereotypes are good for a productive, healthy, and equitable society. The stereotypes of a non-democratic society can be damaging. For example, corruption can become pervasive so that a small handful of people gain large amounts of power, money, or influence. These people then flaunt such power, implicitly encouraging others to copy them so as to also gain power.

Although culture has an implicit influence on education, government plays a more active and explicit role in shaping its functions. As mentioned above, non-democratic countries do not develop their education system due to the potential threat that educated people pose for an uneducated elite. While possibilities for education are given, educated people can criticize or analyze the government and the situation of their country. As such, it is preferable to a ruling elite for such educated individuals to be small in number since uneducated masses help provide social stability (e.g., see Hawthorn, Tremblay, & Bownick, 1967). Although the government of such countries rarely creates a terrible education system, more often they just fail to improve it when problems arise. Such governments may also be at war relatively frequently, in part as a means of rallying an otherwise apathetic or restless populace to support them or in an attempt to further increase their power and influence. Regardless of the reasons, war can have a negative effect on a country's education system. For instance, the Iran-Iraq war led to a number of issues respecting education. During the war, some people tried to avoid fighting by going to university and studying. Since these people just wanted "any degree," some of them ended up with a teaching degree but had little motivation to actually teach. When these teachers were hired, they were less effective than their more motivated peers. After the war though, it became a policy to accept war veterans into universities irrespective of their marks. These people then got degrees and influenced the policies of universities and other institutions due to the prestige and influence associated with being a veteran.

Iranian society suffered when some of these individuals used their influence to gain more power and influence, or to provide support for their agendas. When those agendas coincided with government agendas, even more support was provided. In addition, population growth can be encouraged or discouraged by government policy. Increasing population growth puts a larger economic strain on families as well as the education system, which now has to deal with more students. Another policy that can be encouraged or enforced by the government is language usage, particularly in regard to language(s) of instruction. In educational contexts, language-of-instruction policies can create and exacerbate problems for people who have a different native language from the one required in school. In the case of state funded schools, government investment plays a large role in the quality of the facilities and the salaries of teachers, administrators, and other staff. When this funding is too low, teacher salaries will also be inappropriately low. In Iran, this is especially critical as teachers often need multiple jobs in order to survive, preventing them from spending extra time with students. With inadequate funding, schools are unable to hire a sufficient number of teachers so that teachers are often required to do more or teach a greater number of students than they otherwise should. Lastly, the way in which government policies are created and implemented is related to how democratic they are. In a non-democratic approach, policies are centrally created without much consideration of opposing or contrasting views and priorities. As a result, the implementation of these policies may not reflect local problems or issues, and may create more problems than they solve.

At the school level as well similar management problems can arise. The behavior of administrators, in most cases, depends on cultural influences and on government policies put in place to support them. When a top-down approach is used by the government, school administrators often act in the same way. Administrators are thus required to implement a given policy and expect the same of the people beneath them in the administrative hierarchy. In the case of Iran though, the vast differences among the provinces can make this worse. A province containing a Persian minority, or different cultural/ethnic groups than those in the capital province, ends up being required to implement an imposed homogeneous national policy and complaints are simply ignored. An administrator who is not part of the central administration can offer suggestions, but

they will likely be ignored or passed over as impractical. As a result, administrators end up implementing a policy with which they may completely disagree or which they see as inappropriate for the local circumstances. One such problem is that the administrators have little control over school facilities and materials. They cannot change the course content or curriculum, but merely implement them as given. The attitude of administrators is particularly noticeable when state and private schools are compared. The administrators of the private schools seek parental opinion and advice, and often listen to it or implement suggestions, whereas this does not happen at state schools. Regardless of the school though, there is a strong emphasis on developing the individual. This results in less emphasis on team work, such that collaboration is rarely encouraged or incorporated into the course material. All of these factors combine, especially in state schools, to create a poor relationship between all the stakeholders in a school.

6.1 Strategy recommendations

The teacher and administrator participants discussed their strategies for handling students who are perceived as ready to drop out of school. Upon closer inspection of their strategies, it is clear that they lack a systematic approach to preventing dropping out. Teachers individually developed strategies based on their own experiences but complained that they lacked training for handling struggling students. The school advisor, only one per school, was made responsible for handling all struggling students to ensure they do not leave school. In addition, proactive dropout prevention is never the focus of any of these strategies. For example, the administrator only responded once a teacher brought to him a struggling student, and the advisor only responded once a teacher sent a struggling student to him. In other words, no action was performed until *after* a student was already on the verge of dropping out of school.

