



**ASSESSING THE CAUSES OF STUDENT DROPOUT IN
MY'AYNI REFUGEE PRIMARY SCHOOL, TIGRAY,
ETHIOPIA**

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1.1 Introduction.

Today, there are 16.1 million refugees worldwide under UNHCR's mandate. More than half are children, and six million are of primary and secondary school-going age. The average length of time a refugee spends in exile is about 20 years. Twenty years is more than an entire childhood, and represents a significant portion of a person's productive working years. Given this sobering picture, it is critical that we think beyond a refugee's basic survival. Refugees have skills, ideas, hopes and dreams. They face huge risks and challenges, but – as we saw exemplified in the inspiring achievements of the Refugee Olympic Team – they are also tough, resilient and creative, with the energy and drive to shape their own destinies, if given the chance. Making sure that refugees have access to education is at the heart of UNHCR's mandate to protect the world's rapidly increasing refugee population, and central to its mission of finding long-term solutions to refugee crises. However, as the number of people forcibly displaced by conflict and violence rises, demand for education naturally grows and the resources in the countries that shelter them are stretched ever thinner.

Of the six million primary and secondary school-age refugees under UNHCR's mandate, 3.7 million have no school to go to. Refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than non-refugee children. Only 50 per cent have access to primary education, compared with a global level of more than 90 per cent. And as they get older, the gap becomes a chasm: 84 per cent of non-refugee adolescents attend lower secondary school, but only 22 per cent of refugee adolescents have that same opportunity. At the higher education level, just one per cent of refugees attend university compared to 34 per cent globally.

As per UNHCR Ethiopia's Refugee Education data analysis, only 52% (179,597 of the 344,330) school-age children have access to school. Some 99,449 (53%) of 187, 397 of primary school-age

children are not in primary school and only 47 per cent of refugee children have access to primary education, compared with a national average of more than 90 per cent. Only 5438 (10%) of 56,969 secondary school-age children/youth have secondary education in Ethiopia, compared to national average of 29% and just about 0.2% (1700) of refugees attend university education. 56 % (55,566 of 99,964) preschool children have access to school compared to national average of 50%.

Ethiopia hosts more than 25 refugee camps, home to approximately 801,079 refugees from neighboring Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan (UNHCR, January 2016). Out of the 25 refugee camps, four camps namely Shimelba, My-Ayni, Adi Harush, and Hitsats camps (in order of establishment) are located in Tigray Region. According to data obtained from UNHCR, these camps accommodate over 30,000 Eritrean refugees in 2017. The Shimelba refugee camp opened in 2001 following the Ethio – Eritrea border that lasted for two years (1998 – 2000); and My Ayni refugee camp in 2008 when the former camp reached its full capacity.

As of January 2017, My-Ayni refugee camp is host to 10,016 Eritrean refugees where children below the age of 18 constitute 45% of the total refugee population (Ethiopia population update as of 31 January 2017, UNHCR). The refugee camp mainly accommodates young single male including unaccompanied minors. The high number of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) arriving in northern Ethiopia has increased exponentially in recent years. Currently, there are approximately 1,200 children aged between 7 and 18+, 25% female, living in group care in My' Ayni camp. School age children including the UASC living in the camp have access to basic social services including education, medical assistance, psychosocial support services, recreational activities etc provided by the Ethiopian Government Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and other non-governmental organizations with support from the UN refugee agency, UNHCR and other donors.

The majority of children fall within the primary school age and tend to initially enroll in the primary school located in the camp. However, their attendance in school becomes less regular which eventually leads to dropout. The high dropout rate of refugee children has become a major concern to agencies providing protection assistance and more widely to the humanitarian community.

Given the significant number of primary school age children in My'Ayni camp enrolling in primary school and given the high dropout rate reported at the end of each academic year, it has become a protection concern to implementing agencies. This study therefore attempts to identify the main causes of students' high dropout in Mai-Ayni primary school and come up with possible recommendations to reduce the dropout rate among primary school students.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The UN universal declaration of the human rights adapted by the united nation in 1948 article 26 articulates that “everyone has the right to education. Education should be free at least in the elementary and fundamental Stages of Elementary education shall be compulsory (UN resolution 217-iii)”. This postulates the principles that beyond the role it plays for development, education is a basic right, an end in itself. To this effect, primary education is defined as a means for development. A conference on education for all (EFA) was held in Jomotien, Thailand in 1990 under the joint sponsorship of UNIECF, UNDP & Word Bank (1995). In this conferences, as Lock and Verspoor (1990) and World Bank (1995) indicated population growth, high dropout and repetition rates and resource constraints were among the major reasons for the failure to provide the right to primary education for all eligible age groups especially in developing countries.

As per the UNCRC, Article 28: All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this right. Discipline in schools should respect children’s dignity. For children to benefit from education, schools must be run in an orderly way – without the use of violence. Any form of school discipline should take into account the child’s human dignity. Therefore, governments must ensure that school administrators review their discipline policies and eliminate any discipline practices involving physical or mental violence, abuse or neglect. The Convention places a high value on education. Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.

In displacement settings however, access to education is limited for refugee children and they are the most affected when it comes to retention and completion of school due to the challenges, risks they face and unmet needs. The below data obtained from the My’Ayni primary school shows a significant number of children dropping out of school in which this study is designed to identify the main causes and factors contributing to this high student dropout.

