Early school leaving: a crisis in secondary schooling in Tonga

Makafalani Tatafu
University of Wollongong


This paper is posted at Research Online.
NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Early school leaving - a crisis in secondary schooling in Tonga

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctorate in Education

from

University of Wollongong
New South Wales, Australia

by

Makafalani Tatafu, BA, MA

Graduate School of Education

1997
Table of Contents

Acknowledgments i
Abstract ii

1 Early School Leaving in Perspective

1. Early school leaving and unsuccessful completers 2
2. Consequences of early school leaving 5
3. Consequences of early school leaving in the South 8
   Assessment of the costs of early school leaving 14
   Glimpses of hope 16
4. The research questions 17
5. Structure 19
6. Theoretical framework 20
7. Perspective of this study 21

2 Literature Review

1. Structure of the literature review 24
2. Definition of early school leaving 25
   Causes of the definition variations 26
   Quest for a consensus on definition 27
   A working definition of early school leaving 29
3. Measurement of rates of early school leaving 29
   Time frame: Age Cohort and True Cohort Method 31
   Age Cohort Method 31
   True Cohort Method 32
   Baseline population 35
   Recommendations for the measurement of ESL 37
   Assessment of the Methods of Calculation of Rates 38
4. The extent of early school leaving

Extent of early school leaving in the South

Extent of early school leaving in the North

Assessment of the extent of early school leaving in the North and South

5. Causes of early school leaving

Three major causes in the North

Early school leavers are at fault

Student characteristics correlated with early school leaving

The school as a cause of early school leaving

School processes responsible for early school leaving

Causes of early school leaving in the South

Assessment of the causes of early school leaving in the North and South

6. A theoretical framework to incorporate the causes of early school leaving

Development of a theoretical framework

Choice of the 'systems analysis'

Major components of the education system for systems analysis

Macro, meso and micro levels of operation

 Criticisms of the theoretical framework in Figure 2.7

7. Policy measures for reducing early school leaving

School policy measures

Three policy measures for North and South

7.1 School as a community of support

School membership and social bonding

Educational engagement

Impediments to educational engagement

Teachers' beliefs and behaviours

Workplace for teachers

Enabling school structures
7.2 Confirmation of conclusions: High School and Beyond 82
7.3 Evidence from the Catholic schools 83

*Philosophy of Catholic Education* 85
*Treating school as a 'black box' : Input-output model* 87
*Evidence from a look 'inside' Catholic schools* 88

8. Concluding remarks 90

## 3

The Research Context and Theoretical Framework

1. A brief explanation of the research context in Tonga

   *Geography of Tonga* 93
   *Population* 93
   *Social system* 95
   *Economy* 97
   *Schooling system* 98

2. Factors perceived to be impacting on students to leave school early 100

   *Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers* 100
   *Government monopoly of schooling policy* 101
   *Primary and secondary schooling* 103
   *A brief history of the Tonga School Leaving Certificates* 104A
   *Inequity of government assistance to non-government schools* 105
   *Primary school curriculum* 106
   *Secondary school curriculum* 108
   *Outcomes of the examination driven secondary school curriculum* 110
   *The interaction in the school community* 112
   *Social systems* 113
   *Family factors* 115
   *Subsistence economy* 116
Unreliable transport system
School-related Associations (e.g. PTA)
Changes in social indicators
Cultural changes
A brief history of the school leaving certificate

3. The theoretical framework for this research
4. Concluding remarks

4 Research Design

1. Rationale for the choice of the topic of early school leaving
   Research questions
   Definition of early school leaving
   Measurements of the rates of early school leaving
   Rates of early school leaving in Tonga
   Comparison of early school leavers with others
   Advantages of secondary schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers
   Disadvantages of secondary schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers
   Perception of secondary school attractiveness
   Causes of early school leaving
   Policy measures for reducing early school leaving
   The choice of the sample of schools
   The location of the sample schools

2. Rationale for and the number in the five groups of respondents
   Teachers and administrators of sample schools
   Teachers and administrators of non-sample schools
   Early school leavers
   Unsuccessful completers
3. Overview of purposes, questionnaires and respondents

3.1 Questionnaire for teachers and school administrators

Rationale

Questionnaire content and development

Trial

3.2 Questionnaire for early school leavers

Rationale

Questionnaire content and development

Trial

3.3 Questionnaire for unsuccessful completers

Rationale

Questionnaire content and development

Trial

3.4 Questionnaire for parents of early school leavers

Rationale

Questionnaire content and development

Trial

3.5 Questionnaire for community leaders

Rationale

Questionnaire content and development

Trial

4. Analysis of data

Characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

Assessment of school attractiveness

Causes of early school leaving

Policy measures for reducing early school leaving
4.1 Limitations of research

Restricted to the Catholic Education System

Unavailability of respondents

Absence of successful completers

Inquiry time

5. Trustworthiness of the data

Credibility of the researcher

Preference for researcher to do the interviews

Confidentiality and anonymity assured

Questionnaires and interviews in the Tongan language

Questionnaire trials

Participant rapport

Credibility of the research assistants

Summary

Data Analysis

Introduction

A case study of an early school leaver

A case study of an unsuccessful completer

Link with the theoretical framework

Overview of the data analysis by research issues and sub-issues

Reflection on the translation saga

1. Extent of early school leaving

1.1 The collection of the early school leaving data

1.2 Rates of early school leaving

1.3 Comparison of the rate of early school leaving and that derived from the government official figures

1.4 Gender differences of early school leaving
2. Characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

2.1 A comparison of the characteristics of early school leavers and those of the national population

2.2 A comparison of the characteristics of early school leavers and those of the unsuccessful completers

3 Consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

3.1 Advantages of secondary schooling according to early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

3.2 Disadvantages of secondary schooling to early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

3.3 Problems associated with early school leaving

3.4 Comparison of the perceptions of other respondents and those of the early school leavers and of the unsuccessful completers

4.1 Perception of school attractiveness

4.1.1 School facilities and resources

4.1.2 Administration of the school

4.1.3 Teachers

4.1.4 Students

4.2 Stakeholders' perceptions of the causes of early school leaving

4.2.1 School administrator-related causes of early school leaving

- Agreement among the five groups of respondents
- Description of categories and comparison of respondents
- Similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers
- Similarities between early school leavers and their parents
- Summary of categories

4.2.2 Teacher-related causes of early school leaving

- Agreement among the five groups of respondents
- Description of categories and comparison of respondents
- Similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers
Similarities between early school leavers and their parents 239
Summary of categories 239

4.2.3 Parent-related causes of early school leaving 242
Agreement among the five groups of respondents 242
Description of categories and comparison of respondents 244
Similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers 246
Similarities between early school leavers and their parents 246
Summary of categories 247

4.2.4 Student-related causes of early school leaving 249
Agreement among the five groups of respondents 250
Description of categories and comparison of respondents 250
Similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers 253
Similarities between early school leavers and their parents 253
Summary of categories 254

4.2.5 Village community-related causes of early school leaving 256
Agreement among the five groups of respondents 257
Description of categories and comparison of respondents 258
Similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers 260
Similarities between early school leavers and their parents 260
Summary of categories 261

4.2.6 Government-related causes of early school leaving 262
Agreement among the five groups of respondents 264
Description of categories and comparison of respondents 265
Similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers 267
Similarities between early school leavers and their parents 268
Summary of categories 268

4.2.7 Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving 270
Agreement among the five groups of respondents 271
Description of categories and comparison of respondents 272
Similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers 274
Similarities between early school leavers and their parents 274
Summary of categories 275

4.2.8 Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving 278
Agreement among the five groups of respondents 280
Description of categories and comparison of respondents 280
Similarities between early school leavers, unsuccessful completers and parents 281
Summary of categories 282

4.2.9 Concluding remarks 284

5. Stakeholders' perceptions of the policy measures for reducing ESL 285

5.1 Policy measures to be implemented by teachers 286
Description of the categories of policy measures 288
Comparison of the five groups of respondents 290
Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures 291
Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures 293

5.2 Policy measures to be implemented by school administrators 295
Description of the categories of policy measures 295
Comparison of the five groups of respondents 297
Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures 298
Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures 300

5.3 Policy measures to be implemented by parents 301
Description of the categories of policy measures 302
Comparison of the five groups of respondents 305
Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures 306
Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures 307
5.4 Policy measures to be implemented by students

Description of the categories of policy measures

Comparison of the five groups of respondents

Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures

Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures

5.5 Policy measures to be implemented by the village community

Description of the categories of policy measures

Comparison of the five groups of respondents

Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures

Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures

5.6 Policy measures to be implemented by the Tongan government

Description of the categories of policy measures

Comparison of the five groups of respondents

Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures

Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures

5.7 Policy measures to be implemented by the Church Education Department

Description of the categories of policy measures

Comparison of the five groups of respondents

Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures

Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures

5.8 Culture-related policy measures to be implemented by the Tongan people

Description of the categories of policy measures

Comparison of the five groups of respondents

Correspondence between the causes of ESL and policy measures

Correspondence between the summaries of the causes of ESL and policy measures

5.9 Concluding remarks
6
Discussion

1. Extent of early school leaving
   1.1 More boys leaving high school early than girls
   1.2 Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

2. Characteristics of the early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

3. Consequences of early school leaving for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers
   3.1 Advantages of secondary schooling for early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers
   3.2 Disadvantages of secondary schooling according to the five groups of respondents: who to blame?

