

Student Dropout in an Ethiopian Police University College Peacekeeping Language Center

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Abstract

This study investigated the reasons why learners drop out of the Ethiopian Police University College Peacekeeping Language Center. The data for this research was generated through questionnaires and interviews to collect the opinions of language center teachers, learners, and former learners. The results show that learners mainly drop out because of pressure from their working places. Learners said they would drop out less if they could learn the whole day, or off duty.

Introduction

Background of the Study

The Peacekeeping English Project (PEP) is funded by the UK government and managed by the British Council on its behalf. The project provides assistance in English language training to stakeholders in different countries. The PEP in Ethiopia is working with the Ethiopian Ministry of National Defense (EMOND), the Ethiopian Federal Police Commission (EFPC) and regional police commissions.

As the result of work by the EFPC, the peacekeeping English language teaching center was opened in October 2013 after a memorandum of understanding was signed between EFPC and the government of the UK. The center runs two kinds of classes: regular classes and the evening classes. The regular classes are conducted in two shifts, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The morning shift starts at 09:00 a.m. and finishes at noon. The afternoon shift starts at 13:00 and it finishes at 16:30. The center basically provides two language courses: English for the military, and English for law enforcement. The courses are given across three different levels.

English for the military, as the name indicates, is a course designed for military personnel and comes with course books for each level. English for law enforcement is suitable for law enforcers from a wide range of different backgrounds, including the police, border guards, customs officials and security personnel. Unlike English for the military, English for law enforcement has only one course book to be used across all three levels. Overall, these two courses take about sixteen weeks if they run without interruption for half a day every day. Learners dropping out is one of the biggest challenges the language center is currently facing. The purpose of this case study is to find out why learners drop out and answer the research

question “*What changes could reduce dropout rates?*” along with the following research sub-questions:

1. Will learners drop out much less if the language setting is changed?
2. Will learners drop out much less if learners learn the whole day?
3. Will learners drop out much less if the teachers’ qualification are improved or advanced?
4. Will learners drop out much less if they know that they will be deployed after completing lessons in the language center?
5. Will learners drop out much less if the material in the language center is improved?
6. Will learners drop out much less if lessons given in the language center are relevant and important to their professional and personal development?

The purpose of the study was to find out why learners drop out of the Ethiopian Police University College Peacekeeping Language Center. The research provides recommendations for the Federal Police Commission to reduce dropouts and help the success of the language center.

Review of Related Literature

Reasons Why Learners Drop Out

Learners drop out for different reasons. Mindy Crain-Dorough (2003) points out that dropout occurs because of factors which learners cannot control. According to Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) and Johnston and Rivera (1965) cited in Park and Choi (2009), lack of organizational supports, financial problems, and time constraints have been known to be crucial obstacles to adults’ participation in learning because adult learners are associated with various roles in their lives. So, the reasons for our learners dropping out could be pressure from their workplace or the reason for dropout could be other external factors.

Park and Choi (2009) indicate that some learners drop out of a course even before they start because of external reasons. External factors include organizational supports, financial problems, and time constraints. In addition, external factors and internal factors (which are factors within learners' control) are likely to interact with each other. For example, one of the major issues in most adult education courses according to Pelikanova, Gabriel and Joel (2009) is the problem of students fitting in their courses with many other demands on their limited time and resources such as children, work, leisure, and financial restraints. Even the most interested students may find unexpected problems that interfere with the completion of a course. The reality is that once a student starts to miss classes, the motivation to continue quickly falls.

When learners do drop out, it leads to financial costs. According to Pelikanova, Gabriel, and Joel (2009), high dropout rates are extremely costly to language schools, colleges, and course managers in planning and resource management. In addition, students suffer financially and educationally by not achieving positive results. Student dropout is also detrimental to teachers as they see their planning and preparation being rejected. Nothing is more demoralizing for a teacher than to see half of his students not completing his course (Pelikanova, Gabriel, & Joel 2009).

Park and Choi (2009) offer two theories to explain why students leave a course. The first one is the student integration model, in which persistence is related to the match of students' motivation and academic ability to the institution's academic and social characteristics. This match affects a person's commitment to the institution and to completing their studies. The second theory predicts students' persistence based on their intentions, which are shaped by beliefs and attitudes.

According to Rumberger (2011), there are two different perspectives for understanding the phenomenon of student dropout. One framework is based on an individual perspective that focuses on individual factors associated with dropping out; the other is based on an institutional perspective that focuses on the contextual factors found in students' families, schools, communities and peers. Both frameworks are useful and necessary to understand this complex phenomenon.