To remedy this situation, some strategies for preventing dropping out will be briefly discussed. These strategies are those developed in Western countries, but are also applicable to Iran. However, some changes may be necessary before they can be effectively implemented and such changes will be briefly mentioned. Four main categories of suggestions will be discussed, including: 1) increasing school attendance, 2)

motivating underachievers, 3) after-school and within-school programs, and 4) other general strategies.

6.1.1 Increasing school attendance

Most of the research literature on low school attendance, or absenteeism, has focused on its causes or its relationship to academic performance (Corvile, Rayan, & Dalicandro, 1998). Little research has been done to examine methods for improving school attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). However, three studies will be briefly mentioned that could provide inspiration for teachers and administrators in Iran.

Sturgeon and Beer (1990) examined an attempt to reduce absenteeism through rewarding high attendance with exemption from semester tests. With this policy in effect for 10 years, and no policy beforehand, the results showed a statistically significant decrease in the number of absences after the attendance reward was adopted.

Reid, Bailey-Dempsey, and Viggiani (1996) conducted a study in which girls with academic or attendance problems in junior high or high school were randomly assigned to a control group or were enrolled in one of two programs. One program offered social and educational services to the girls and their families. The other program offered financial incentives for improving school and attendance performance. There was a modest improvement in school attendance from students in both the financial incentive program and case-management program compared to students in the control group. However, similar results were not seen in the following year. Although there was no statistically significant difference in school attendance between students in the financial program and case-management program, higher academic performance was noticed for students receiving case-management services than for students receiving only financial incentives.

Another study was conducted at a large suburban high school (Miller, 2002) to investigate whether student participation in a therapeutic discipline program would improve their attitude toward attendance, increase their attendance, and provide greater insight into solving attendance problems. Students with low attendance were randomly

assigned to either the therapeutic discipline program or to a control group. Students enrolled in the therapeutic program were required to work through a biblio-therapeutic learning packet and attend a follow-up exit conference with the dean. Students in the control group were exposed to two traditional methods of improving attendance: in-school suspension where students were required to do schoolwork and threatening students with further disciplinary measures. Students in both programs also participated in a written exercise regarding ways they could help solve their truancy problems. The results from this study indicated that students enrolled in the therapeutic program experienced a number of improvements. These students had fewer absences from class and gave more insight into resolving their attendance problems than students in the control group. There was also an improvement in class attendance for students in the therapeutic program.

According to Kim and Streeter (2008), hundreds of thousands of students across the US are absent from schools each day, and more may leave class after being counted as present in the school's attendance records. Teachers, administrators, and staff need to understand the problem of school attendance from a multilevel perspective. An intervention which focuses on individual students may improve their attendance, but is unlikely to have a widespread effect on overall school attendance. Additionally, the problem of school attendance should be viewed as everyone's responsibility. In Figure 2, an effective response is described as a multileveled approach that must involve the school, the family, and the community. Such a multilevel approach is important for Iran, but requires cultural adaptation and change; since right now the family and community are disconnected from the school, in state schools.

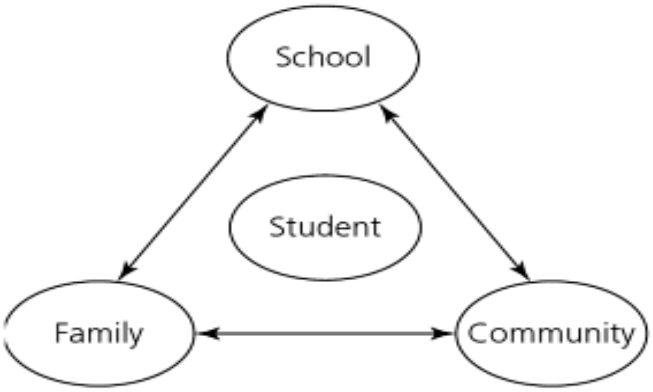

Figure 2: A Student-Centered Multilevel Approach to School Attendance (Adapted from Kim & Streeter, 2008).