4. Causes of early school leaving
   4.1 Teacher-related causes of early school leaving
   4.2 School administrator-related causes of early school leaving
   4.3 Parent-related causes of early school leaving
   4.4 Student-related causes of early school leaving
   4.5 Village community-related causes of early school leaving
   4.6 Tongan government-related causes of early school leaving
   4.7 Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving
   4.8 Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving

4.9 Summary

5. Policy measures for reducing early school leaving
   5.1 Teacher-related policy measures for reducing early school leaving
   5.2 Administrator-related policy measures for reducing early school leaving
   5.3 Parent-related policy measures for reducing early school leaving
Policy Space and Policy Recommendations

1. Policy space

1.1 Dimensions of the current policy space

Agents and agencies within the Catholic Education System

Relationships within and between stakeholders

Nature, extent and purpose of decision making activities

Constraints to possible action by the agents and agencies

2. Policy recommendations

2.1 School as a community

2.2 Professional norms

Commitment to exemplary practice

Commitment to practice toward valued social ends

Commitment not only to one's own practice but to the practice itself

Commitment to the ethic of caring

2.3 Distribution of power and authority

2.4 Motivational rules for teachers and administrators

What gets rewarded gets done

What is rewarding gets done

What is good gets done
2.5 School membership

Overcoming impediments to school membership

2.6 Educational engagement

Overcoming impediments to educational engagement

2.7 Curriculum change

2.8 Link between school failures and the social problems facing Tonga

2.9 Government policy reform

3. Draft terms of reference for review of the education system

4. Directions for further research

Concluding remarks

Bibliography

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for an early school leaver

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for an unsuccessful completer

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for parents of early school leavers

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for teachers and school administrators

Appendix 5: Questionnaire for community leaders

Appendix 6: Reference from the Bishop of Tonga and Niue
List of Tables

Table 1.1 Returns to investment in education, by country type and level (%) 7
Table 1.2 Public spending on education as a share of the public budget (%) 10
Table 1.3 Primary school gross enrolment ratios and average annual population growth rate 12
Table 1.4 Estimated total literate and illiterate populations aged 15 and over in developing countries, by region 1990 (%) 13
Table 1.5 Estimated numbers of out-of-school children in developing countries, 1990 and 2000 (millions) 14
Table 1.6 Estimated percentages of the population of primary school entrance age attaining and not attaining Grade 4, and not entering school, 1980 and 1990 15
Table 2.1 Estimated early school leavers from primary schools in the South 40
Table 2.2 Estimated percentages of the population of primary school entrance age attaining and not attaining Grade 4, and not entering school, 1980 and 1990 41
Table 2.3 Rates of early school leaving from primary schools in Bangladesh 43
Table 2.4 General characteristics of at-risk students 48
Table 2.5 Characteristics of early school leavers and graduates 50
Table 2.6 Causes of early school leaving from the 10 studies from Bangladesh 58
Table 2.7 Causes of early school leaving in Bangladesh according to school leavers and parents 59
Table 2.8 Causes of early school leaving in Bangladesh according to community leaders 60
Table 2.9 The major components of an education system with inputs from and outputs to society 67
Table 2.10 Early school leaving percentages for students from families with varying degrees of functional and structural deficiencies 84
Table 2.11 Early school leaving rates by sector for students with scholastic or disciplinary problems 85
Table 3.1 Population by census division and district 94
Table 3.2 Students enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Tonga 104
Table 3.3 Recurrent allocation of government grants to secondary schools, 1990 106
Table 3.4  Primary school subjects and length of teaching hours  
Table 3.5  Early school leavers among prisoners  
Table 3.6  Registered marriages and registered divorces in Tonga, 1987-1992  
Table 3.7  Systems analysis framework for early school leaving in Tonga  
Table 5.1  Early school leavers from the new entrants of the five sample schools  
Table 5.2  Gender differences among early school leavers by year, Form and gender  
Table 5.3  Characteristics of early school leavers of 1988 & 1989 new cohorts and those of the total population  
Table 5.4  Failure rates in the Tonga School Certificate Examination, 1988-92  
Table 5.5  Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers of sample schools, 1988 and 1989  
Table 5.6  Advantages of schooling in the experiences of the early school leavers (ESL) and unsuccessful completers (UC) from the 1988 & 1989 new cohorts  
Table 5.7  Disadvantages of secondary schooling to early school leavers (ESL) and unsuccessful completers (UC) for the 1989 & 1989 new cohorts  
Table 5.8  Problems relating to early school leaving according to the parents of early school leavers, teachers school administrators and community leaders  
Table 5.9  Percentages of respondents using "Nofo noa" for 'unemployment'  
Table 5.10a  Facilities and resources  
Table 5.10b  School administration  
Table 5.10c  Teachers  
Table 5.10d  Students  
Table 5.11  School administrator-related causes of early school leaving  
Table 5.11a  Summary of school administrator-related causes of early school leaving  
Table 5.12  Teacher-related causes of early school leaving  
Table 5.12a  Summary of the categories of teacher-related causes of early school leaving  
Table 5.13  Parent-related causes of early school leaving  
Table 5.13a  Summary of the parent-related causes of early school leaving  
Table 5.14  Student-related causes of early school leaving
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Reference</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.14a</td>
<td>Summary of student-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.15</td>
<td>Village community-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.15a</td>
<td>Summary of the village community-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.16</td>
<td>Government-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.16a</td>
<td>Summary of the Tongan Government-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.17</td>
<td>Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.17a</td>
<td>Summary of Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.18</td>
<td>Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.18a</td>
<td>Summary of the Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.19</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by teachers</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.20</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by school administrators</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.21</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by parents</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.22</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by students</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.23</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by the village community</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.24</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by the Tongan Government</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.25</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by the Church Education Department</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.26</td>
<td>Culture-related policy measures to be implemented by the Tongans</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 2.1  Calculation of an annual rate of early school leaving 30
Figure 2.2  Cohort rate of early school leaving of the 1988 new cohort between 1988-92 33
Figure 2.3  Age cohort rate of early school leaving for the whole school over 5 years 34
Figure 2.4  Two different grade levels for calculation of rates 35
Figure 2.5  Comparison of annual rates of early school leaving, using different grade levels and student accounting procedures 36
Figure 2.6  Rosier's theoretical framework (p.18) 63
Figure 2.7  'Systems analysis' for early school leaving 69
Figure 4.1  Secondary schools in Tonga in 1990 139
Figure 4.2  Overview of purposes, questionnaires and respondents 147
Figure 5.1  Summary of the research questions, respondents and contents of the questionnaires 183
Figure 5.2  Theoretical framework for gauging the causes of early school leaving 221
Figure 5.3  Correspondence between teacher-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 292
Figure 5.4  Correspondence between the summaries of the teacher-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 294
Figure 5.5  Correspondence between the school administrator-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 299
Figure 5.6  Correspondence between the summaries of the school administrator-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 301
Figure 5.7  Correspondence between the parent-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 306
Figure 5.8  Correspondence between the summaries of the parent-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 308
Figure 5.9  Correspondence between the student-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 312
Figure 5.10  Correspondence between the summaries of the student-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 313
Figure 5.11  Correspondence between the village community-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 317
Figure 5.12 Correspondence between the summaries of the village community-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 318

Figure 5.13 Correspondence between the Tongan Government-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 323

Figure 5.14 Correspondence between the summaries of the Tongan Government-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 325

Figure 5.15 Correspondence between the Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 330

Figure 5.16 Correspondence between the summaries of the Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 331

Figure 5.17 Correspondence between the Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 335

Figure 5.18 Correspondence between the summaries of the Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving and policy measures 336

Figure 6.1 Rates of early school leaving of the sample schools 339
I wish to acknowledge, with deep gratitude and appreciation, the invaluable contribution that the joint supervisors of this study, Dr Michael Wilson and Dr Edward Booth, have made to the production of this thesis. Their professional advice, personal encouragement, commitment and friendship have together formed the substance of what I would justly call their "super-vision". It was indeed joyful and invigorating to work with them. Committing themselves even in their free time to supervise this work will always be remembered.

