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**EXPLORING THE DROPOUT PHENOMENON  
AMONG SELECTED PUBLIC SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS IN AL'AIN, UNITED  
ARAB EMIRATES**



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**SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY**

**2024**



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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMICS  
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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First and foremost, all praises are due to God Almighty for His blessings. Without His aid and facilitation, I would not have embarked on this journey nor brought it to completion. It is said that failing to express gratitude towards others is akin to neglecting gratitude towards God. Hence, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation and thanks to my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Mohd Asri Mohd Noor, who provided me unwavering guidance, direction, and support throughout this endeavour. I am truly grateful for his esteemed mentorship. I would also like to extend my thanks to my colleagues for their guidance and encouragement. Last but never the least, special thanks to my family for their unwavering support.





## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the dropout phenomenon in selected public secondary schools in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Employing a qualitative research design, the study collected data through purposive sampling, focusing on specific characteristics and criteria relevant to dropout cases. In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with individuals who had dropped out, providing rich qualitative data on the factors contributing to school dropout. The data was meticulously analyzed using various levels of coding to identify emergent themes related to the research questions, facilitated by the NVivo software program. The findings revealed several critical themes and sub-themes aligned with the research objectives. The findings indicated significant relationships between several factors and dropout rates. These factors included family circumstances, health issues, motivation levels, and marital status. The study also revealed a strong correlation between a family's socio-economic status and dropout rates. Other contributing elements identified were the behaviors of some teachers, peer influence, and the difficulty of the instructional language in the curriculum. Furthermore, the study highlighted the impact of unmet safety, social, and psychological needs in increasing dropout rates. Lastly, the lack of effective coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and the absence of strict dropout prevention policies exacerbated this phenomenon. Conclusions drawn from the study indicate that school dropouts can be significantly mitigated through targeted interventions. Key factors identified include inadequate family support, insufficient dropout prevention policies, challenging curricula, lack of motivation from school and family environments, certain teacher behaviors, and peer influence. Addressing these issues requires collaborative efforts among all stakeholders, including schools, teachers, educational officials, and parents. The study underscores the importance of early and consistent monitoring of student progress, enhanced communication among stakeholders, increased family and school motivation, ensuring family stability and safety, curriculum optimization, provision of recreational school activities, implementation of stringent dropout prevention policies, and reducing exam and homework-induced stress.





## **MENEROKA FENOMENA KECICIRAN DALAM KALANGAN SEKOLAH MENENGAH AWAM TERPILIH DI AL' AIN EMIRIAH ARAB BERSATU**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki fenomena keciciran di beberapa sekolah menengah awam terpilih di Al Ain, Emiriah Arab Bersatu. Menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif, kajian ini mengumpulkan data melalui pensampelan bertujuan, memberi tumpuan kepada ciri-ciri dan kriteria tertentu yang relevan dengan kes keciciran. Temu bual mendalam secara bersemuka telah dijalankan dengan individu yang telah tercicir, menyediakan data kualitatif yang kaya mengenai faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada keciciran sekolah. Data dianalisis dengan teliti menggunakan pelbagai peringkat pengkodan untuk mengenal pasti tema-tema yang muncul berkaitan dengan soalan penyelidikan, dibantu oleh perisian NVivo. Penemuan menunjukkan beberapa tema dan sub-tema kritikal yang selari dengan objektif penyelidikan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan hubungan yang signifikan antara beberapa faktor dengan kadar keciciran. Faktor-faktor ini termasuk keadaan keluarga, masalah kesihatan, tahap motivasi, dan status perkahwinan. Kajian ini juga mendedahkan hubungan yang kuat antara status sosioekonomi keluarga dengan kadar keciciran. Elemen lain yang turut menyumbang ialah tingkah laku beberapa guru, pengaruh rakan sebaya, dan kesukaran bahasa pengajaran dalam kurikulum. Selain itu, kajian ini menekankan kesan keperluan keselamatan, sosial, dan psikologi yang tidak dipenuhi dalam meningkatkan kadar keciciran. Akhir sekali, kekurangan mekanisme penyesuaian yang berkesan untuk menangani tekanan dan ketiadaan dasar pencegahan keciciran yang ketat memburukkan lagi fenomena ini. Kesimpulan yang diperoleh daripada kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa keciciran sekolah boleh dikurangkan dengan ketara melalui intervensi yang disasarkan. Faktor-faktor utama yang dikenal pasti termasuk sokongan keluarga yang tidak mencukupi, dasar pencegahan keciciran yang tidak memadai, kurikulum yang mencabar, kekurangan motivasi daripada persekitaran sekolah dan keluarga, tingkah laku tertentu guru, dan pengaruh rakan sebaya. Menangani isu-isu ini memerlukan usaha sama daripada semua pihak berkepentingan, termasuk sekolah, guru, pegawai pendidikan, dan ibu bapa. Kajian ini menekankan kepentingan pemantauan awal dan berterusan terhadap kemajuan pelajar, komunikasi yang dipertingkatkan antara pihak berkepentingan, peningkatan motivasi keluarga dan sekolah, memastikan kestabilan dan keselamatan keluarga, pengoptimuman kurikulum, penyediaan aktiviti rekreasi sekolah, pelaksanaan dasar pencegahan keciciran yang ketat, dan pengurangan tekanan akibat peperiksaan dan kerja rumah.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADEC	Abu-Dhabi Educational Council
ADEK	Abu Dhabi Education Knowledge
ANOVA	ANalysis Of VAriance
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
ELS	Eaton Lambert Syndrome
EM	Extrinsic Motivation
ESL	Learners English as a second language
EVT	Endo Vascular Treatment
FNC	Federal National Council
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IM	Intrinsic Motivation
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of the Variance.
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOE	Ministry of Education
NELS	National Education Longitudinal Study
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLS	Ordinary Least Square
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SCCT	Society of Cardiovascular Computed Tomography