Kim and Streeter (2008) mention a number of school climate factors that can result in increased truancy. Of these, several were also identified by the dropout and teacher participants including: lack of flexibility in meeting the needs of students with different cultural experiences and diverse learning styles, attitudes of teachers and administrators, and a curriculum that is perceived as boring, irrelevant, or unchallenging. To address attendance problems resulting from school factors, the school's organizational structure, culture, and curriculum all need to be changed (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

One possible solution is to create an environment where students feel invested in their learning and connected to the school. In other words, the relationships between teachers and students need to be improved. This can be accomplished by actively engaging students as part of the school community. Schools can help students feel relevant, important, and involved through seeking and seriously considering their perspectives (Fallis & Opotow, 2003).

A number of student-related factors can also influence their attendance. Some possible factors include drug and alcohol abuse, mental health problems, poor physical health, teen pregnancy and family responsibilities, student employment, and lack of understanding of the long-term consequences of school failure (Kim & Streeter, 2008). As identified by the participants, family responsibilities and student employment are two of the biggest individual factors. While North American student problems are often

anxiety, stress, or self-confidence related (Kearney, 2003; Corville-Smith et al., 1998), in Iran the problem is likely due to the economic situation of the student's family. However, academic problems such as not understanding material are also prevalent. Effective solutions for academic problems may include after-school tutoring and mentoring programs, but these problems must be affordable (accessible) to students.

For school-related strategies, schools should collaborate with families to improve school attendance, as family involvement is integral to reducing school absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Family problems can enter into classrooms, negatively affecting student attendance and academic performance. Such problems can include unsteady employment, lack of reliable transportation, divorce, and family conflicts. A study by Corville-Smith et al. (1998) compared students who attended school regularly with students who were often absent from school. The study found that absent students perceived their families as being less accepting of them, less consistent and effective in discipline, more conflicted and controlling, and ultimately less cohesive. Schools can help to connect families with appropriate social services or other resources so as to reduce family problems. As a result, this will improve student attendance and performance. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) provide a list of three effective family strategies available to school-based practitioners, including: communicate with families when students are absent, hold workshops for parents, and visit the homes of students. This requires a cultural change, or it could just be a policy change. For instance, male teachers often do not visit the home of students because this is socially inappropriate. However, women could be hired as teachers and visit the parents along with a male teacher or male administrator from the school. This would be perceived as less socially inappropriate.

6.1.2 Motivating underachievers

As a practitioner with numerous years of experience, Coil (2007) has suggested a number of strategies which teachers can implement to help motivate underachieving students. Of these strategies, the following are those most relevant and most applicable for teachers in Iran:

- Remain in contact with parents, so that there is frequent communication regarding the status of their child. This is something apparently done in Iranian private schools, but is not performed in state schools.
- Show students how success outside of school is connected to performance inside school, using actual examples of former students. One of the teacher participants suggested this is something that he prefers to do, but it would be beneficial for more teachers to do this.
- Help students to identify their strengths and encourage them to develop their strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses. Encourage students to discuss and think about success and failure, helping them to identify and address issues and fears that prevent success. Iranian teachers more commonly just punish students for academic or behavioral failures, and changing this to instead work with student may be quite beneficial.
- Work with students to identify and develop organizational and study skills. Practical and realistic examples should be used so that students can actually learn and develop such skills.
- Use different methods and settings of instruction, both in groups and individually, as is appropriate for the learning goals and outcomes. As well, use different methods for assessing student performance rather than only providing written exams.
- Collaborate with other experienced teachers to develop strategies for working with underachieving students. The teacher participants complained that they are not trained for working with such students, and thus they rely on their own experience. Hence, they could also benefit from learning from the experiences of other teachers.

There are also several strategies that Coil (2007) has suggested for parents to help motivate underachieving children:

- Emphasize what your child has learned from an activity, including what was learned from mistakes rather than solely focusing on the mistakes they made. This

is more important for an educated family, since an uneducated family may not know enough about the activity.

- Know your child's areas of interest and use these as encouragement for success in school. Sharing these areas of interest with teachers can also provide teachers with ideas on how to motivate your child.
- Discover your child's academic weaknesses and develop ways to make learning in that area fun. Irrespective of the education level of the parents, they should be able to identify strengths and weaknesses. However, uneducated parents may need to more frequently communicate with teachers or other educated individuals in order to develop ways of making learning fun.
- Encourage your child to teach a younger child. As well, find an older child or mentor to work with your child in subjects of interest or difficulty.
- Remain in contact with teachers and work with them to help your child remain motivated. This is especially important for parents who have too little education to help their child academically.