I am deeply indebted to AusAid for awarding me the scholarship for this study. If it was not for their help, this study would not have been undertaken. Their willingness to help especially in the death of both my parents is another proof of their commitment to this study. I am also very grateful to the Graduate School of Education and the University of Wollongong for their financial support, in order to present part of this study at the AARE Conference in Sydney in 1995 and at the Joint ERA and AARE Conference in Singapore in 1996.

Special thanks are due to His Lordship, Most Rev. Soane Lilo Foliaki SM, Bishop of Tonga and Niue, priests and religious for the support they have always given to my family. I am also grateful to the principals, teachers, students and parents of the Catholic High Schools, Mailefihi-Siulikutapu College, Vava'u District High School, Taufa'ahau-Pilolevu and St. Andrew Secondary School for their cooperation in the research fieldwork. I am deeply indebted to my brother, Taufa Tatafu, and his wife Kalisi Lata Tatafu, for the social and financial support that they had given my family throughout the duration of this study.

Leaving the best wine last, I would like to acknowledge with affection the loving support and cooperation of my wife, Kelela Maka'afalani Tatafu. Her commitment to our family and the education of our children allowed me more time to dedicate myself to this study, and the Tongan Catholic Community of Wollongong whose support and encouragement are gratefully acknowledged.
Abstract

Early school leaving : a crisis in secondary schooling in Tonga

This thesis explores the extent of early school leaving from one Anglican and four Catholic high schools in Tonga. The 'early school leavers' were the students who left secondary schooling before completing what is referred to as 'general education' (Forms 1 to 5). In other words, they were the ones who left secondary schooling before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination. It is argued here that the extent of early school leaving is much greater than the early school leavers themselves because it includes the 'unsuccessful completers', the students who actually completed their 'general education' but were unsuccessful with the Tonga School Certificate Examination. The early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers together make up about 90 per cent of the secondary school population in Tonga. In this sense, secondary school education in Tonga is "successful" for about 10 per cent of the total secondary school population.

The study also seeks to gauge the causes of early school leaving by the use of a conceptual model which is based on a 'systems analysis' framework (Coombs, 1985). The possible systems that could impact positively on students to either remain at school or negatively to leave prematurely are grouped under the two parallel systems of 'Schooling' and 'Community'. Each of these two systems operate at the macro, meso and the micro level. At the macro level of the 'Schooling Systems' is found the Government or the Church School Controlling Authority. The Government or the Church Education Department operates at meso level while the individual schools are found in the micro level.

At the macro level of the 'Community Systems', on the other hand, is found the Tongan culture whose umbrella encompasses the economic, social and political systems. The village
Community operates at the meso level and at the micro level is found the family (both nuclear and extended). Both the 'Schooling Systems' and the 'Community Systems' operate simultaneously as push and pull factors on the students at what is called the 'Decision-making Space'.

There are nine "agents" or factors identified in the theoretical model in the two major systems: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Government or Church Education Department, Tongan Government and the Tongan Culture. The research design ensured that each respondent was asked to assess the influence of each of these nine "agents" on early school leaving. The importance of this theoretical model is that each of the open ended questions on the causes of early school leaving, and on the policy measures for addressing the problem was related to each of the nine "agents".

There were five groups of respondents in this study: the early school leavers (N = 365), parents of early school leavers (N = 365), unsuccessful completers (N = 180), teachers and school administrators (N = 163) and community leaders (N = 120). The researcher interviewed the early school leavers and their parents while the other respondents completed their own questionnaires. All the questions on causes and policy measures were open ended. Three responses were asked from each respondent in order of importance.

The outcomes of the survey showed that this model is as holistic as possible in its search for the causes of early school leaving because the causes are more numerous and varied than the three causes - student and family factors, social factors and school factors - identified in the literature (Wehlage et al., 1990). Thus, in this study there were causes relating to teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Government or Church Schooling Authority, Government or Church Education Department, the Tongan Government and the Tongan Culture. Similarly, there were policy measures to be implemented by each of these "agents".
The findings of this study indicate that there are many causes and a host of "policy" measures to be taken into account in the attempt to address the problem. While there were many causes, the study strongly demonstrated that the examination and selection orientated academic curriculum was the crucial factor in the problem of early school leaving. Thus, the study recommended a school reform that the various "agents" in the 'schooling systems' and the 'community systems' must endorse if it is to take its full effect. In particular, these "agents" must reach a consensus on the type of curriculum and assessment processes that provide all students with opportunities to experience success in their secondary schooling.

Poverty was identified as one of the major causes of early school leaving. It was clear from the data that the financial difficulties of parents were related mainly to their inability to allocate prudently their limited resources to ensure that their children's schooling takes precedence over the other obligations. As for the schools, the respondents felt strongly that the inequitable distribution of government funds for secondary schools was partly responsible for their lack of resources.

In the draft terms of reference recommended at the end of the study for a Review Committee to address the major issues and problems facing the education system in Tonga, twelve major issues of the study were identified as the foci of the terms of reference: school management, curriculum, assessment processes, special teacher education programs, reform of classroom teaching, parental support, village support, school stakeholders forming a partnership with non-school stakeholders to address the educational issues, student and staff welfare policies, equitable distribution of government funds and maintenance of special character of each schooling system.
Early School Leaving in Perspective

"There is nothing more practical than an ideal" (Dr. Gerry Arbuckle)

An ideal is always beyond us but it serves the important function of challenging us to be as close to it as possible. This is true of the ideal that this study strives for which keeps it always in focus. The ideal is that any concern for education and its problems must be examined "not piecemeal as if it stands alone, but as belonging to a system with interacting parts which produce their own indicators as to whether the interaction is going well or badly" (Coombs, 1968 : 8). The reality and practicality of this ideal is clearly expressed in the fact that the critical components of the system should be examined from a holistic perspective. The study of the issue of early school leaving which is the focus of this enquiry is a case where such an educational philosophy is appropriate because it is and must be examined not only in itself but also in its relation to a wide range of social, cultural and economic factors.

This chapter is divided into seven sections. In the first section a brief discussion of the early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers will be offered together with the extent of early school leaving in Tonga. The consequences of early school leaving for the countries in the North is dealt with in the second section but in the third section the consequences of early school leaving for the countries in the South are discussed together with an assessment of the costs of early school leaving. The fourth section focuses on the research questions. Each question is given a brief outline of its basic concern. In the fifth section, the structure of the study is outlined in chapters. A brief description of the theoretical framework used in this study is provided in the sixth section. In the final section the perspective of this study is briefly stated.
1. Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

The term 'school dropout' has been extensively used in the literature but this study prefers the phrase, 'early school leaving' (Rosier, 1978), for it is more neutral and it sheds most of the possible unfortunate connotations of putting the blame on the student. The use of 'school dropout' suggests that the problem of early school leaving exists not because of deficiencies in the schools but rather of deficiencies in the students and their families. Thus, it would be senseless to advocate school reforms on behalf of students who are likely to leave school early, if the problem resides in the students and not in the schools. Furthermore, the use of 'school dropouts' could easily have the unfortunate effect of diverting attention away from a holistic approach to the problem of early school leaving.

In the same spirit of avoiding the stigma of labelling, the use of the terms 'North' and 'South' (Colclough with Levin, 1993) is preferred to other renderings like 'developed' and 'developing', 'first' and 'third' world countries.