SCT	Social Cognitive Theory
SES	Supplemental Educational Services
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
U.S.	United States
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNDP's	United Nations Development Programs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UPSI	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
VET	Vocational English Learning



## APPENDIX LIST

- A Interview Protocol
- B Original Interview Questions
- C Transcript Of the Students' Interviews (Respondents)
- D Extra Tables and Figures





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION



Educational process is an integrated process encompassing families, schools and the entire community to reach effective outputs. Education is often regarded as a sector which faces issues of efficiency and productivity including resistance to change (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2016). Policy makers, in the last two decades, have sought for continuous improvement of students' academic performance. Many educational reformers, particularly those associated with the standards movement; believe that the key to improve students' performances is to improve schools first. The performance of students will be improved if there is rigorous academic standards which are aligned with assessments and curriculum, as well as having teachers with requisite skills to deliver the required standards while teaching (Wenglinsky, 2001).





Students are the primary consideration of any educational institution. The values of colleges and universities are directly attached to the students without who such value does not exist. Educational is also the fulcrum of social and economic development of a country (Ali, Jusof, Ali, Mokhta, & Salamat, 2009). Previous studies on students' performances mostly focused on issues such as teacher education, class environment, gender differences, teaching styles, family educational background and socioeconomic factors (Singh, Malik & Singh, 2016).

## 1.2 Brief Profile About The UAE

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) consists of seven Emirates coexisting as a federation.

It has achieved tremendous transformation to become one of the best economic centers of the Middle East. The UAE has also transformed from once conservative nation to one of the most liberal economies in the Gulf, tolerating other beliefs and cultures. Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1950s, the country's economy was largely on declining pearl and fishing industry. However, the country began oil export in 1962 which leveraged the country to the path of dramatic economic transformation. As shown in Figure 1.1, the UAE has become the tourism and trading hub of the region through economic diversification. Many UAE firms have invested heavily internationally.



## Figure 1.1

### *Map of the UAE*



The UAE has a population of 8.1 million people with its capital located in Abu Dhabi. The country has an estimated area of 77,700 sq km (30,000 sq miles). The main language is Arabic, while Islam is the main religion. The country uses the UAE Dirham as its official currency. After the death of the UAE leader, Sheikh Zayed Bin-Sultan Al Nahyan, in 2004, his son, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, who was the Abu Dhabi President, was named as the president by the UAE Federal Council in November 2004. He was regarded as a pro-Western modernizer. Seven Emirates - Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Fujairah, Ras al Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm al Quwain – make up the United Arab Emirates (UAE) federation which significant degree of independence. The country is governed by a Supreme Council of Rulers made up of the seven emirates, who appoint the prime minister and the cabinet. The UAE is a regional and an international center for television and media industries. The Abu Dhabi's media zone and Dubai Media City and two-four-54 (media free zone), were incorporated to attract the key international media players like CNN, Reuters, Fox and Sony. The country has significant political and regulatory control over the media content through significant censorship of publications before distribution. This includes foreign publication. The UAE has one of the highest penetrations of internet in the Arab world with 8.1 million users.



However, it is significant filtered and censored particularly on religion and opposition politics (BBC NEWS, 2018).

In the UAE, education provision started almost same time with the Federation establishment with the opening of the United Arab Emirates University and University in Al Ain, Abu Dhabi in 1971. The country has progressed, since then, with efforts of guaranteeing modern programs, high literacy rates, and women's participation in education. The country continuously improves its youth education through setting agenda 2021. The UAE National Agenda was an effort of over 300 officials drawn from 90 local government and federal entities. The agenda include national indicators in the healthcare, education, police and security, economy, society, justice, government services, infrastructure and housing sector (Vision, 2018).



The UAE has made regionally significant achievements to ensure women's access to education. The United Nations Development Program, UNDP's Millennium Development Goal (also refers to Education for sustainable development introduced by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO to replace MDGs) No. 5, "Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women", has reached its targeted levels of female participation in primary education and continues to increase (Global Giving, 2018).

The government of the UAE has considered education as the top priority. It has effectively used its petrol wealth to increase educational attainment rates and establish a relatively high-quality of education system – more or less from the ground up (Client & Stefan, 2018).







The government also has been interested in dealing with international students. It seeks to improve the UAE's ranking in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study scoring among the top 20 countries (Client & Stefan, 2018).

Growing interests in foreign education is also reflected on the increased demand for global elementary and secondary schools in the Emirates. Remarkably, the UAE currently has the highest number of global schools worldwide after China, most of them implementing the British and U.S. curricula in English. There were 624 global schools with 627,800 enrolled students in the UAE as of January 2018 (up from 548 schools with 545,074 students in 2016). The vast majority of these schools are located in urban centers like Dubai, but global schools are spreading elsewhere as well. The UAE has a total of 580 schools in Abu-Dhabi with a total enrolment of 584,932 students. Private schools constitute approximately 60 percent of the country's schools and provide education to about 500,000 students (Client & Stefan, 2018)

His Highness Sheikh Khalifa has sought to implement plans based on the development of the country's human capital, believing that the imparting of skills to the new generation should be the main goal of any successful government. He has likewise distinguished training, culture, wellbeing and families as being among his top priorities (National Media Council, 2016).