6.1.3 Within-school and out-of-school programs

A variety of programs or approaches have been developed to help reduce student drop-outs or to assist students in re-enrollment. Although these programs have primarily been developed in and for Western countries, many of them could be adapted for Iran. Four programs will be briefly discussed.

The first program is Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS), a comprehensive program for elementary-school-aged students that aims to promote social and emotional competency, reduce aggressive and disruptive behavior, and enhance the educational process (Kusche & Greenburg, 1994). This program is a multi-year curriculum of systematic lessons, instructions, and materials for teaching students: social competence, positive peer relations, interpersonal problem-solving skills, emotional literacy, and self-control. The curriculum also includes information and activities usable with parents, though the curriculum is intended for use in a school or classroom setting. Long-term studies have shown that PATHS is effective at reducing behavioral risk

factors and improving protective factors (Kam, Kusche, & Greenburg, 2004). Such a program would be beneficial for assisting students with social problems they may experience, bullying being one of them.

The second program is Family and School Together (FAST), a set of preventive and early intervention after-school programs which are meant to involve parents and the community in keeping students safe and in school (FAST, 2012). FAST is divided into five programs, each for a different age group. These programs have a number of aims, including: connecting parents and children to their schools and communities, helping parents to build personal success attributes in their children, promoting community service, preserving classroom time through school-focused and extracurricular parental involvement, building skills and positive attitudes in children through experiential learning, and keeping capable parents as the primary agents for protection of their children. This is an example of a program that tries to include families and communities in the education system.

The third type of program is home visits. These have been used in the United States for many years. Home visiting programs have the same goal of helping children through helping their parents. Most home visiting programs have trained their practitioners to interact with parents, training and encouraging them to work with their children (Gomby, Culross, & Behrman, 1999). Thus, practitioners do not directly interact with children. Parents could be helped in a direct manner, such as coaching to help them help their children with homework, and in an indirect manner, such as providing parents with emotional support or job training. As the focus of home visiting programs is on the families, practitioners try to involve both parents in the services. However, these services have traditionally worked better with mothers than with fathers. Most home visiting programs focus on prevention, as they operate under the belief it is best for families to influence children when they are young. Problematic behaviors that begin when a child is younger become very difficult to change as the child ages, whereas good behaviors that are cultivated at a young age can progress and improve throughout the child's life. Therefore, these programs aim to prevent individual problems, such as low-birthweight babies and learning delays, but also family-related problems such as unnecessary reliance

on public assistance and child abuse. Although this program is important, social stigma in Iran may make this more difficult to actually implement. However, home visiting programs could have trained practitioners who may not necessarily be teachers and who work with multiple parents and family. Elimination of social stigma could also be performed through educating the parents in the purpose of this program, the purpose of the practitioners, and make the program more universal.

The fourth program is Parents and Peers as Leaders in School (PALS), developed at the University of Illinois at Chicago by Atkins, Mckay, Abdul-Adil. It is intended to act as a mental-health service for youth that provides individualized treatment within their school setting, being both flexible and coordinated. According to Franklina et al. (2008), "the PALS model emphasizes the need for systematic assessment of child mental-health difficulties and identifies factors that contribute to these at school and in the after-school environment. The model also specifies the need to involve teachers and adult caregivers in the systematic assessment of intervention needs" (p. 81). Recipients of this service are both children and adolescents, but PALS is specifically designed for those youth who might not be involved in mental-health care due to a variety of problems. Since PALS is a school-based program, and children spend the vast majority of their time in school, it provides an excellent opportunity to reach children in out-of-home placements. Therefore, if there is an effort to provide mental-health care that is coordinated between schools and care providers, there is a greater chance that systematic and synchronized care will be provided to children in out-of-home placements. Although mental health problems could easily exist in Iran, families and schools are so uninformed and unable to collect relevant data that these problems cannot be addressed. Especially in low socio-economic regions, psychologists are not seen as positive or helpful individuals, making it far more difficult for them to provide support to others.

6.1.4 Essential strategies for reducing student attrition

Schargel and Smik (2009) suggested fifteen strategies that lie at the heart of efforts to solve the problem of student attrition. These strategies are divided into four basic but interconnected topics.