Table 1.1: Enrolment, retention and dropout figures

Academic Year	Enrolment			Retention			Dropouts			Percentage
	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	Girls	Boys	Total	
2011/12	554	1302	1856	435	1091	1544	101	211	312	17%
2012/13	611	1369	1980	512	1177	1689	99	192	291	15%
2013/14	533	1178	1711	416	913	1329	117	265	382	22%
2014/15	572	1047	1619	463	904	1367	109	143	252	16%
2015/16	696	1377	2073	530	976	1506	166	401	567	27%

Source: My’ Ayni primary school data, handover note July 2016, IRC

As per the data from the above table, it has been noted that at the beginning of each academic year, high number of children register in school. However, from time to time the school attendance was observed to decline and as a result reported a high dropout rate at the end of the academic year. A desk review has been done to see the trends in enrolment, dropout and retention of students in my' Ayni primary school for the last five years (2011/12 to 2015/16). In the 2016/17 academic year, the dropout rate was, for example, reported to be as high as 40% at the end of the first semester session alone which is alarming. This study is therefore designed with the aim of assessing the main causes for this high student dropout and to suggest possible strategies to address the problem.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 Major objective of the study

In Ethiopia, several studies have been conducted to identify the causes for school dropout. However, no study has been carried out to find out the causes for school dropouts in a refugee camp setting in Ethiopia and therefore this study will help to identify the gaps in research which this study is planning to fill.

1.3.1.1 General objective of the study

- To examine the economic, household, cultural and educational characteristics associated with student's dropout in the primary school.

1.3.1.2 Specific objectives of the study

- To determine the main causes (socio-cultural, economic and educational) for the high dropout rate in My' Ayni refugee primary school and draw conclusions on key factors.
- To assess the role of stakeholders in contributing to the reduction of student dropout.

- To provide recommendations that can help to minimize the high dropout rate among primary school students in the study area.

1.4 Research Questions

The study will explore three interlinked research questions

- What are the main causes for student dropout in the My’Ayni Primary School?
- What role do stakeholders play to reduce students’ dropout of school?
- What can be done to mitigate against dropping out?

1.5 Significance of the study

The education implementing agency and UNHCR have identified the My’Ayni primary school as one of the schools in which high school dropout rate is reported among refugee school age children. The outcome of this study is expected to generate useful information on the main causes and factors contributing to school dropout and the measures to be taken to mitigate the problem. Moreover, the finding of this study will also be essential for policy makers and other organizations that are interested in making decision and formulating strategies regarding the measures to be taken in reducing dropout rates. The study will also suggest for further research in the area.

1.6 Scope and Limitation of the study

1.6.1 Scope of the study

The study will be conducted in one of the four refugee camps hosting Eritrean refugees in Western zone of Tigray. Given the demography of refugees in those camps, the study findings can be used to inform the decisions to be made by concerned bodies to mitigate the problem of school dropouts in the primary schools in the refugee camp.

1.6.2 Limitation of the study

The limitation of the study may be challenges related to tracing and locating children who dropped out from school. Moreover, given the distance to the refugee camp time and financial resource shortage will be the limitation that may affect the process of research.

1.7 Universe of the Study

The study will focus in the My'Ayni refugee primary school and target its students and teachers. Currently, there are 2625 students of grades 1-8 attending primary school in the camp. For The study, however, students from upper primary grades of 5-8 will be targeted. 10% of the 947 students will be randomly selected to participate in the study. There are also 42 primary school teachers and all the teachers will participate in the study. The school enrollment in the 2015/16 academic year was 2073 (696 girls and 1377 boys). Out of initially enrolled 2073 primary school children, only 1506 (530 girls and 976 boys) were retained by the end of the academic year with a reported dropout rate of 27%. This study will look at the trends in enrolment, retention and dropout

1.8 Sample

In order to collect sufficient and relevant data for the study, the My'Ayni primary refugee school which has the highest dropout rate among the other refugee primary schools for the Eritreans is selected for the study purposely. The sample for the study will be students from grades 5-8 and will be selected using simple random sampling technique. Using simple random sampling technique, an adequate representative sample of students attending grades 5-8 and all teachers will be selected for this study. In addition, head and vice head teachers, education officers of the implementing agency responsible for primary school and members of PTA will be targets for the study.

1.9 Tools for data collection

Besides to the secondary data, the study will also employ a variety of data collection tools such as questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and key informant interview (KIIs) guides. Based on the research questions, close and open ended questions, focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interview guides will be used to collect relevant information for the study. The questionnaire will be the most appropriate means to involve large sample population to collect the necessary information within a given time frame. Thus, questionnaire will be prepared for students, teachers and school directors and vice directors which will contain three parts. The first part will be used to collect information about personal characteristics of the respondents while the second part is intended to secure information regarding the causes for dropout of students from the study school. The third part is intended to secure information regarding the measures to be taken to reduce dropouts. The research tools will be translated into local language (Tigrigna) and pilot tested to ensure the questions are clear and appropriate to the level of the study targets.

Once data collection is complete, the completed questionnaire, FGD and KII guides, will be validated, sorted and summarized to be able to draw conclusions for the study.

1.10 Tables

Tables will be used to present relevant statistical calculations including percentage, mean, median, standard deviation, co-relation etc. Tables will have proper numbers followed by table title conveying the matter contained in the table clearly.

1.11. Chapter plan

The study will have five chapters in which the first chapter will be an introduction to the subject matter of the study. The second chapter will be on literature review related to the study. The third

chapter will focus on research design and methodology. The fourth chapter will be presentation and data analysis while the fifth chapter will focus on findings, conclusions and recommendation.

References

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