The government additionally requested the formation of the Supreme Council of Education, the Youth Council and the Emirati Scientists Council. The structure of the new Cabinet targets five noteworthy topics: getting ready for the future, the issues





and needs that are explicit to youth, providing full access to opportunities for them to explore their thoughts in ways that serve their future and their nation, creating and making bliss in society and developing education that will bolster the nation's development (National Media Council, 2016).

### 1.3 Background of the Study

The at-risk students' abilities to stay in schools and graduate are affected negatively by a number of factors. These include increased diversity and poverty of student, high school dropout, issues of pedagogy, leadership issues in urban schools, special education issues, graduation requirements that are more rigorous (state mandates), behavioral as well as issues associated with mental health in the society. There is prevalence of this phenomenon where thousands of students dropped out in urban schools across the US (Brown, 2015).

There is no doubt that the most prominent phenomena negatively affect the education sector and its future outcomes lie in the dropout of students from the educational system and their lack of ability to advance scientifically and academically, as confirmed by the results of a series of studies and educational and social studies (Mohd, 2018).

The dropout phenomenon is one of the major challenges that deter the process of education particularly in developing nations (Eissa, 2016). There is renewed attention to the problem of high school students dropping out, promoting educators,





policy makers and researchers keen on investigating the triggers of dropouts and the immediate solution for its prevention (Heckman & Paul, 2007; Orfield, 2004).

Education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has witnessed tremendous growth and development, yet the issue of student dropout remains a concern. To delve into the specifics of this challenge, a closer examination of dropout scenarios in the UAE is important. A longitudinal study conducted by Ahmed (2013) over two years, analyzing 496 Emirati pupils, showed that 149 left public education without completing high school. Approximately 56% of these students cited the need to support their families, while 11.3% couldn't afford to continue schooling. This stark reality underscores the multifaceted nature of dropout reasons, intertwining familial obligations and financial constraints (Ahmed, 2013).



Educational institutions in the UAE are not immune to the global complexities influencing student retention. By incorporating the voices of educators, a more comprehensive understanding of dropout scenarios emerges. Interviews with teachers and school administrators uncover challenges within the educational system that contribute to dropout rates. For instance, overcrowded classrooms, as highlighted by a report from the UAE Ministry of Education, can limit the effectiveness of teaching methods and personalized attention (UAE Ministry of Education Report, 2020). These insights highlight the need for systemic changes to improve the learning environment.

Parents play an important role in shaping a student's educational journey, and understanding their perspectives is paramount. A study by Dr. Natasha Ridge, executive director of the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research,





emphasized the significance of parental education levels in determining children's educational continuity (Ahmed, 2013). Additionally, parental monitoring of school work was found to be a critical factor; only 18% of students reported having their parents monitor their academic progress (Ahmed, 2013). This underscores the importance of parental involvement as a potential determinant of academic persistence.

Policymakers in the UAE hold the key to implementing systemic changes that can address dropout challenges. Exploring their perspectives and initiatives can provide valuable insights. The UAE Vision 2021, a national agenda for the country's development, places a strong emphasis on education as a cornerstone for building a knowledge-based economy (Government of UAE, 2021). Analyzing how education policies align with this vision and the challenges faced in implementation can shed light on the broader socio-political landscape influencing dropout rates.

Theoretical frameworks in educational psychology and sociology add depth to the understanding of student dropout. Tinto's Retention Theory (1987) and Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) can be applied to explore how institutional factors and environmental influences contribute to student persistence or withdrawal. Additionally, considering the psychological aspects through Weiner's Attribution Theory (1974) and Glasser's Choice Theory (1998) offers insights into students' internal motivations and decision-making processes, enriching the overall theoretical foundation of the study.

A nuanced exploration of dropout scenarios in the UAE involves a combination of empirical studies, educator perspectives, parental insights, policymaker considerations, and a robust theoretical framework. Integrating these elements provides





a holistic understanding of the multifaceted challenges contributing to student dropout, offering a foundation for targeted interventions and improvements in the educational landscape of the UAE.

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund) explained dropouts as children who are of school age who left school without completing the educational stage, whether by their desire or because of other factors, as well as not attending schools for one year or more. The European Union referred dropouts as persons between the ages of 18 and 24 who left education with the lowest level of education (high school), (Abu Dhabi Education Knowledge (ADEK), 2016)

Dropout has significant adverse effect on socio-economic development making it an alarming concern. The issue of pupil dropout has assumed global dimension as it is no longer limited to only communities but the nation in general. The consequence is that scarced educational resources are underutilized thereby hampering the achievement of national educational objectives and aspiration. This negatively affects the health of educational system and therefore has adverse effect on the state of the economy through the possible higher future costs associated with those that dropout (Segumba, 2015). Students' dropouts have both negative personal effects and economic impacts on individuals and communities (Brown, 2015).

It was reported by Rumberger (2001) that though there is a long-term upward trend in high school completion in the US, in any given year there is about 5% of drop out of high school students. Rumberger and Stephen (2003) stated that 21 percent of National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS, 88) cohort students dropped





out of schools after the eighth grade at some point but prior to their completion of high school. According to the United States Department of Education report, in October 2005 there were approximately 3.5 million students age 16 to 24 did not enroll in high schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). Rumberger (2004) drew on both individuals and institutional perspectives to understand decisions to quit school. The individuals' perspectives focus on students' values, attitudes, and behaviors and consider dropping out of schools to be the final stage in a cumulative process of academic and social disengagement from schools.

The data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) revealed that in 2012, an estimated 7.2 million children in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) were out of school (TRENDS Research & Advisory, 2015). In the Arab regions, there are 3.1 million fewer children out of schools since 2002, but 8.5 million children remain excluded. At the lower secondary level, over 60 percent of students are not learning in Morocco and Oman (Steer, Ghanem & Jalbout, 2014).