Failure to complete high school is in fact a nest of problems which are illustrated by the following instances. The son of a solo mother who works to support the family is caught up in an economic whirlwind. A pedagogical problem is suggested in the students who flit from one curriculum or school to another. Counselling would benefit those who have been hurt by real or imagined slights suffered in school from teachers and fellow students. A daughter who leaves school to help with younger siblings succumbs to the demands of the family life. The range of circumstances across all early school leavers is daunting because they are nested in another way. Most students leave school because of the "compounded impact of, for instance, being poor, coming from a broken home, having been held back in the fourth grade, and finally having slugged 'Mr. Fairlee', the school's legendary vice-principal for enforcement" (Mann in Natriello, 1987 : 7).
Societies and educational systems themselves distinguish sharply between the 'finished' and 'unfinished' products of the education system. On the one hand, some students leave the school system before completing a standard cycle such as primary or secondary schooling. These are characterised as 'early school leavers' and 'school pushouts'. In the context of this study the former have left secondary schooling voluntarily while the latter have been rejected by the examination and selection mechanism of the education system. Thus, in this thesis the "early school leavers" leave during their secondary schooling whereas "school pushouts" complete their high school studies but were unsuccessful in proceeding to the next stage, the final examination. Hence, they are referred to throughout this study as "unsuccessful completers". On the other hand, those who persevere and complete the cycle, have the opportunities to either leave to establish themselves in 'the real world' or continue through one or more of the remaining cycles (Coombs, 1968). This explanation of early school leavers is an elaboration of the definition presented in the 'Abstract'.

It is important at the outset to state categorically that the school 'unfinished' products (early school leavers and unsuccessful completers) are not all failures, any more than the high school 'finished' products (successful completers) are all successes. The early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers all take with them something useful from school, more or less in proportion to the length of their stay at the system and the efforts that they put into their school education. In a number of countries the event of attending school and perhaps learning to read and write would give students a special status in society, and even set them apart from those to whom those opportunities were not available. Those who may have the opportunity to attend secondary schools or even the university without completing the course may nevertheless have earned the privilege of being included in the 'educated elite' of their societies (Coombs, 1985). However, in many countries where certificates and degrees are closely linked to employment of one's choice, the 'finishers' have much more promising career prospects, whereas the ones who leave school early or fail, "face a future in
which unemployment and low wages are a near certainty" (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez : 1990 : 1).

Early school leavers have been in many respects the neglected outputs of the educational system as evidenced at least by the fact that "there has been surprisingly little research done on the topic" (Weis, Farrar and Petrie, 1989 : p. x), and "there has been little research to date on providing school-based programs for youth at risk" (Mann, 1987 : 307). That is not altogether surprising since schools are concerned largely with the achievement of those who remain in school. Early school leavers are not their concern. At the same time, and this is true in Tonga, schools can benefit indirectly from student retention in that the more students they have, the more resources are allocated to them. Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez (1990) maintained that one of the reasons for the lack of research done on the topic is that there is no network bonding of similarly inclined professionals. This study seeks to place early school leaving on the research agenda as a significant issue which cannot be easily dispensed with because it has serious consequences for early school leavers themselves, wastage from school system and for the society as a whole.

Extent of early school leaving in Tonga

The rates of early school leaving derived from the Tonga Ministry of Education figures show that the average rate for the whole secondary school population of Tonga for 1991 and 1992 was 37 per cent (Reports of the Ministry of Education, 1991-92). This average rate of 37 per cent is not as high as 80 per cent in Bangladesh (Islam and Booth, 1994) or the 90 per cent in Papua New Guinea (Fox, 1996). However, since it is argued here that the extent of early school leaving in Tonga is greater than the early school leavers themselves in that it includes the unsuccessful completers, the rate of early school leaving would be closer to the higher rates previously identified. In fact, the extent of early school leaving is 87 per cent because of the remaining 65 per cent who sat the Tonga School Certificate Examination only
about 20 per cent were successful. In other words, 80 per cent were unsuccessful completers. Thus, the overall percentage of both early school leavers and unsuccessful completers was 87, and only 13 per cent was regarded as being "successful". This clearly suggests that the education system in Tonga as a whole is facing problems of monumental proportions. This fact alone is sufficient ground for the researcher to be seriously concerned about the problem of early school leaving.

2. Consequences of early school leaving in the North

One concern for early school leavers has arisen from some alarming financial realities from the North as represented by studies from United States. It has been estimated by Levin (1972) that United States "loses about $77 billion dollars annually because of early school leavers - $3 billion in crime prevention, $3 billion in welfare and unemployment, and $71 billion in lost tax revenue" (quoted in Weis, Farrar and Petrie, 1989 : ix). The majority of the inmates in any jail in the United States are functionally illiterate and yet a year in jail costs three times as much ($25,000) as a year in college (Mann in Natriello, 1987 : 11 - 12). Quite apart from the wider social and personal factors, from a purely economic perspective it may make better sense to put money into prevention and retraining programmes in order to keep students in school than to subsequently face the heavy economic and social consequences which often parallel early school leaving.

Levin's estimation is quite dated but an indirect estimate of the magnitude of the economic costs of early school leaving can be made by calculating the cost of early school leaving for an individual and aggregated to the national level. The U.S. Bureau of Census (1979) indicated that a male who completed fewer than 12 years of school would expect to earn $601,000 in his working years between 18 and 65 years, whereas a man who completed 12 years of education would expect to earn $861,000 over the same period. The comparable figures for a female early school leaver and a female graduate were respectively $211,000
and $381,000. Thus, the difference in lifetime earnings between a female early school leaver from high school and a high school graduate is $170,000 as compared to a difference of $260,000 between a male early school leaver and a high school male graduate. Since the number of male and female early school leavers in the U.S. was quite similar when this calculation was made in 1987, the average difference in lifetime earnings can be obtained by halving the sum of the male figure of $260,00 and the female figure $170,000 which was $215,000 (McDill, Natriello and Pallas in Natriello, 1987).

The difference in lifetime earnings cannot be attributed only to the effects of early school leaving. Some portion of this difference is due to factors common to both the early school leaving process and earnings determination. The most obvious of these factors are ability and socioeconomic background. There are many studies of the extent of bias in estimated rates of return to educational investments due to omitting ability and other relevant factors from the estimation (Griffin, 1976; Taubman, 1976; Olneck, 1979). Although the estimates of bias vary somewhat across studies, they all seem to be around 50 per cent. This means that about one half of the difference in lifetime earnings between early school leavers and graduates can be attributed to differences in ability and other factors between early school leavers and graduates, and about one half is due to the effects of early school leaving. Hence, for an individual early school leaver the economic cost of leaving school early is estimated to be $107,500 in foregone lifetime earnings which is, as stated previously, half of $215,000, the difference in lifetime earnings between an early school leaver and a school graduate.

Of the 3,800,000 high school sophomores enrolled in the U.S. in the spring of 1980, 13.6 per cent, or about 516,000, left school by the spring of 1982. For this one cohort of students alone, then, the estimated lifetime cost of early school leaving in terms of foregone earnings is 516,000 x $107,500 = $55,470,000,000 - more than 55 billion dollars (McDill, Natriello and Pallas in Natriello, 1987). If this figure is taken at its face value, Levin's
earlier conclusion still stands: the national opportunity cost of keeping students in school can scarcely approach the cost to the nation of them leaving school early (Levin, 1972). Steinberg, Blinde and Chan (1984: 113 - 132) succinctly outlined the major educational, social and economic problems associated with early school leaving as follows:

It is well documented that dropping out of high school is associated with an array of individual and social costs. For the individual, failure to complete high school is associated with limited occupational and economic prospects, disenfranchisement from society and its institutions, and substantial loss of personal income over his or her lifetime. For society, premature school leaving is associated with increased expenditures for government assistance to individual and families, higher rates of crime, and maintenance of costly programs for purposes such as employment and training (p. 130).

School administrators also indicated that high rates of early school leaving have affected not only the individual development of students, but also the schools' standards and achievement levels (Neill, 1979). Howe and Edelman, (1985) pointed out that "it cost only $500 to provide a year of compensatory education to a student before he or she got into academic trouble. It cost over $3,000 when one such student repeated one grade once" (p. 51).

Schweinhart and Weikart (1980) had shown that two years of preschool education for one child cost $5,984 and returned $14,819 in savings from a reduced need for later special education ($3,353), increased in projected lifetime earnings ($10,798), and the mother's income from paid employment during the hours the child was in the program ($668)" (p.46).