A framework was developed by two groups of authors which explains that students who drop out can be *pushed out*, *pulled out*, or they can *fall out* of school. According to Doll, Eslami, and Walters (2013), pressures on students can be push and pull factors and may lead students to drop out. Students are pushed out when adverse situations in the school force them to drop out. These adverse situations may include tests, attendance, and discipline policies. On the other hand, students are pulled out when a factor inside the students diverts them from completing school. Financial worries, out of school employment, and family issues are some possible factors that can pull a student out. Jordan et al. (1994) added a third factor called falling out of school, which occurs when a student drops out because he or she is discouraged after not showing significant academic progress.

Strategies for Preventing Dropout

To avoid dropout, we should focus on making learning relevant, raising the academic bar and rethinking schedules. Roberta Furger (2008) mentions learners may drop out if they are bored and see no connection between academic life and real life. If learning is relevant, learners may not drop out because they will be engaged. Lessons and materials that are below learners' expectations could also be reasons for learners' dropping out. As a result, we should ensure that lessons meet the learners' expectations and language proficiency level. Finally, some learners

could face problems with school schedules because of the demands of a job or family responsibilities, so we may be able to reduce dropout rates by arranging school schedules that meet students' needs.

On the other hand, Rumberger (2011) has three additional suggestions to prevent learners from dropping out. He starts by saying that dropping out is influenced by both individual and institutional factors, so intervention strategies can focus on either or both sets of factors. Rumberger (2011) adds that because dropping out is associated with both academic and social problems, effective prevention strategies must focus on both arenas. That is, if dropout prevention strategies are going to be effective, they must be comprehensive by providing resources and supports in all areas of students' lives. And because dropouts leave for a variety of reasons, services provided them must be flexible and tailored to their individual needs.

Methods

This case study deals with the phenomenon of learner dropout. Therefore, a questionnaire and an interview were prepared for three groups of research participants: learners who were learning at the time the research was conducted, students who dropped out, and teachers from the language center. The questionnaires and the interview questions tried to find out whether or not materials used by the language center, the setting of the language center, teachers' qualifications, relevance of the curriculum for learners' personal and professional development, learners' possibility of being deployed to peacekeeping, and pressure from the workplace were reasons for learners to drop out. The questionnaire and interview questions are available in Appendix A and B.

Participants

The two student groups referenced in this study are the students studying at the language center (SLC) and students who have dropped from the language center (SDC). The questionnaires were given to students who were learning at the time of the research, and students who dropped out of the language center. At the time of the survey, 60 students were currently learning in the language center (SLC). Of these, 10 were surveyed, a sample of 17%. The sample included four women and six men, all over 35 years old. There were 17 students who had previously dropped out from the language center (SDC), and ten of these were selected to take part in the survey. The sample represented about 59% of SDC. Most of them were over 35 years old and three of them were women. Both SLC and SDC were selected randomly.

Interviews were conducted with teachers at the language center (TLC). All three of the language center teachers were interviewed, and all three were between 30 and 45 years of age.

Procedure

Ten questions were prepared for the questionnaire. From these, one was open-ended and the remaining questions were multiple-choice questions. The survey questions are provided in Appendix A. The questionnaires were distributed on paper to answer during class. All dispatched questionnaires were completed and returned. Both SLC and SDC were not asked to identify themselves except providing information which was important to the research.

The TLC were asked three interview questions. They were asked about their willingness to participate in the survey, and they were happy to help. The interviews conducted with TLC lasted for about five minutes each. The interview questions are provided in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Questionnaires for SLC and SDC were analyzed by tallying each multiple-choice response. Answers to the final open-ended question were collected in a list, and recurring themes were noted. Answers from the questionnaires can be found in Appendices A and B.

TLC interviews were recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted. Findings and recommendations were drawn from the interpreted data. The transcribed data was interpreted and analyzed with literature. Transcriptions of the TLC interviews are attached in Appendix B.

Results

Findings

Questionnaires.