In Egypt, according to the latest statistics issued by the Ministry of Education and Technical Education in 2016, the number of dropout students in both primary and preparatory stage at the governorates and educational directorates reached 159,540 students, of which 77,412 were girls and 82,128 were boys. The governorate of Assiut topped the largest percentage among the number of dropouts, reaching 8.70%. This is followed by Marsa Matruh governorate with 7.69% and 5.79% in Luxor Governorate. Next is 2.68% in Cairo governorate, 4.63% in Alexandria, 5.45% in El-Beheira Governorate, 5.7% in Menoufia Governorate, 5.28% in Sohag Governorate, 4.2% in Ismailia, 4.5% in Suez and 3.49% in Giza. The statistics revealed that the dropout rates





in primary schools for the students of the government education directorates reached 45,214 (Forty-five thousand and two hundred fourteen) in which 27,088 (twenty-seven thousand and eighty-eight) were students with 18,146 (eighteen thousand and hundred forty six) girls. Qalyubia governorate topped the largest with 88%, Marsa Matrouh with 86%, El-Gharbia Governorate with 67%, Menoufia with 66%, Beni Suef Governorate with 65% and Assiut Governorate with 72% (Mohmood, 2016).

The Committee on Health, Labor and Social Affairs of the Federal National Council in the UAE during its discussion of the draft law on the rights of the child pointed out that social studies indicated the reducing of more than 10 thousand students in government secondary schools in the country out of the 120 thousand students enrolled in this stage. It indicates an increased dropout rates among high school students (Eman, 2014). According to ADEK (2016) there are between 5 and 6 percent of the population in Jordan with different disabilities (mobility, audio and visual). In order to address the educational needs of people with different disabilities, the Ministry of Education has to build specialist schools, which are costly.

As discussed earlier, the issue of students' dropouts is prevalent in many countries including the Arab region. The UAE is no exception. This will further discuss in the next section that focuses on the problem of students' dropouts in the context of the UAE.





## 1.4 Problem Statement

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has experienced rapid economic development since its establishment in 1971, marked by achievements in universal education enrollment and a burgeoning higher education sector (Baghat, 1999; Sulaiman, 2000). Despite these advancements, concerns persist over a significant male dropout rate from secondary schools, reaching up to 20% in a single year, raising questions about the underlying factors contributing to the disparity between male and female dropout rates (KHDA, 2010). While existing explanations point to high public sector salaries as a pull factor for male students, this paper challenges such assertions based on findings from the research study sponsored by the Emirates Foundation, revealing that male dropouts in the UAE share similarities with their counterparts worldwide, including factors such as low socio-economic backgrounds, poorly educated parents, and attending schools with inadequate teaching quality.

Qualitative research has been limited in the UAE concerning dropout patterns, but existing literature globally emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the dropout phenomenon. A literature review conducted by USAID (2011) highlights four primary domains—individual, family, school, and community—that influence students' decisions to drop out. Notably, qualitative studies often delve deeper into the nuanced experiences within these domains, providing a richer understanding of the students' perspectives and motivations.

In the educational landscape of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), dropout rates in boys' schools have emerged as a critical issue, with safety concerns and absenteeism







identified as primary contributors (Emirate New Agency, 2017). The impact of high rates of absenteeism, particularly after holidays, religious events, and exams, has permeated the educational system, affecting both the administrative processes and the annual lesson plans (Eisam, 2014). The UNESCO Institute of Statistics reports show a disconcerting trend in dropout ratios, with both gross and net enrolment rates declining for both genders between 2016 and 2017 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016; UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2017).

The data shows a considerable gender disparity, with higher dropout rates among boys, especially in the secondary education level (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2017; Nadeem, 2015). Despite a shift in trends from 2010 onwards, where boys showed increased awareness of the importance of completing their education, the dropout rates, particularly among males, remain a significant concern (Nadeem, 2015). The Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau's annual report underscores the challenge, revealing that only 32% of male students' complete high school on time, with dropout rates higher in grades 10-12, particularly for males (TRENDS Research & Advisory, 2015).

The specific gap lies in the absence of a thorough examination of how socioeconomic factors within the family environment intersect with familial structures and educational factors to shape students' decisions about their educational paths. While it is acknowledged that mothers of dropouts often have lower educational levels, and parental education, particularly that of the mother, influences a child's educational trajectory, the precise mechanisms through which these factors impact students' choices are not well-explored.





This research seeks to unravel the complexities of this gap by posing critical questions that go beyond the surface-level associations. For instance, the study aims to investigate how the economic status of a family contributes to a student's decision to continue or discontinue their education. It also seeks to understand the role of family dynamics, beyond educational levels, in shaping a student's attitude towards schooling. Additionally, the research will explore specific challenges within the family environment related to socioeconomic factors and educational factors that act as barriers to a student's educational persistence.

The research identifies several critical gaps in understanding student dropout rates in UAE secondary schools, particularly among boys. Objective 1 seeks to address the gap by focusing on perceived factors contributing to dropouts, offering a comprehensive exploration that goes beyond the acknowledged issue. Objective 2 responds to a gap concerning the impact of family socioeconomic status on student persistence, aiming to delve deeply into this aspect. Objective 3 fills a gap by focusing on coping mechanisms, acknowledging the stressors but exploring how students navigate these challenges. Objective 4 targets a gap related to the insufficient exploration of student motivations, providing a deeper understanding of why students choose to continue or discontinue their education. Lastly, Objective 5 seek to address a gap concerning the lack of specificity on effective policies, aiming to uncover students' perspectives on policies that could improve their retention in schools. Collectively, these objectives form a comprehensive research framework to bridge the identified gaps and contribute valuable insights to inform interventions and policies addressing dropout rates in UAE secondary schools.