First, early invention is necessary. Most school improvement programs should begin with a comprehensive family involvement initiative. Family involvement has a direct positive effect on children's achievement, and is the most accurate predictor of success in school. Family childhood education works to provide the best possible classroom instruction from the beginning of a child's school experience. As well, programs should be included to help low-achieving students improve reading and writing skills.

Second, some basic core strategies are needed that continue the work done with early intervention. These strategies promote opportunities for bonding with adult role models and to engage in learning opportunities outside of the classroom. One strategy is service learning, which connects meaningful community-service experience with academic learning. Another is alternative schooling, which provides a potential dropout a variety of options that can lead to graduation. Mentoring is another strategy that provides a caring, supportive relationship between a mentor and mentee based on trust. Out-of-school enhancement is another possible strategy that can eliminate information loss and inspire interest in a variety of areas.

Third, no sustained and comprehensive effort to keep students in school can afford to ignore what happens in the classroom. Thus we need better teachers and an education system that increases students' motivation in the following ways. One is through professional development, where educators learn to work with youth at high risk of academic failure. Another is openness to diverse learning styles. Yet another is using instructional technologies, since technology can deliver engaging instruction and provide motivation. However, technology may be beyond the budget of most schools. Individualized learning is another possibility, with a customized program is created for each student, allowing for flexibility with the instructional program and extracurricular activities.

Lastly, no strategy to reduce student attrition will be successful in isolation of the wider community. Four strategies can help to establish a stronger connection between schools and their community. The first strategy is systemic renewal, which calls for a continuing process of evaluating the educational system. The second strategy is community

collaboration, which encourages people to support to the school, creating a caring environment where youth can thrive and achieve. The third is career education and workforce readiness, which is essential for all students to prepare them for the larger demands of today's workplace. Although a number of students may already be working, and thus understanding the value of their education with respect to work may be more valuable. Finally, the fourth is conflict resolution and violence prevention, which addresses potential violence as well as crisis management.

6.2 Closing comments

Given these problems, a number of solutions can be suggested for Iran and perhaps for countries with similar political, religious, and educational contexts. It is first necessary for these countries to look to other areas or sources for inspiration, and learn how to adjust, adapt, or accommodate those ideas for their own country. A more democratic approach would likely help with such adjustment and implementation, since feedback from all of the participants gives a vision shared among participants of how educational policy in the context studied might be more effective. In addition, a more global approach could help a country and its citizens better integrate into the global society. This integration allows citizens to take advantage of the various benefits of being part of a global society while educating them with regard to various disadvantages so they are better able to deal with those. A more democratic approach in other aspects of society at large may also be important, including and especially within the administration and culture of schools. An important step toward a more democratic approach would be to better respect minority languages in education. If only one language is accepted, but other language groups are major constituents of local and provincial populations, then it should be important to respect those other languages and have policies that can help to better include people who speak those languages in the operation schools and of the country. However, being more democratic is not sufficient to eliminate these problems. Democratic countries still experience problems of school dropouts, socio-economic inequality, class-related barriers, and so on. Becoming more democratic in approach and attitude though may help to identity problems and make it easier to effectively implement solutions.

Another solution can be to engage in curriculum reform, so that more practical and relevant courses are taught. Greater availability of library resources and laboratories can greatly improve the quality of these courses, though such inclusion may require greater investment. For Iran though, effectively addressing the problem of low teacher salary is especially important so that teachers can focus on their main job of teaching. While government involvement through greater investment is necessary, this need not be purely monetary investment nor should it be restricted to schools. Other programs to assist poor families may greatly reduce the dropout rate among boys without requiring increases to the funding of schools. Regardless of funding though, there needs to be a political will to reduce the dropout rate. Without concern for improving quality or standards of performance of students, increased investment may have no benefit towards the actual quality of the education system. Dropout issues are not specific to any one grade or course, but are an accumulation of many problems. For example, a student who drops out in grade 9 did not just have trouble in that grade but likely experienced many problems throughout multiple previous grades and courses. Thus, it is necessary to improve the motivation of students and support struggling students as early as possible in their school career.