The first part of the questionnaire asked SLC to confirm they were learning, and the respondents confirmed it. SDC were asked to confirm that they had dropped out, and they confirmed it. A summary of student responses to questions 3-9 can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Responses to Questionnaire

No.	Questions	Responses of SLC			Responses of SDC		
		yes	no	n/a	yes	no	n/a
3	Pressure from working place is a reason for dropping out.	30%	0%	70%	50%	0%	50%
4	If I learn off duty or the whole day, I may not drop out.	50%	0%	50%	50%	0%	50%
5	The lessons of the language center were relevant and important for personal and professional development.	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%
6	The language center teachers	90%	10%	0%	100%	0%	0%

No.	Questions	Responses of SLC			Responses of SDC		
		yes	no	n/a	yes	no	n/a
	were qualified and helpful for development of English language skills.						
7	The language center setting was a reason for dropping out.	10%	90%	0%	10%	90%	0%
8	Teaching materials were very good and motivating.	90%	10%	0%	100%	0%	0%
9	Being not deployed in peace keeping mission after completion of lesson in the language center was a reason for dropping out	10%	90%	0%	0%	100%	0%

Question 10 was an open-ended question which asked, “What else would you like to add about reasons which lead learners to drop out from the language center teaching programme?”

The following were answers given by respondents:

- Pressure from office, difficulty of the lesson, and the language is a foreign language
- Pressure from work, lack of motivation
- Pressure from office and learning while working
- Pressure from office, lack of support from the commission and they knew that they may not participate in a peacekeeping mission
- Learning time is uncomfortable for learners
- The lesson is difficult and they have not time to study
- The lesson is very difficult to them
- Mostly because of repetitive meetings
- They learn half a day and work half a day. As a result, they are under pressure from the office so they drop out.

- There are different urgent duties in the commission and learners miss classes for personal reasons.

Interview for the language center teachers.

All three teachers in the center (TLC) were interviewed, and they were named Teacher One, Teacher Two and Teacher Three. The first question they were asked was about the complaints they heard from the learners. Teacher One said learners complain about workloads in their office and lack of time for studying and work pressure from the office. Teacher Two said learners complain about not separating work and learning, and Teacher Three said learners complain about lack of time for learning and pressure in their office.

The second question asked, “Why do you think learners drop out?” Teacher One said students are very busy at work, so it is difficult for them to continue learning while also working in the office, so students dropped out from the center. Teacher Two said job pressure is a significant reason. Teacher Three said the main reason is related to the learner’s job, since they learn while on duty. It is inconvenient for them so that is why they drop out.

The last question the three teachers were asked was “What do you think a solution will be for learners’ dropout?” Teacher One said the only solution would be to make students free from work while they take the language course, since in that case they will be able to invest their full time in learning. Teacher Two responded that fulfilling learners’ expectations and appropriate attendance control could help reduce dropouts. Teacher Three said the solution is to get learners to attend full day classes so they may find it easy to attend the class. At least the organization needs to require them to attend class regularly.

Discussion

SLC and SDC were asked about whether or not pressure from the workplace is their reason for dropping out. SLC and SDC confirmed that pressure from the workplace is a reason for dropping out. Park and Choi (2009) said learners may drop out because of external factors, including pressure from their workplace. According to Rumberger (2011), learners drop out as the result of an institutional perspective that focuses on the contextual factors found in students, families, schools, communities and peers. Based on the responses of SLC and SDC, learners drop out because of pressure from their office or working place. This was the main finding of the questionnaire, and helps answer the main research question: “What changes could reduce dropout rates?” If pressure from work is the main reason given by learners for dropping out, the solution should be to reduce pressure from work. This was not a predicted result, so it does not appear in the research sub-questions.

The next question posed to SLC and SDC asks if learning off duty or the whole day would cause them not to drop out. The majority of SLC and SDC confirmed that they may not drop out if they learned off duty or the whole day. Therefore, not learning the whole day or off duty appears to be a reason for learners to drop out (see research sub-question 2). It may be best to change the schedule of the learning center. Roberta Furger (2008) also talks about rethinking schedules of classes to solve the problem of learner dropout.

The next question provided for SLC and SDC was about the relevance and importance of lessons of the language center for personal and professional development. SLC and SDC responded saying the lessons given in the language center were very important and relevant for their personal and professional development. From this we can get an answer for sub-question 6:

“Will learners drop out much less if lessons given in the language center are relevant and important to their professional and personal development?” It seems that learners’ decisions to drop out are not related to the relevance of lessons to their development.

Roberta Furger (2008) also indicates boredom and disengagement as two key reasons students stop attending class and eventually drop out of school. SLC and SDC said the teachers were helpful and qualified. From this it is possible to confirm that teachers’ qualification and willingness to help learners develop their English skills were not the primary reason for learners’ dropping out, providing an answer to sub-question 3: “Will learners drop out much less if the teachers’ qualifications are improved or advanced?” A change in teacher qualifications would be unlikely to make a difference in dropout rates.