The depth of this exploration is essential for developing effective policies and interventions aimed at reducing dropout rates in the UAE. By recognizing the broader impact of socioeconomic factors within the family environment and educational factors, the research goes beyond acknowledging correlations and delves into the root causes of student dropout rates. This study is not merely an extension of existing literature but a novel endeavor to uncover the specific mechanisms through which family and socioeconomic factors intersect, influencing students' decisions regarding their education.

This research addresses the identified gap by delving into the intricate interplay between family dynamics factors, educational factors and socioeconomic factors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms influencing students' decisions. This improved understanding will contribute to the academic discourse on dropout rates and pave the way for targeted and evidence-based interventions aimed at reducing dropout rates in the unique context of the UAE.

At a practical conference in UAE, important educational issues were discussed in the context of the UAE education. Among the main issues faced by boys' schools are schools safety and absenteeism which lead to dropouts from schools (Emirate New Agency, 2017).

In the UAE, the high rates of absenteeism among students before and after public holidays, religious holidays and classroom exams are a problem that affects the educational field and the school administration and casts a negative impact on the educational process. It also affects the annual plan of lessons. School's principals and





parents in Umm Al Quwain confirmed that the high rates of absentees among students after the holidays have become a phenomenon experienced by schools and teaching bodies and cast a negative impact in the field of education, demanding the needs to include some field activities in the curriculum that will reduce boredom and breathe the spirit of vitality among students. These will make the school environment more attractive to them. In addition, parents are also asked to bring their children to school so as not to miss the grades of assessment in the written and oral examinations (Eisam, 2014).

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2016) with regards to education in the UAE, students in secondary educational level are from age 11 to 17 years old, and the number (enrolment and dropout) is as follows:



**Table 1.1**

*The ratio of enrolment and dropout – Gross enrolment ratio and net enrolment rate (with ratio 120% according to UNESCO) in secondary education in UAE (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016)*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Gross enrolment by 2016</b>	<b>Net enrolment by 2016</b>	<b>Dropout</b>
Female	92.98	85.56	7.42
Male	98.63	89.42	9.21

Table 1.1 indicates that the ratio (with 120%) between gross and net enrolment for both boys and girls was reduced. So, from that ratio, there were 7.42 dropouts among girls and 9.21 among boys. It is worrying to find out the reason for that phenomenon.



**Table 1.2**

*The ratio of enrolment and dropout – The numbers of girls and boys (with ratio 120% according to UNESCO) in the secondary education in the UAE (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2017)*

Gender	Gross-enrolment by 2017	Net enrolment by 2017	Dropout ratio
Female	100.4	90.33	10.07
Male	109.28	95.15	14.13

Table 1.2 indicates the ratio for both boys and girls (with the ratio of 120%) was reduced between the gross and net enrolment rate. There were 10.07 dropouts among girls and 14.13 among boys. It is intriguing to find out the reason for that phenomenon.

According to the UAE Ministry of Education, the number of dropouts between boys and girls in intermediate and secondary level (11-17 years old) in 2010 is as follows:

**Table 1.3**

*The numbers of girls and boys in the three different cycles in the UAE (World Data on Education, 2011)*

Gender	First-cycle Primary level (6-10 years old)	Second-cycle intermediate level (11-14 years old)	Third-cycle Secondary level (15-17 years old)	Total numbers
Female	0.4%	0.5%	2.2%	3.1%
Male	2.2%	2.3%	7.7%	12.2%

Table 1.3 shows the percentage of boys and girls who dropped out at each cycle of the education system. It shows that the percentage of boys is higher compared to girls especially at the secondary level.

**Table 1.4**

*The ratio of enrolment and dropout – The numbers of girls and boys (with ratio 120% according to UNESCO) in the secondary education in the UAE between 2016 and 2017 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2017)*

Gender	Gross enrolment 2016	Net enrolment 2016	Dropout 2016	Gross enrolment 2017	Net enrolment 2017	Dropout 2017
female	93.33	85.88	7.45	100.4	90.33	10.07
Male	97.33	88.24	9.09	109.28	95.15	14.13

Table 1.4 indicates that the ratio (with the ratio of 120%) for both boys and girls was reduced between the gross and net enrolment rate. There were 10.07 dropouts among girls and 14.13 among boys in 2017. From the table, it also indicates 7.45 dropouts among girls and 9.09 dropouts among boys identified in 2016 revealing an increase in the secondary education in two consecutive years. It is intriguing to find out the reason for that increasing in secondary level.

From 2010 academic year to 2013 academic year there were changes in trend, partly due to the boys' awareness that it is important to complete their studies in order to obtain suitable jobs, a decent salary for a decent life that resulted in fewer dropouts among them compared to girls. According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), the total number of students in Dubai in the 2013-2014 academic years was 239,020: 126,530 were girls and 112,490 were boys. Overall, there were 101,360 students in the

first cycle (6-10 years old) with 52,891 girls and 48,469 boys. The second cycle had 79,907 students, made up of 42,020 girls and 37,887 boys. In high schools, there were 57,753 students: 31,619 girls and 26,134 boys. There were more than 1,600 students dropped out of public schools and the majority was girls with 1,198 in total leaving schools compared to 460 boys. The figures also revealed that 3,764 students, 2,630 boys and 1,134 girls, failed a year and had to repeat. From this number, 1,518 failed in grades six to nine, or the second cycle, and 2,246 were high school students. The statistics from the ministry showed that the highest rate of dropouts was in high schools. From the total number of 1,183 high school dropouts, 815 were girls compared with 368 boys. In cycle two, 444 students left schools: 357 girls and 87 boys. As for cycle one, 36 girls left schools if compared with only five boys. In total, 1,579 boys in high schools had to repeat the year, compared with 667 girls and in the second cycle it was 1,051 boys and 467 girls. These figures were in contrast to previous years where the majority of school leavers were boys by as much as 20% in a single year (Nadeem, 2015).