They asserted that consequences of early school leaving would have been extensively reduced if primary school education was successful. It would seem that the earlier the efforts are made to combat early school leaving, the less damage there would be for early school leavers and the greater the dividends to the wider society.
3. Consequences of early school leaving in the South

A search of the more recent literature has found no parallel estimates published on the economic and social costs of early school leaving for countries in the South. However, rates of return to investment in education can be used as an indirect measure of the benefits or the deprivation that a society and its citizens have derived from their education systems. From pioneering studies in the past two decades, the literature is now replete with estimates of returns to education (Psacharopoulos 1973, 1981, 1985). There is evidence on the private and social returns to investment in education as illustrated in Table 1.1 for the countries of both the North and the South. The social and private rates of return are the benefits that the society as a whole and the individual person have received from their respective investment on education.

Table 1.1 Returns to investment in education, by country type and level (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Social Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Private Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Number of countries reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe, Middle East and North Africa</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Psacharopoulos (1985)

- Data were not available because no control group of illiterates was available.

Note: Private returns take into account only the cost of education to the individual. In contrast, social returns are based on the full cost of education to society, so they are comparatively lower.
Although regional and intercountry variations are substantial, clear patterns may be observed in Table 1.1:

- **Primary education** is the most profitable form of investment, followed by secondary and, finally, by higher education.
- **Returns are** by far the highest in the poorest countries and decline with the level of economic development.
- **Because subsidies are** high in most countries, private rates of return are consistently higher than social returns, particularly in higher education.
- **In the few countries** for which time series data are available, the returns to education have remained relatively stable over time (World Bank, 1986, p. 8).

The social rates of return reported in Table 1.1 suggest that in most countries of the South primary education should receive the highest investment priority, followed by secondary education. A more recent global update of the returns to investment in education was again produced by Psacharopoulos, (1994) in which the findings in Table 1.1 are upheld. In that update Psacharopoulos concluded that investment in education continues to be a very attractive investment opportunity in the world today both from the private and the social point of view.

Apart from measurable monetary rewards, national investment in the primary and secondary levels of education may generate more externalities than would investment at higher levels. These externalities include such benefits as lower fertility, and better health and nutrition. As for monetary rewards, two examples from a number of available researches will illustrate the profitability of investment in education. First, research in eight countries shows that the annual crop yields of farmers with four years of primary school education are on average nine per cent higher than those of uneducated farmers (Jamison and Lau, 1982). Second, a survey of 52 World Bank agricultural projects showed that providing education or training
considerably increases the profitability of investment in agricultural development (Mingat, 1984).

At this point it is important to determine the trends in the flow of resources into education because if resources to education have increasingly dwindled, then there is little chance that the problem of early school leaving will be addressed adequately. Table 1.2 suggests that public expenditures on education in the South have actually declined as a percentage of the budget between 1970 and 1980. The most recent figures of public expenditure on education as a percentage of government expenditure between 1980 and 1990 were calculated for countries that provided data for both periods (World Education Report, 1993).

Table 1.2 Public spending on education as a share of the public budget (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin American &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe, Middle East &amp; N. Africa</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank, 1986

Note: Public expenditure on education includes capital and recurrent costs (see Unesco definitions, Statistical Yearbook). Mean percentages were calculated only from countries with data for all four periods.

It was found that there had been a further decline from 16.5 to 15.9 per cent for 26 African countries, and a further decline from 19.5 to 19.1 for five countries from South America. While there was no change in 13 of the European countries, there was an increase of 1.2 per cent in 17 of the Asian countries. However, this percentage increase in the Asian countries arose from large increases in the figures from the four Asian countries of Hong Kong,
Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Syrian Arab Republic whose level of economic development is generally higher than most of the Asian countries. Thus, the decline in public expenditure as a percentage of the budget in the South from the period of 1965 to 1980 shown in Table 1.2 generally continues into the period of 1980 and 1990.

The continued decline in the expenditure on education has been most acutely felt in the regions where the growth of school-age population is still high. This will continue to put more pressure on an already stretched resources. For all the regions of the South except East and Southeast Asia, the population aged 5-14 was expected to increase by at least 17 per cent between 1980 and 1990 (Vu, 1984). In Africa, where the projected increase was expected to be nearly 40 per cent, universal primary education (UPE) will not be attainable by the year 2025 unless the proportion of GNP devoted to education nearly doubles (Lee, 1984). This is highly unlikely when one realizes that the "same constraints that have caused government spending to stagnate are not expected to diminish in the foreseeable future" (World Bank, 1986: 8).

Despite the worldwide increase in the educational expenditure in the 1960s and early 1970s and the doubling of school enrolments in the South, in many of those countries fewer than half the children between the ages of 6 and 11 have enrolled in primary schooling. In 1993 14 countries as shown in Table 1.3 still had a primary school gross enrolment ratio of less than 50 per cent (World Education Report 1993). The gross enrolment ratio is the total enrolment in primary school education, regardless of age, divided by the population of the age-group which officially corresponds to primary schooling. The net enrolment ratios, which only include enrolment for the age-group corresponding to the official school age of primary school level, are even smaller. The annual population growth rate of more than two per cent for the countries in Table 1.3 shows that these countries still have a long way to go in their attempts to offer universal primary schooling for their people.
Table 1.3 Primary school gross enrolment ratios and average annual population growth rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gross enrolment ratio (%)</th>
<th>Annual average population growth rate (%) 1980-1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Education Report 1993

The low level of educational development in most countries of the South is also reflected in high rates of adult illiteracy. In 26 of 36 African countries surveyed by Unesco in 1982, more than half of all adults were illiterate. "The 'literacy gap' within the South is still the most salient aspect of the broader 'knowledge gap' between the South and the North. It is gradually being overcome, although not everywhere at the same rate" (World Education Report 1993:23). In 1990 as shown in Table 1.4 more than 50 per cent of adults in the regions of Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa were illiterate. While illiteracy rates have declined in the regions of East Asia/Oceania (20%) and Latin America/Caribbean (15%), the region of the Arab states with 49 per cent is still close to the illiteracy rates of the two regions of Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The illiteracy rates for women are much higher because 65 per cent of the total estimated number of illiterate adults in 1990 were female (World Education Report 1993).
Table 1.4 Estimated total literate and illiterate populations aged 15 and over in developing countries, by region 1990 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Literate</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia/Oceania</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Education Report 1993

Another indicator of the failure in educational strategies is the large numbers of children out of school (Table 1.5). The out-of-school children are the numbers of children of primary school age who are not enrolled in primary school. Increases in the number of out-of-school children at the age group 6-11 years for the year 2000 are predicted for three of the five regions, and decreases for Latin America/Caribbean and Southern Asia. As for the age group 12-17 years increases are predicted for all the regions. It is interesting to note that the predicted increases in the region of Eastern Asia/Oceania are substantially larger than the others.

It is important to note that a pattern has emerged from the figures in Tables 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5. It is the regions with declining educational budgets (Table 1.2), low gross enrolment ratios, high annual population growth rates (Table 1.3), and high illiteracy rates (Table 1.4) that also have high increases in the number of children out of school. It would seem that these same regions would be expected also to have high rates of early school leaving. Since these factors are inter-related, it is hoped that a serious attempt to address the issue of early school leaving would contribute towards a reduction of the related problems of low gross enrolment ratios, high illiteracy rates and large numbers of out-of-school children.
Table 1.5 Estimated numbers of out-of-school children in developing countries, 1990 and 2000 (millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Age group 6-11 years</th>
<th></th>
<th>Age group 12-17 years</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia/Oceania</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Education Report, 1993

Assessment of the costs of early school leaving

Evidence indicates that universal primary school education (UPE) has not been realized in many countries of the South (Colclough with Levin, 1993) and the resources devoted to this problem are likely to make the solution to the early school leaving problem even more unlikely. Furthermore, the economic evidence on the cost of early school leaving suggests that the South has been deprived of most needed benefits of schooling:

In virtually all developing countries, whatever their policy of admission at the secondary and higher levels, dropouts are enormous at the primary stage and have been a widespread cause for concern. It is not at all unusual for at least half the children entering the first grade in one of these countries to leave before the end of the fourth year, without even having acquired permanent literacy (Coombs, 1968: 71)

While the figures from Coombs are dated, they serve the purpose of showing that early school leaving has been a long standing problem. However, if the most recent figures of about 80 per cent of students leaving primary school education prematurely in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in Asia, Brazil, Peru and Guatemala in Latin America, and some African countries covered in the literature review are indicative of the high rates of early school leaving in the 1990s shown in Table 1.6, then the incidence of early school
leaving has improved only marginally from 1960s when Coombs made his estimate. Thus, the estimated economic and social cost of early school leaving to the South is enormous. With the budgetary allocations to education actually declining since the 1970s in most countries of the South as shown in Tables 1.2 and 1.3, and with the constraints on government spending on education not expecting to decrease in the future, the social and individual cost of early school leaving to the South is expected to rise.