Although this study may be very useful for comparative research in education, it does have some limitations. Aside from the limitations of a case-study approach discussed in Chapter 3, three other major limitations exist. First, the small number of participants, while acceptable for a case study, is problematic for generalization. This is especially true in the case of the administrator, as only one was interviewed. While the purpose of the study was not to gather information for generalizations, the ability to generalize from this study may be limited. Second, the purpose of this study was to focus on the East-Azerbaijan province of Iran. The demographics of this province are quite different from other provinces; therefore, a study such as mine may be limited in the ability to foster understanding of other areas of Iran and other areas of the Middle East. Again, this is a generalization problem. Third, there may be bias in the questions asked and the analysis of the responses from me due to my background. My background is from this province of Iran, in which I was born, raised, matured, and worked. As such, this background helps to develop an effective and deep understanding of the province and its context. Yet, it also

biases me against other viewpoints or interpretations, since I lack the perspective of an outsider.

The limitations of prospective arising from my background raise an issue for future research. It would be quite beneficial to have others conduct similar research in the same area of Iran, but who lack my insider perspective. Such research would aid in understanding and potentially clarifying any insider bias on my part that colour the results of this study. As well, case studies conducted by researchers from other countries, as practically difficult as this may be, would give other perspectives and potentially interesting results. In addition, other categories of stakeholders could be interviewed. For instance, ministry or government officials may provide interesting observations of the dropout problem in various parts of Iran and of Iran as a whole. These other stakeholders may also provide opinions about the degree to which and ways in which dropping out is a problem for Iran and what strategy the government may and should have, if any. Finally, another possible direction of future research would be to compare the situation of state schools with private schools, to understand their advantages and drawbacks. For instance, parents of students in private schools are kept informed of the students' progress despite this kind of connection being absent or socially-ostracized among parents of students in state schools. Hence, a deeper comparison may provide insight into whether there are strategies within the school that can be performed or whether wider social and cultural change is needed in order to improve the education situation.

Endnotes

1. Ahmed, 2001; Bouzari, 2002; Farastkhah, 2000; Farastkhah and Mokhtari, 2001, Fathi, 1985; Keddie and Matthee, 2002; Jackson, Malcom, & Thomas, 2011; Mehran, 1991, 1999; Nashat and Beck, 2003; Qasmi, 2006; Rezai-Rashti, 1977, 1989, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Rezai-Rashti and James, 2003, 2009; Rezai-Rashti and Moghadam, 2010; Rihani, 1993; Shavarini, 2005; Shavarini and Robison, 2005.

2. Ascher, 1987; Borger and Cioffi, 1970; Central Intelligence Agency, 2009; Gabler, 2010; Graber et al., 1996; Gurian, 2006; Haycock and Huang, 2001; Jordan and Cooper, 2003; Lamb et al., 2011; McCaul et al., 1992; Mariampolski, 2001; Milliken, 2007; Pytel, 2006; Richards and Megan, 2009; Sadker et al., 2009; Seetharamu and Devi, 1985; Schargel and Smink, 2001; Winch, 1964.

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Appendix A

In this appendix, additional contextually significant statistical information regarding Iran is discussed. All statistics in this appendix have been translated from a report by the Statistical Centre of Iran (2011), unless otherwise noted.

Urbanization and Rural Populations

Iran had an egregious relocation between the years 1956 to 2011. In 1956, almost 70% of Iranians were in a rural environment. However, in 2011 just a little under 30% were living in a rural environment, and the remaining 70% were urbanized. As Figure 3 shows, this represents a significant change over a short period of time in the geographical distribution of the population.