**Table 1.5**

*The number of students dropping out, and repeating according to gender between the three cycles (Nadeem, 2015)*

Gender	Dropout/ cycle one, primary level (6-10 age)	Dropout/ cycle two, intermediate level (11-14 age)	Dropout/ cycle three, secondary level (15-18 age)	Failed and repeated in cycle two and three, intermediate and secondary level (11-18 age)
Female	36	357	815	1134
Male	5	87	368	2630

In Table 1.5, the data indicates that the dropout rate of girls was more than boys and it was concentrated in cycle three (secondary level). The number of boys who failed



and had to repeat in cycle two and three is much higher than the girls. However, interestingly, more boys managed to complete their education because their dropout rate throughout the three cycles is lower than girls.

It has also been reported that the primary school completion rate has declined in the United Arab Emirates from 94 percent in 2001–2002 academic year to 84 percent in 2010–2011 academic year. A decline in lower secondary schools was also seen for the same academic years (UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database, 2011).

The annual report by the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau, which supervises the United Arab Emirates education system together with the Knowledge and Human Development Authority, found that only 32% of male students completed high schools on time which indicated that many students were held behind due to poor attendance and earning fewer school credits key predictors of dropping out. There were 35% of males dropped out between grades 10 and 12 compared to 25% of females. According to Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr Al Qasbi Foundation, at least 20% of males in the UAE dropped out before completing secondary schools education (TRENDS Research & Advisory, 2015). Thus, this indicates that boy dropouts in secondary level were high, while the percentage of girl students was not far behind.

As discussed earlier, dropout is an important issue affecting educational system worldwide. The statistics presented by the UAE Center for Strategic Studies and Research in 2011, entitled 'The Education Industry: Towards Building the UAE Knowledge Economy Society' revealed the seriousness of this problem. In the UAE, the study revealed that in the 2009-2010 academic years, there were an estimated







22,368 local students enrolled in the sixth grade in both public and private schools. This number, however, dwindled to only 16,444 students when they reached the twelfth grade indicating that the dropout from the education system was approximately 26.5% (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2012).

There are many general reasons why students drop out from schools. A study involving 730 students from Ras Al Khaimah in the UAE in 2016 revealed that more than half of the students' (55%) parents work in the police force with low salary compared with other occupational fields, so this salary and the lack of job opportunities in the public sector for boys also discourage many of them from continuing their education (Government of the United Arab Emirates, 2017). Studies in the United Arab Emirates have also discovered that males are separated from the school community, and the separation of them has been linked to their negative experiences in schools (Li, 2016)

Abu Dhabi Education Knowledge (2016) also mentioned that the most dangerous risk of dropping out of schools is the phenomenon of family disintegration, especially in light of the high divorce rates, the practice of polygamy and the preoccupation of father and mother in work and neglect of children, where students cannot encounter stressors to adapt with that conditions and which affect them in developing coping mechanisms. All these may lead to their dropouts. There are other factors of dropouts in the UAE including the disability factor.

According to a study of local Abu Dhabi city students, there are several factors that contribute to students dropping out (according to ADEK). Some of them dropped





out due to (a) excess of absence, and (b) age exceeded the maximum limit (from 11-18 years old) for staying in class. In the same year (2016) according to ADEK statistic, the highest occurrence of dropouts among males in public schools happened when they were in grade 9 (14 years old).

Educators warned against the decline in the demand of students in public and private schools for education in recent years and missing of motivation. They explained that most students are indifferent in studying, they do not focus on teachers' explanation, and spend their school days sleeping and playing, and thus these call on the Ministry of Education to restructure its educational plans, policies and programs, to motivate students to learn. They attributed the problem mainly as a result of unattractive curriculum contents, absence of incentives in the teaching profession, the application of the three classroom system, weak control of parents over their children, and weak communication between home and schools. Due to this reasons, it is a need to improve the policies on students' retention in very important.

The students in the twelfth grade emphasized that most students do not care to explain to their teachers of their absentees, or to focus on their lessons, and spend their school days either sleeping or playing. They added that this is due to their boredom from the existing teaching methods, many examinations, as well as the availability of other methods of learning outside schools, which hinder them from attending schools, noting private lessons and academic summaries. In detail, the head of the Al-Safa School for Secondary Education, Ali Malallah, affirmed that he had observed in recent years the low motivation of students to learn, and the control of a state of indifference and lack of interest in them, especially males. He said that students in schools do not





interact with their teachers, and a number of periodic reports indicated a decline in the level of educational achievement they have, despite actions taken by the Ministry to improve the education level in the state. In addition, weak supervisions of parents on their children, and the lack of follow-up of their conditions inside schools are other factors that contributed to dropouts. The director of the Mohammed bin Rashid Model School, Muhammad Hassan, called on the Ministry of Education to review the future policies that was put in place, to ensure their suitability to the needs of students and the educational environment in general (Alsoba'ei, 2011).