Table 1.6 Estimated percentages of the population of primary school entrance age attaining and not attaining Grade 4, and not entering school 1980 and 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Attaining Grade 4</th>
<th>Not attaining Grade 4</th>
<th>Not entering school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Carribean</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least developed countries</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Education Report, 1993

The estimated costs of early school leaving to both the North and the South suggest that they can ill afford to remain complacent about the problem of early school leaving. The decline in budgetary allocations to education in the South is paralleled in the North, where constraints on government spending are on the rise as shown in Table 1.2. However, the problem of early school leaving in the North and more so in the South is not likely to be significant on their agenda unless pressure is mounting from a number of fronts: early school leavers, parents, educators, politicians, interest groups, international aid and lending organisations and researchers. It is in this context that this study hopes to contribute towards an awareness of and a decision to tackle the plight of early school leavers and to suggest measures that would reduce the incidence of early school leaving.
Glimpses of hope

Many countries have become aware that the rapid expansion of enrolments during the 1960s and 1970s was achieved at the expense of educational quality and that the time has come to shift the balance back in the other direction (World Bank, 1978). Glimpses of hope are on the horizon if one believes that the quest for the improvement of school quality would increase schools' retention of students. Many have sought ways of improving educational efficiency by attending to such quality variables as teacher training, textbook provision, and the effective use of school buildings and facilities (Gannicott and Throsby, 1992). Finn et al., (1979), Chamie, (1983) and Kelly, (1987) argue that that it has become clear that providing more equitable access to education to traditionally disadvantaged groups is not just a matter of creating school places, but is inextricably linked with the quality of education provided. Finally, a large literature has emerged in which average expenditure per student is taken as a proxy for quality (Johnson and Stafford, 1973; Ribich and Murphy, 1975; Link and Ratledge, 1975; Rizzuto and Wachtel, 1980; Behrman and Birdsall, 1983). According to Gannicott and Throsby (1992):

these expenditure studies have shown not only that quality has a positive and statistically significant influence on lifetime earnings, but the society's marginal rate of return to investment in school quality is at least as large as its marginal return to investment in additional years of schooling (p. 225).

While the concern for educational quality can have an indirect effect on improving the lot of students who are likely to leave school early, it can never be a substitute for more focused and serious strategies specifically formulated and implemented to prevent them from leaving school early. The somewhat humorous though appropriate warning sounded by Mann (1987) is timely here when he said that "people who believe in simple solutions (to the problem of early school leaving) also believe that break dancing cures arthritis" (p. 9). The problem is so complex and widespread that it needs special efforts and specific resources if countries are to cater for the welfare of all its citizens who have become increasingly aware that social and economic equity is an explicit goal, if not a right, to be attained.
The action to help children complete their school education is not conceived as a solution to
the prevailing social and economic problems, and much less a cure for all the ills of the
world (Coombs, 1968). However, the difference that it would make to these children's
lives and to the society as a whole would make the world a better place to live in.

4. The research questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions from the literature and the empirical data
collected from the research environment in the Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific.
1. What is the extent of early school leaving?
2. What are the personal and social characteristics of early school leavers?
3. What are the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers?
4. What are the causes of early school leaving?
5. What are the most appropriate policy measures for reducing early school leaving?

A fuller explanation of the research questions is offered in the research design in chapter
four. Suffice it here to give only an outline of the components of each of these questions.
In the first question which deals with the extent of early school leaving, there is a need to
examine what is meant by early school leaving and how its rate is measured. Defining and
measuring early school leaving may seem an easy task to perform but as it will be shown in
the literature review in chapter two, it is a real challenge. It is clear from the literature that
there is hardly any agreement on the definition and the measurement of early school leaving
and this makes it difficult to know with some degree of certainty the magnitude of the
problem, let alone being able to compare the findings of different studies. Not only does the
imprecise use of the term tend to impede systematic research and comparison, but perhaps
even more importantly, it tends to keep the debate about early school leavers on definition
and measurement issues rather than on other more important policy issues. Thus, the extent
of early school leaving is important because it indicates the magnitude and the complexity of the problem.

The second research question which focuses on the personal and social characteristics of early school leavers has been the concern of many studies of early school leaving (Cervantes, 1965; Combs and Cooley, 1969; Bachman, Green and Wirtanen, 1971; Rumberger, 1983). Students' characteristics were blamed in those early studies for their early departure from school. In this study far from being regarded as causes of early school leaving, these personal and social characteristics are treated as indicators by which a comparison is made between early school leavers and the national population and more importantly between early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers.

The third question focuses on the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers which is also analysed in the context of providing an avenue for comparing early school leavers and unsuccessful completers. The reason for conducting this comparison is to determine if there are similarities between these two groups in their characteristics and indeed in the outcomes of their schooling. If similarities in those two areas are found to be significant, then Tonga is facing serious educational problems in that the problems associated with early school leaving are much greater than early school leavers themselves. In effect, they would include the unsuccessful completers who together with the early school leavers constitute about 90 per cent of schooling failures in the education systems in Tonga.

The fourth question which focuses on the causes of early school leaving has two components: first, an assessment of school attractiveness through a set of multiple choice statements, and second, a set of open ended questions on the causes of early school leaving. The former provides some indicators of the schooling environment which impacted on the sample students. The latter focuses on the causes of early school leaving. It is envisaged that some of those causes may be related to the schooling environment which interacted with
the sample students, while others may be associated with a variety of non-schooling environments.

The fifth question seeks to determine the types of policy measures that may be formulated to address the problem of early school leaving. The success of the work in question four largely determines the effectiveness of the work of policy making because it has become almost axiomatic that the first step in the search for solution to a problem is to understand what causes it. In the light of that understanding policy measures can be designed to focus directly on the multi-faced problem of early school leaving.

5. Structure

In chapter one a holistic approach to the problem of early school leaving has been presented. It is an approach which sees society as part of both the problem and the solution of early school leaving. The consequences of early school leaving to both the North and the South call for action if society is to maximise its human resources. Chapter two reviews the literature on early school leaving for the countries of both the North and the South. The review focuses on the five key questions of the research, and attempts to build a theoretical framework from the international literature which incorporates the causes of early school leaving.

This framework provides a link to chapter three which describes the Tongan context of the research. It is important that the possible factors which may have given rise to early school leaving in Tonga are considered, and the theoretical framework developed in chapter two is critiqued to accommodate that context as an effective instrument for the task of delving comprehensively into the causes of early school leaving in Tonga. It is argued that the data from the sample schools cannot be adequately assessed without understanding the wider social and cultural context in which schools in Tonga operate.
Chapter four outlines the research design which deals with an explanation of the: five research questions and their various components, the five questionnaires and their rationale, the trialing of the questionnaires, the research samples, the respondents and the credibility of the researcher and the trustworthiness of the research data. The analysis of the empirical data is conducted in chapter five while chapter six focuses on the discussion of the research results. Chapter seven concentrates on the recommended policy measures that can be implemented in Tonga to reduce the problem of early school leaving and its related problems. A number of recommended adjustments to some aspects of the study is offered for future research on the topic.

6. Theoretical framework

The 'systems analysis' framework (Coombs, 1985) is used in this study as the means for gauging the causes of early school leaving. In this framework, the systems that are purported to have offered students to either remain or leave school early, are grouped under the two main systems of 'Community' and 'Schooling'. Under the 'community systems' is found the 'national community' at the macro level, village community at the meso level and the family community at the micro level. As for the 'schooling systems' the school controlling authority' (Church or Government) is placed at the macro level, the 'Education Department' (Church or Government) at the meso level, and the 'individual schools' at the micro level. These two systems impact on the students in a 'push' and 'pull' situation in what is referred to in the theoretical framework as the 'Decision Space'.