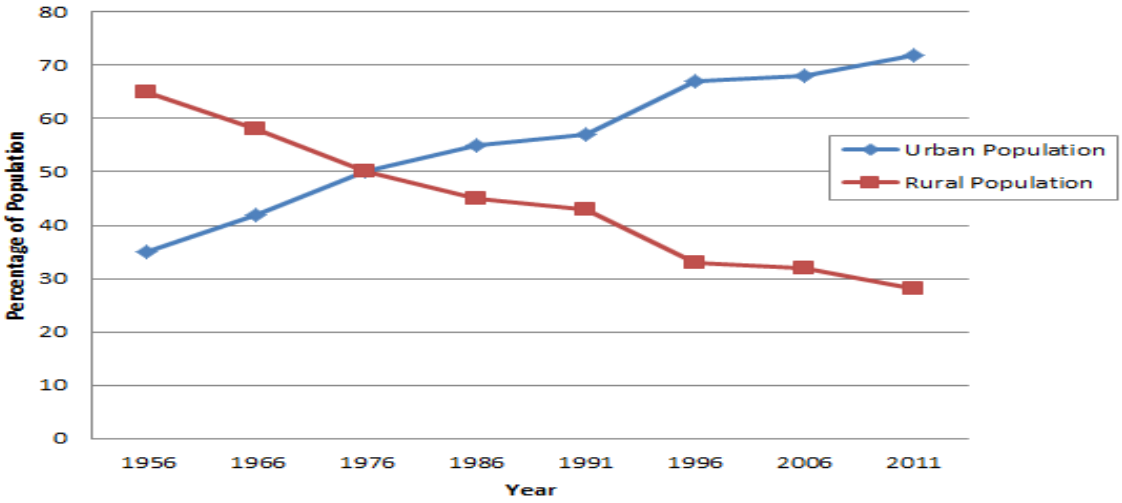

Figure 3: Population Distribution by Urban and Rural (adapted from SCI, 2011).

Age Distribution

Table 6 shows the age population by sex from 1976 to 2011. In the last 35 years, the average age of males and females increased from 22 to around 30 years old. Although the average age has increased, however, the population as a whole is still very young. Table 7 shows that the average age at which one married has increased over the same time period; the increase was about 3.5 years for females and about 2.5 for males. This age increase is

significant, especially for women. At an age of 18, a woman has just finished high school and has not started a university or college degree. However, by age 23 a woman could have graduated from a university with a Bachelor's degree. In terms of social pressures, it was more common for a woman to marry before she could finish — or even start — a university degree in 1976. By 2011 though, the average age of marriage is such that a woman could have finished or be finishing a university degree before she married.

Table 6: Average Age of Iranian Population by Sex.

Sex	1976	1986	1996	2006	2011
Male & Female	22.40	21.70	24.03	27.97	29.86
Male	22.60	21.90	24.15	27.98	29.70
Female	22.20	21.60	23.90	27.95	30.03

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Table 7: Average Age of Marriage in Iran.

Sex	1976	1986	1996	2006	2011
Male	24.10	23.80	25.60	26.20	26.70
Female	19.70	19.90	22.40	23.30	23.40

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Table 8 shows that, in 35 years, the median age increased from 17 to 27 years old. Even by 2011, however, 50% of Iranian society was under the age of 27. Table 9 shows that, after the Islamic revolution (1979), around 46% of the population was under 15 years of age. By 2011, this figure had decreased to 23.4%. However, these proportions should be compared to the total population. By 1986, the total number of people under the age of 15 was around 22.5 million people, but even by 2011 this same category accounts for around 17.5 million.

Table 8: Median Age of Iranian Population by Sex.

Sex	1976	1986	1996	2006	2011
Male & Female	17.40	17.01	19.42	24.73	27.00
Male	17.10	16.97	19.38	24.74	27.00
Female	17.70	17.04	19.45	24.72	27.00

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Table 9: Population by Age Cohort.

Year	0-14		15-64		64-over	
	Percent	Population	Percent	Population	Percent	Population
2011	23.40	17,585,022	70.90	53,281,115	5.70	4,283,532
2006	25.10	17,694,441	69.70	49,135,560	5.20	3,665,781
1996	39.50	23,721,918	56.10	33,691,129	4.30	2,642,441
1986	45.50	22,497,480	51.50	25,464,180	3.00	1,483,350
1976	44.50	15,000,391	52.00	17,528,547	3.50	1,179,806

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Table 10 shows the percentage of the Iranian population constituted by families of varying sizes. In a family of size 1, there is only a single individual and the proportion of the population accounted for by such single-person families has increased slightly from 2006 to 2011. In a family of size 2, there is a couple but no children. This rate has also slightly increased in the same time period. Families of size 3 and 4 include 1 or 2 children, respectively, and this amount has increased as well. Families of size 5 or more are those with 3 or more children. The percentage of the population accounted for by families of this size has decreased more than the proportion of the population accounted for by smaller families during the same time period. From this one can see that the percentage of smaller families, with 0 to 2 children, is increasing while the percentage of larger families is decreasing.

Table 10: Percentage of Population by Family Size.

Person / Year	1	2	3	4	5-more	Total
2011	7.20	18.40	27.10	26.30	21.00	100
2006	5.20	15.30	22.90	24.40	32.20	100

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Education

According to Table 11, the percentage of female students has increased from 35% in 1968 to 48% in 2011, while male students faced quite a different situation with their percentage decreasing from 65% in 1968 to 52% in 2011.