Based on the various statistics and studies presented above, there is clearly a difference in dropout incidences between boys and girls in the intermediate and secondary stages in Abu Dhabi. Various factors have been suggested which lead to students dropping out. However, studies on the perceived factors that contribute to students' dropouts in Abu Dhabi are scarce. More importantly, not much has been discovered on the perceived motivation of students to continue their studies since some of the factors suggested that students were unwillingly taken out of the system due to parents and other circumstances. Similarly, there is a need to understand the coping mechanisms students feel they need to adapt in such adverse situations. This research, therefore, tries to unearth factors that lead to students' dropouts, what coping mechanisms they need to adapt to the different factors and what motivates them to act. So, for all that, this study investigated factors that lead to students dropping out in secondary education. Among the factors are how family socioeconomic status plays a role in the phenomenon, what coping mechanism students think they should implement, what motivation students need to study or drop out, and whether there are policies that could help to reduce students dropping out.





## 1.5 Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the students' dropout rates in secondary schools in Al' Ain region and exploring the unique factors or challenges contributing to the students. Specifically, this study tries achieving the objectives:

1. To explore the perceived factors that contributes to students dropping out of schools in secondary stage.
2. To explore the importance of the family's socioeconomic status on students' persistence in schools setting.
3. To identify what perceived coping mechanisms students think they need to implement as they encounter stressors to adapt with the factors that lead them to dropout.
4. To explore the students' perceived motivations to continue their study or drop out.
5. To explore school's policies that students perceived can be implemented to improve their retention in schools.



## 1.6 Research Questions

1. What perceived factors contribute to students dropping out from schools in secondary stage?
2. What is the importance of the family's socioeconomic status on students' persistence in schools setting?





3. What coping mechanisms do secondary students think they need to implement as they encounter stressors to adapt with the factors that lead them to dropout?
4. What are the students' perceived motivations to continue or drop out?
5. What school's policies students perceived that can be implemented to improve their retention in the schools?

According to Sharan B. Merriam and John W. Creswell, both prominent figures in the field of qualitative research, research objectives and research questions serve distinct but complementary roles in a study. Research objectives are broad goals that outline what the researcher aims to achieve through the study, providing a clear direction and purpose for the research. Typically written in declarative form, they describe the intended outcomes or what the research seeks to accomplish, and can be general or specific. They help to guide the research process by setting specific targets and milestones, often determining the methodology and methods to be used in the study.

On the other hand, research questions are specific queries the researcher wants to answer through their study, focusing on particular aspects of the research problem and guiding the data collection and analysis process. Written in interrogative form, these questions are precise and focused, detailing the exact information the researcher is seeking. They help to narrow down the scope of the research by focusing on specific aspects of the broader research objectives, driving the research design, data collection, and analysis.

The distinctions between research objectives and research questions lie in their scope, guidance, and format. Research objectives are broader and more general, setting





the stage for the overall study, while research questions are narrower and more specific, addressing particular elements of the research objectives. Objectives provide a high-level direction for the study, whereas research questions offer detailed guidance on what data to collect and how to analyze it. In terms of format, objectives are typically written as statements, while research questions are written as questions.

### 1.7 Conceptual Framework of the Research

The UAE has a total of 580 schools with a total enrolment of 584,932 students (Client, & Stefan, 2018). There were many statistics from the UAE Ministry of Education and ADEC which showed the number of students who dropped out and the reasons for that as added in this research. According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2016), around 16% dropouts between boys and girls at UAE secondary schools, in other academic year with a different trend, the majority of school leavers were boys by as much as 20% in a single year (Nadeem, 2015). In addition, in 2012 academic year, students' dropouts from the education system were approximately 26.5% (The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2012). As mentioned above, there are different reasons for dropouts were mentioned by the Abu-Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC) and the Ministry of Education in the UAE.

Some factors were explored that led to dropouts as variables (socioeconomic, family status, coping mechanisms, motivation and policies), each factor was connected to theories related to it and to the research questions and the interview questions.





This research investigated the factors of dropouts from a new perspective that were not studied in any other studies in the UAE before. The issues of dropouts were investigated from the theoretical site focusing on interview sessions with the respondents, observation, recording and taking notes of all changes and emotions occurred. In this research, the retention theory was discussed referring to the ability of a foundation to hold students from primary level through graduation or up-graduation (Seidman, 2005). Many models in this theory discussed students' retention by studying their characteristics or factors and the surrounding of academic institutions. There were many models discussed, and from this theory, policies students perceived can be explored and implemented to improve their retention in schools. In the same way, students' basic needs were decided whether they had any impacts on upper level achievements depending on the Hierarchy of Needs Theory that believes higher levels needs cannot be achieved without achieving the basic needs. The Choice Theory was discussed in case there is lack of knowledge or access to information that may have lower expectations regarding achievements and motivation. From needs theories to behavior one, Intrinsic Motivation (IM) referring to an engagement in behavior that is inherently satisfying or enjoyable was discussed. Conversely, Extrinsic Motivation (EM) referring to performances of behavior that is fundamentally contingent upon the attainment of an outcome that is separable from the action itself. Additionally, this also helped a learning domain advancing attributions and flexibility. It is important to understand students attributions for disappointments as well as triumphs, therefore, the attributions of students were discussed depending on how students interpret events and how this interpretations linked to their behavior and thinking. Additionally, the behavior was linked to the social aspect through the theory of Social Cognitive in which students





controlled their own motivations and behaviors within the network of the social environment, which surrounded them.

## 1.8 Definition of Terms

As indicated by Creswell (2009), definitions ought to be accommodated terms and the language used in an examination and should consider if any probability exists that lead readers not be able to comprehend the significance. The following definitions of terms were provided to ensure consistency of terms and comprehension among readers of this research.



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**Drop-out:** In the context of this research, a "drop-out" is a student who formally disengages from their enrollment in a school setting before completing compulsory education. This includes students who do not re-enroll or return for additional study after leaving the educational institution (Atif, Richards & Bilgin, 2013).