Unlike other models found in the literature (Rosier, 1978), where particular factors are singled out to be investigated in the survey, this study in its attempt to be as holistic as possible allows all the possible factors in those systems to emerge. Thus, there are nine "agents" identified in the theoretical framework which could have impacted negatively on
students to leave school early, and they are the: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Church Department of Education, Government Department of Education, Tongan Government and the Tongan Culture. These agents both positively and negatively impact on students to either leave or remain at school. Although those two systems are separated in the theoretical framework, in reality they overlap in their influences on one another and indeed on the students.

7. Perspective of this study

The ideal endorsed at the inception of this chapter links and gives perspective to all the chapters in this enquiry. As previously stated, it seeks to investigate the problems related to early school leaving from a holistic perspective. Thus, both school and non-school factors constitute the "policy space" that this study will explore in its search for solutions to the problem of early school leaving which is proposed in the title of this thesis as a "crisis in secondary schooling in Tonga".
The literature on early school leaving in the North has been heavily concentrated on the secondary school level whereas in the South the exclusive focus has been on primary school education. This is understandable because countries in the South have been mainly concerned with making primary education available to all their children (Colclough with Levin, 1993), while those in the North have concerned themselves with secondary school education and higher education. Among the countries of the North, the United States have been in the forefront in their efforts to reduce early school leaving. For example, only 30 per cent of the students entering the fifth grade in the United States in the 1920s went on to complete high school whereas as early as the 1960s more than 70 per cent completed grade 12 (Coombs, 1968 : 70).

Making primary schooling accessible and compulsory has been mostly achieved in the North whereas in the South it is an achievement that will take some years to realize. Most countries of the South have been signatories to compulsory primary schooling in many UNESCO conferences since 1960s, and much had been achieved by the 1980s. However, in a recent survey conducted by Colclough with Levin (1993) it was found that in some countries the dream has not materialized while in others the early achievement has been either halted or reversed due to a variety of reasons. Thus, while the North continues to grapple with the problem of early school leaving from secondary and higher education, the South is engaged in the battle to reduce early school leaving from primary schooling (Coombs, 1968).
This study is closely linked to the literature of both the North and the South in that its research will be conducted on the secondary schools in the Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific. In fact, the system of education in Tonga is more aligned with those in the North than those in the South in that primary education became compulsory at the remarkably early date of 1876 (Gannicot, 1990: 25). The 1986 Census revealed that 98 per cent of children of primary school-age were attending primary school. For the secondary school-age group (12-18 years), the enrolment rate is 77 per cent for males and 80 per cent for females (Funaki in Cole, 1993: 131).

In 1991, Takau, one of the four most senior education officials in the Ministry of Education in Tonga, asserted that the education system in Tonga is 'comparable with the best in the world' in the statement that he made in the context of the curriculum revision which have been taking place in the education system in Tonga.

The standard and quality of the syllabus and curriculum materials that Tonga is aiming at is not for a so-called under-developed country but for a fully developed system, comparable with the best in the world [italics added]. So the mission of the Curriculum Development Unit is to develop curricula of the highest standard, to enhance the quality of education for all children in Tonga (p.101).

Economically the Kingdom of Tonga is classified among the countries of the South. Its per capita income of A$750 with an average rise in real GDP per capita of 2.0 per cent per annum is indicative of its economic level (Fairbairn, 1992: 2). In view of the combined effects of elements of both the North and the South in Tonga, the literature on early school leaving of both the North and the South will be reviewed. The literature of the North will be concentrated on the United States in view of its early and continued concern for early school leaving whereas in the South the literature will be more widely represented in Asia and South America.
1. Structure of the literature review

The six questions that this study seeks to answer with regards to secondary schools in Tonga provide the framework for the literature review. The six structuring questions for the chapter are as follows:

1. What is the definition of 'early school leaving'?
2. How have the rates of early school leaving been measured?
3. What has been the extent of early school leaving?
4. What have been the causes of early school leaving?
5. What is the theoretical framework that would incorporate the causes of early school leaving?
6. What have been the most appropriate measures for reducing early school leaving?

A discussion of the complications involved in attempting to arrive at a common definition of early school leaving will be offered in the first section. The second section deals with the problems associated with the measurement of early school leaving which are also related to the complications associated with the definition of 'early school leaving'. The rates of early school leaving in countries from the North and South will be offered in section three, but the researcher is acutely aware of the fact that those rates are only indicative rather than comparative because of the lack of consistency in the definition of early school leaving and the differences in the methods used in the calculation of the rates.

In section four, the discussion of the causes of early school leaving will focus on the personal characteristics of early school leavers and their family background, and on the school processes which have been shown to be associated with early school leaving. In the fifth section the causes of early school leaving found in section four will be developed into a
theoretical framework which will be critiqued in the light of the research context in Tonga in chapter 3. In the sixth section the school measures deemed most appropriate for reducing early school leaving will be discussed.

2. Definition of early school leaving

'Early school leaving' seems to be an easy phrase to define because it appears that determining whether a student is physically present at school or not does not require special training. Yet it has proven to be a very challenging task as Hammack and Morrow in Natriello (1987) have discovered in their respective researches because "there are as many different definitions of a dropout (early school leaving) as there are school districts recording dropouts" (Natriello 1987:9). Phi Delta Kappa's Centre for Evaluation, Development and Research in an attempt to arrive at a consensus definition of early school leaving by analysing the school district reporting practices in United States secondary schools concluded:

We simply cannot agree what a dropout is. In some districts death, marriage, taking a job, entering the armed forces, entering college early, being expelled or jailed, going to a deaf school, business school, or vocational school causes one to be considered a dropout. In another district, none of these acts would be considered...Some districts solved their problem of who to count as a dropout by not using any definition at all, whereas other districts had three or four definitions, and neither we nor they seemed to know which one was used (Barber, 1984:7-8).

It seems that the wobbly nature of the data on early school leaving is troublesome because unless there is an agreement on what an early school leaver is, it is difficult to make a compelling case for more attention to the plight of early school leavers. If the data are unreliable, misunderstood, and a basis for finger-pointing, it is easy to see why leaders are nervous about this area. Even worse, it is likely that they will be unfairly criticized for something that is beyond their control. Mann in Natriello (1987) maintains that "until answers are found, most educational authorities will concentrate on what they do best, they will fret..."
quietly about school dropouts, and they will maintain a string of activities (often developed for other purposes) that can be trotted out in response to criticism" (p. 13).

*Causes of the definition variations*

The problems in the definition may be illustrated by reference to the situation in the United States where the problems began at the recording level. Procedurally, there were people entrusted in each school with maintaining records of attendance of students enrolled at the school. When a student formally left school, a notation was made regarding the reason for the student's departure. These notations were usually in the form of a code which generally included the following: transferred to another school; entered a private school; moved out of district; entered the military; entered full-time work; and so on. These codes were sent from time to time to the central office where systemwide data were collected and processed. However, Hammack, in Natriello, (1987) maintained that the "thoroughness of such centralised record keeping, its currency and ability to be used for student tracking and report generating, varied, as did the availability of personnel to utilize them" (p. 23).

Furthermore, there were problems relating to students who did not formally withdraw from the school in which they were enrolled. The possibility was that they either ceased to attend school altogether or they were transferred to another school but they simply failed to inform the school in which they were first enrolled. When students left school between the academic years, would they automatically be regarded as early school leavers? When students failed to report that they had formally left school, would they automatically be counted as early school leavers? When these students were categorised in the early school leavers' statistics as "not found", were they classified as early school leavers or students still remaining at school? The main problem here was that the responses to these questions varied from one educational district to another, and from country to country (Pallas in Stern and Williams, 1986: 154-
Another complication arose from the fact that school systems had developed special schools, alternative programs and the like, and the data collection for central record keeping became more complex and problematic. It was very difficult to maintain consistency in the reporting of early school leavers within educational districts as well as across them. For instance, some districts included special education students in their reports whereas others did not. Some counted all students enrolled in any type of program offered by the district, while others included only those enrolled in regular day high schools. The specific early school leaving codes that were used, varied so that in some districts, a transfer to a business or trade school was not registered as an early school leaver, while in others it was, at least if the school did not offer a high school diploma program. Finally, as the structure of educational systems varied both within districts and between them, there was no consistency in the grade levels included (Morrow in Natriello, 1987: 38-51).