The majority of SLC and SDC responded saying that the language center setting was not the reason for learners dropping out, so this answers research sub-question 1. The language center setting appears not to be a reason for learners dropping out.

SLC and SDC also confirmed that teaching materials were very good and motivating to learn and the teaching materials were not a reason for learners dropping out. Thus, research sub-question 5—“Will learners’ drop out much less if the material in the language center improved?”— may also be answered. This factor appears not to be the reason that learners drop out.

The last question presented for SLC and SDC was about not being deployed on a peacekeeping mission after the completion of lessons in the language center. The SCL and SDC responded by saying that not being deployed was not a reason for learners’ dropping out. Thus, research sub-question 4 is answered in the negative. This factor would also be unlikely to reduce dropout rates.

In the open-ended question, SLC and SDC confirmed that learners drop out because of pressure from their office or workplace, and learners would drop out less if the class took place when they were off duty, or the whole day. SLC and SDC had similar responses for all the questions and there was no significant difference in their responses.

The second part of the interpretation deals with interview questions of the language center teachers. The teachers were asked three questions from which the first question asked what the complaints they hear from the learners were. TLC said that learners complained about workload and pressure from their office. This response indicates that workplace pressure was a pulling factor as mentioned by Doll, Eslami, & Walters (2013).

The second question asked TLC to tell why learners were dropping out. The responses indicated that learners drop out because of work pressure and because they learn half a day. This showed that learners need to get ample time to learn and the language center needs to rethink its schedules as Roberta Furger (2008) advises.

In the third question, TLC were asked about possible solutions for dropping out. TLC suggested learners need to learn the whole day or off duty, proper attention was needed from the police commission, and appropriate attendance control was needed. Generally, the response of TLC showed that institutional intervention is important to solve the problem of learners dropping out, as it was indicated by Rumberger (2011).

Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to find out why learners drop out and answer the research question: “What changes could reduce dropout rates?” Based on the student questionnaires and teacher interviews, the following overall findings were identified:

1. Learners drop out because of pressure from their workplace. Learners are expected to fulfill their office duty and they are not given enough time to learn and to study. This is clearly indicated in the above interpretation of the responses of students who were learning during the research time, students who dropped out of the language center, and teachers of the language center. Jordan et al. (1994) confirm that learners could be pulled out of the course as the result of external pressures.
2. Learners would drop out less if they learned the whole day, or off duty. Most of the learners have other pressures from their workplace while they are learning, and they are forced to drop out as a result. This agrees with Furger's (2008) suggestion that uncomfortable and inappropriate learning schedules could be a reason for learners dropping out.

The recommendations drawn out from the findings are the following:

1. As shown in the findings, many learners drop out because of pressure in their office. Therefore, the Federal Police Commission needs to make learners free of some duties and give them ample time to learn and study.
2. Most learners said they would not drop out if they learned the whole day, or off duty. Therefore, as much as possible, the Federal Police Commission needs to look at ways to allow whole day or off duty class schedules. The Commission has to make learners free from unscheduled meetings or find ways that learners can participate in the meeting but not miss the class.
3. Finally, the police commission should give proper attention to the language center, and, as a result, the language center can solve some of its problems.

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Appendix A

Questionnaires and Answers

Questionnaires for learners who are learning in the Federal Police University College Peacekeeping Language Center (SLC). The number of participants giving each response is indicated in parentheses.

INTRODUCTION/CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Hello, my name is **Geremew Garda** and I work for federal police university college peace keeping language center as Instructor. I am conducting research on students who have dropped out from peace keeping English language center. All the questions I ask you will be confidential and no responses will be reported. The results of this survey will help the language center and students who will join the language center in the future. If any question makes you feel uncomfortable or you would prefer not to answer, you may skip it. If you don't understand the question or do not know how to answer, that is ok and you can skip to the next question. You may also stop the survey at any time. Thank you for your cooperation in advance.

1. Are you learning in federal police university college language center?
A.Yes(10)B.No(0)
2. If your answer is yes for the above question, do you think you can complete the level you are learning now?
A.Yes(8)B.N C. I am not sure (2)
3. If your answer for the above question is B or C the following could be reason for that
A. The lesson is difficult think so, I do not I will finish
B. The lesson is not interesting so, I do not think I will finish
C. Because of pressure from my workplace, I do not think I will finish(3)
7 say nothing
4. Which one is true for you? I will not drop out if,.....
A. I learn half a day(5)
B. I learn the whole day(5)
C. I learn off duty
D. B and C
5. The lesson given in the language center is....
A. Not important and relevant for my carrier and personal development
B. It is important for my carrier and personal development(10)
6. The teachers in the center are....
A. Well trained and help learners to develop their language skills(9)
B. Not well trained and not helpful for learners to develop their language(1)
7. If the language center setting is not improved...
A. I will drop out
B. I will not drop out
8. The language center teaching materials are...
A. Very good and motivating for learning(9)
B. Not good and not motivating for learning
Isaid needs to be more attractive
9. Will you drop out if you know you will not be deployed in peace keeping mission