2. **Cycle one:** "Cycle One" refers to the educational level encompassing primary school students aged 6-10, following the age categorization outlined by the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC).
3. **Cycle two:** "Cycle Two" pertains to the educational level involving intermediate school students aged 11-14, in accordance with the age classification provided by ADEC.





4. **Cycle three:** "Cycle Three" designates the educational level encompassing secondary school students aged 15-18, based on the age categorization outlined by ADEC.
5. **Socioeconomic status:** "Socioeconomic status" is the social standing or class of an individual or group, commonly assessed through a combination of educational attainment, income, and occupation.
6. **Coping mechanisms:** "Coping mechanisms" refer to adaptive strategies and approaches employed by individuals to manage stress and/or trauma, assisting in handling challenging emotions and maintaining emotional well-being.
7. **Persistence:** "Persistence" is the continuous enrollment of individuals over time. In the context of this research, it specifically refers to a student who remains continuously enrolled without any interruptions (Tinto, 2006; Atif et al., 2013).
8. **Student Retention:** "Student retention" involves the re-enrollment of a student from one academic term to the next (Maher & Macallister, 2013).

## 1.9 Research Scope

The Emirate of Abu Dhabi which comprises Al Ain and the Western Region in the UAE has more than 480 schools, public and private, with a total enrolment of 584,932 students. There were 624 global schools with 627,800 enrolled students in the UAE as of January 2018 (up from 548 schools with 545,074 students in 2016). The vast majority of these schools are located in the urban centers like Dubai, but global schools are spreading elsewhere as well. Private schools constitute approximately 60 percent of the



country's schools and provide education to about 500,000 students (Kevin, Client, & Stefan, 2018). In Dubai, there are more than 120 schools including public and private schools. There are also public and private schools in the other emirates: Fujairah, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain and Ras Al Khaimah.

The study had some assumptions and limitations as it was conducted in Al-Ain region (Public Secondary Schools) which is considered a small city beside the capital of the country which has seven big emirates. The majority of the respondents were from Al-Ain, so there was no representation of students from the other emirates. A pilot study was conducted with one respondent. The sample was limited to 6 respondents or according to the response. The limitations of the research are:

1. There was no guarantee that the students who dropped out encountered any barriers that influenced the outcome.
2. The statistical documents from the MOE are very confidential and that is considered a barrier during the research.
3. Generalizations made concerning students were limited due to the number of respondents that was included.

### **1.10 Significance of Research**

The spread of dropout phenomenon is of concern to many educators, intellectuals and state affairs. Many governments have given this problem special attention to study this phenomenon that affects not only the dropouts, but also the society as a whole. This is





because leakage increases the cost of education and increases the unemployment rate as well as the spread of ignorance, poverty and other social and economic problems (Eman, 2014).

"We need to improve the motivations and motivations of male students," said one UAE policymaker. "This [school-age] generation lacks motivation. Education is available and easy for them, they have a lot of knowledge available on their phones and through many other means, but we need to change their attitudes and outlook on education" (the fourth interview in the GCC 2017, Gulf Cooperation Council).

According to the statements of the Minister of Education (23 January 2018), the Ministry seeks to reduce the dropout rate to 0% in the emirate schools. This research investigated in depth about some problems of dropouts from the students' perspectives that were not discussed in other studies in the educational field in the UAE. Retention of students in schools has been an ongoing issue. As far as this study is concerned, the focus was on students who abandoned education to know the real reasons from the students themselves.

The UAE is striving to address this problem as it began to grant powers to the school administration to encourage students and increase attendance to reduce dropout rates. This research explored the factors that contribute to the reduced dropout rate. This research employed the qualitative approach by using interviews with the respondents to explore this phenomenon. The results of this research are important to academic practitioners and can be utilized to improve the education system in the UAE. This





research is significant because it focused on the students themselves to understand the phenomenon: to solve any problem effectively, real reasons should be investigated.

Some students do not the relationship between what they are expected to learn and their future goals. They lack adults' interests or care about them and their education (Alsoba'ai, 2011). In addition, financial factors like the need to support a young family (or parents and siblings), or other social hardship like divorce or losing a parent can lead students to put work and other priorities ahead of finishing schools. Hence, an adequate understanding of why and when students drop out requires a consideration of all aspects of the circumstances that lead to quitting schools.

This research is significant because it was conducted to investigate what factors contributed to the lack of interests in learning and dropouts in a country that provides everything to its citizens and considers education a top priority for its advancement and growth.

Additionally, this research is significant due to the important contribution to the literature on local students' dropouts. Most of the existing literature has focused on the numbers of students who dropped out and the general reasons without any interviews with the students who dropped out to investigate their situation. Referring to this research, it focused on listening to the perceptions of the respondents' live experiences within their community. In addition, the results of this research have provided vital information to academic practitioners that can be utilized in developing specific academic programs. This research has added to the body of knowledge regarding students who dropped out and now they are parents in their families and have





responsibility for new children who will be the future of their homeland, and as Nelson and Guerra (2014) mentioned, parents level of education is one of the factors that encourage students to appreciate education and their academic achievement. Additionally, this information allows for recommendations that may improve the education programs which lead to reducing dropouts among students.

So, this study is important for many, ministry of education, teachers, parents and Decision makers.

### 1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed a brief introduction of the topic. It began with a brief profile about the UAE, its history, population and education. It has also discussed the problem of students' dropouts in Al-Ain city, followed by the research objectives and questions. In addition, it has showed the conceptual framework by clarifying the concepts and theories related to it. Then, the definitions of terms were defined, followed by a discussion about the limitations and their impact. The next chapter will further discuss the important concepts involve in this research.