Table 11: Number of Students Based on the Educational Levels in Iran.

Students / Year & Sex		Pre-Elementary	Elementary School	Secondary School	High School	Total	Per cent	
							High school	Based on Sex
2007	Male	247,983	2,952,075	1,967,906	1,838,567	7,006,531	26.2	51.84
	Female	263,246	2,773,554	1,740,364	1,731,272	6,508,436	26.6	48.16
2008	Male	219,653	2,912,264	1,833,240	1,832,405	6,797,562	26.9	51.89
	Female	236,191	2,742,705	1,644,404	1,677,775	6,301,075	26.6	48.11
2009	Male	221,844	2,878,290	1,733,942	1,713,585	6,547,661	26.2	51.89
	Female	230,414	2,713,462	1,558,304	1,546,074	6,048,254	25.6	48.11
2010	Male	225,305	2,898,799	1,705,332	1,601,595	6,431,031	24.9	51.94
	Female	239,148	2,734,026	1,539,569	1,437,252	5,949,995	24.1	48.06
2011	Male	232,630	2,932,282	1,693,270	1,567,691	6,425,873	24.4	51.97
	Female	242,765	2,769,239	1,535,135	1,389,637	5,936,776	23.4	48.02

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Table 13 reveals that, in the years 1997 to 2011, the number of males dropping out of school was almost always higher than females. Additionally, Table 12 illustrates that this difference was noticeably higher in the secondary level. From 2007 to 2011, there were many more males dropping out of secondary school than females.

Table 12: Change in the Number of Students from Previous Year in Iran.

		Pre-Elementary	Elementary School	Secondary School	High School
2007	Male	-20,366	-57,486	-132,988	-52,000
	Female	-21,337	-44,736	-97,403	-74,108
2008	Male	-28,330	-39,811	-134,666	-6,162
	Female	-27,055	-30,849	-95,960	-53,497
2009	Male	+2,191	-33,974	-99,298	-118,820
	Female	-5,777	-29,243	-86,100	-131,701
2010	Male	+3,461	+20,509	-28,610	-111,990
	Female	+8,734	+20,564	-18,735	+108,822
2011	Male	+7,325	+33,483	-12,062	-33,404
	Female	+3,617	+35,213	-4,434	-47,615

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Table 13: Number of Students Dropping Out of School by Sex in Iran.

Year	Male	Female
1997	-38,253	66,327
1998	-25,101	-3,115
1999	-230,116	-151,578
2000	-221,424	-152,483
2001	-328,081	-237,076
2002	-368,799	-285,617
2003	-306,612	-237,062
2004	-412,084	-328,128
2005	-213,844	-172,879
2006	-233,735	-206,970
2007	-262,840	-237,584
2008	-208,969	-207,361
2009	-249,901	-252,821
2010	-116,630	-98,259
2011	-5,158	-13,219

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Two points from Table 14 should be mentioned. First, the number of males who dropped out of school between 2007 and 2011 was consistently higher than the number of females. Second, the percentage of female students has slightly increased over the same time period. Thus, while there are females who are dropping out of school, this number and associated proportion are lower than for males.

Table 14: Number of Students by Sex in the East-Azerbaijan Province (2007-2011).

Year	Number of Students			Percentage		Decrease			
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Year	Total	Male	Female
2007	359,924	326,429	686,353	52.44	47.56				
2008	347,301	316,483	663,784	52.32	47.68	2007-8	22,569	12,623	9,946
2009	330,768	305,325	636,093	52.00	48.00	2008-9	27,691	16,533	11,158
2010	322,717	300,049	622,766	51.82	48.18	2009-10	13,327	8,051	5,276
2011	320,833	298,536	619,369	51.80	48.20	2010-11	3,397	1,884	1,513

These statistics are from the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI, 2011).

Table 15: Youth Unemployment by Education Level (Percentage).

Education Level	1997		2007	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Read-Write	14.1	7.3	17.4	6.6
Primary	14.8	6.3	15.1	8.2
Middle School	16.8	21.2	18.0	30.7
High School	29.5	40.9	23.1	50.7
College	18.2	18.5	22.4	52.6
Total	18.0	16.6	18.7	37.9

Note: To compare college with other education levels, youth in this table are defined as 20-29 years old.

Source: Author's calculations from Household Expenditure and Income Surveys (HEIS) data files (see Salehi-Isfahani, 2010).

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