- D. For another issues(3)
3 did not say anything
4. I would not dropped out if:
- A. I learned half a day
 - B. I learned the whole day(4)
 - C. learned off duty
 - D. B and C(1)
- 5 did not say anything
5. The lesson given in the language center was :
- A. Important and relevant for my carrier and personal development
 - B. Not Important and relevant for my carrier and personal development(10)
6. The teachers in the language center were:
- A. Well trained and help learners to develop their language skills(10)
 - B. Not well trained and do not help learners to develop their language skills
7. I dropped out because the language center setting:
- A. Was not comfortable for learning(1)
 - B. For some other reasons(9)
8. The language center teaching materials were:
- A. Very good and motivating for learning(10)
 - B. Not good and not motivating for learning
9. You would have dropped out if you knew you would not deployed in peace keeping mission
- A. No
 - B. Yes(10)
10. What else do you like to add about reasons which leads learners to dropout from the language center teaching programme
- The following are the responses from ten respondents

1. Pressure from office and they would not have dropped out if they learn off duty
2. Pressure from office and they would not have dropped out if they learn off duty
3. Pressure from work and long meetings
4. Pressure from office
5. Pressure from work and personal reasons
6. Personal issues
7. Pressure from office and personal issues
8. Pressure from office, the training is interrupted for different reasons and learners miss classes for personal reasons
9. Pressure from office

Appendix B

Interview Questions, Responses, and Transcriptions

Thank you for volunteering for the interview. I will ask you some question concerning students who dropped out from our language center and about students who are currently learning in the language center.

1. What are the complaints you hear from the learners
2. Why do you think learners dropout?
3. What do you think will be solution for learners' dropout?

We have four teachers in the language center including me for the time being so I forwarded these questions for the teachers in the language center. I named them saying teacher one, teacher two and teacher three.

Teacher one

- 1) What are the complaints you hear from the learners:

Well the most commonly said complaint about from the part of the students or from the learners is that you know are not happy about the fact that they are learning here the same time while working after class and that is the most serious issue they have so far and you know it seems to be creating a problem on their performance at the end of the day at the of the course so students are always complaining about workloads at their office and the fact that they are unable to study and practice the language and that this thing is creating on their performance specially on exams at the end of the course.

- 2) Why do think learners dropout well learners dropout day to different reasons. But the most commonly heard reason the most commonly mentioned reason specially from the students part is that they are very busy at work that is difficult for them to continue learning which working the same time working in the office because of that most students drop out from the center. 10% to 15% may drop out for personal reason

- 3) What do you think will be solution for learners' dropout?

The only solution would be to late students learn the course by making them free from work that way they will be able to invest their full time on learning and they will take responsibility.

Teacher two

- 1) What are the complaints you hear from learners?

They are not satisfied with the service given to them. They have complained about the location of the language center. They are not provided by necessary learning materials CDs and books. The organization the commission does not have proper calendar. As the result they stay away from learning for different immediate jobs.

- 2) Why do you think learners drop out?

There might be many factors. They got very motivated at the beginning of the lesson but through pass of time they got dissatisfied because they do not get what they expect from teachers and office. Job pressure or burden reason for their drop out

- 3) What do you think will be solution for learners drop out?

The center has to receive attention and the lesson has to be up to learners expectation. The learners has to be deployed after they finish the course .Students dissatisfaction has to be answered. Appropriate attendance control has to be set.

Teacher three

1. What are the complaints you hear from learners?

There is lot of complaints the most repeatedly ask complaints that they do not have enough time to attend class for example they are busy of office works and going for mission in the regional states

2. Why do you think learners drop out?

Mainly the learners who drop out are level two and level three in our case level do not drop out that much. I think the reason is sometimes getting fed up with class and when they become frustrated and they dropout. I think the main reason is related with their job as you know they learn being duty. So for that matter they find inconvenient learn and they drop out.

3. What do you think will be solution for learners' dropout?

The solution is to get them attend the full class or the whole day at that time they may find it easy attend the class. At least the organization has to let them to attend the class regularly.



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