Some districts had regular four year high schools and junior or intermediate schools that included the ninth grade plus senior high schools, while others had only one or the other. The data reported in the early school leaving statistics sometimes included only tenth through twelfth grades; others reported ninth through twelfth grades, but only those from regular four-year high schools, leaving unreported ninth-grade students who left school early from junior high schools. The effects of these different definitions on rates of early school leaving reported for systems would explain at least some of the variability between them.

*Quest for a consensus on definition*

Page and Thomas (1977), defined an early school leaver in the *International Dictionary of Education* as "a person who leaves school/college before completing his or her studies" (p.
56). The importance of this definition is that it refuses to enter the controversy over the reasons for departure from school. Although this definition is sufficiently clear, it leaves room for multiple interpretations. While some educational authorities solve their definition problems by counting early school leavers without any clear definition, others would have three or four definitions but they do not seem to know which one was used (Barber, 1984).

Although there are difficulties with reaching a consensus on definition, Good (Ed., 1973) the Dictionary of Education attempted to establish what could be regarded as the critical elements of a common definition by stating that early school leaving designates an elementary or secondary school pupil who has been in membership during the regular school term and who withdraws or is dropped from membership for any reason except death or transfer to another school before graduating from secondary school (grade 12) or before completing an equivalent program of studies; such an individual is considered a dropout whether his dropping out occurs before or between regular school terms, whether it occurs before or after he has passed the compulsory school attendance age, and where applicable, whether or not he has completed a minimum required amount of school work (p. 198).

While there is a wide variety of definitions of early school leaving produced by different organisations and countries, they all list the reasons why students withdraw from school. Further complications arise from the fact that these reasons vary as clearly shown in the following examples. Elliott et al., (1966 : 180) found that the phrase 'early school leaving' has been applied to a variety of cases: (1) pushouts - undesirable students; (2) disaffected - students no longer wishing to be associated with the schools; (3) educational mortalities - students failing to complete a program; (4) capable early leavers - family socialisation did not agree with school demands; (5) stopouts - dropouts who return to school, usually within the same academic year. Furthermore, it was reported by the Center for Evaluation, Development, and Research that in some districts (in United States) 'death, marriage, taking a job, entering the armed forces, entering university early, being expelled or jailed, going to a
special school, business school, or vocational school would be counted as early school leavers, whereas in others, none of these incidences would be included among early school leavers' (Natriello, 1987).

A working definition of early school leaving

Morrow (1986) reviewed the reasons for early school leaving that were listed in a number of these definitions, and he suggested three criteria for a definition by means of three questions. It is this set of criteria that is proposed here as the working definition for an early school leaver. Thus, an early school leaver is a student who at one time was formally enrolled in a particular school, and for whom all the three questions below would be answered in the negative:

(a) Is the student actively enrolled in a particular school?
(b) If not, has the enrollment been formally transferred to another educational institution?
(c) Has the student satisfied local standards for graduation? (p. 40).

A student death is not counted as an early school leaver.

3. Measurement of rates of early school leaving

A rate is expressed as a "fraction or ratio of the incidence of something happening, over the period of time it could have happened" (Morrow in Natriello, 1986 : 42). This ratio is often given as $n/d = \text{rate}$. The numerator ($n$) is the number of special cases out of the total of possible cases ($d$) which is the denominator or the baseline population. When one calculates the rate of early school leaving as in Figure 2.1, one would have to know the denominator ($d$), the total number of students from whom the early leavers departed, and the numerator ($n$), the number of students who fit the definition of early school leaving, and the period of time being considered. All the figures used in the following examples are hypothetical.
The calculation of the annual rate of early school leaving for the Vava'u School District as shown in Figure 2.1 is fairly straightforward, provided that the definition of early school leaving is agreed upon. However, some studies (Hammack, 1987; Morrow, 1987; Barber, 1984; Elliott et al., 1966; Page & Thomas, 1977) have made it clear that there are serious difficulties to be overcome before we can obtain valid and reliable data on the extent of early school leaving. The disagreements over definitions which have been discussed at length above, are further compounded by the different methods of measuring early school leaving. This current researcher could not agree more with Morrow (1987: 39) when he asserted that the variety of practices used by researchers and practitioners in the two areas: the definition of an early school leaver, and the calculation of the rate of early school leaving impede the development of a common knowledge base of early school leavers. It would seem that 'early school leaving' and the 'rate of early school leaving' are conceptually distinct but in reality they are so closely linked that one cannot be defined without the other. The fact is that the definition of 'early school leaving' determines the number of early school leavers which is one of the components of the calculation of rates of early school leaving.

Vava'u School District 1993

d = 1000 (total number of students at the start of 1993)
n = 100 (number of early school leavers by the end of 1993)

\[
\text{Annual rate} = \frac{100}{1000} = 10\%
\]

Figure 2.1 Calculation of an annual rate of early school leaving

There are three factors influencing the calculation of the rate of early school leaving: time frame, range of grade levels and student accounting procedure. The differences in the interpretations of those three factors account for the differences in the rates and the definitions
of early school leaving. The time frame is the period within which the number of students who leave school is counted. The range of grade levels refers to the pool of possible early school leavers from which the actual leavers originated. The student's accounting procedure consists of either the Average Daily Attendance (ADA) or the Average Daily Membership (ADM) which are the two common methods for reporting the number of students in a district (Garms, 1978: 233-234).

**Time frame: Age Cohort Method and True Cohort Method**

The time frame is the period within which the number of students who leave school is counted. If the time frame is one calendar year as in Figure 2.1, it is referred to as an annual rate but if it is several years, then it is called the cohort rate as in Figure 2.2. The cohort rate is derived from the method which has become known as the True Cohort Method (Booth and Islam, 1994) which employed data collected from each of the years that a given cohort of students is expected to graduate from school. Since the cohort rate has a time frame of several years, it is a more statistically involved method. The other method for calculating the rates of early school leaving is the Age Cohort Method. Its rate is referred to as the age cohort rate which is calculated from the census data. All the other methods are variations of these two methods.

**Age Cohort Method**

The traditional method of determining the extent of early school leaving was the Age Cohort Method (Barber, 1984) which relied entirely on the statistics provided by the official government body or the respective ministry of education. This method calculates the percentage of the total number of sample students who leave school from a particular year, and multiply that by the number of years they were supposed to be in education before a given exit
point. The product is the extent of early school leaving. For example, let us assume that the total number of the students in a primary school (Class 1 to Class 6) were 1000 in 1995 and 67 of them left primary school in 1990 before completing Class 6, the exit point. The formula for the calculation of the extent of early school leaving would be 67 early leavers of 1995 divided by 1000 students of 1995 and multiplied by 100 per cent, and also by the 6 years of primary school education because the exit point is the end of class 6. The extent of early school leaving is 40.2 per cent as given below:

\[
\frac{100 \times 67 \times 6}{1000} = 40.2\% = \text{extent of early school leaving}
\]

Evidence suggests that there are problems relating to the reliability of the figures presented by each school to the government body or obtained by that body through some other census method. In addition there are shortcomings associated with the averaging involved in the calculations (Karcher, 1976; Heyneman, 1979; Gustavsson, 1990).

*True Cohort Method*

With the True Cohort Method, the total number of new students coming to a primary school, for example, in a given year is recorded. Over the six years of primary school education, each student is traced meticulously to determine if he or she left school before the end of primary school education. The students who left their first primary schools for other primary schools will be further pursued to see if they completed their primary school education. After determining the number of the new students of that particular year who did not complete their primary school education, the extent of early school leaving can be accurately calculated as the percentage of the total enrollment.
The simple formula for determining the number of early school leavers is as follows:

A = the total number of new students coming to a primary school in a given year.
B = the total number of students who left from that group of new students over six years.
C = the total number of transfers who completed their primary school education.

The number of early school leavers = B - C, and the extent of early school leaving is the percentage of that total that left school before completing their primary school education.

Thus, the formula for the extent of early school leaving is given below:

\[
\frac{(B - C) \times 100}{A} = \text{Extent of Early School Leaving}
\]

Students repeating a year could be a problem in using the True Cohort Method, if they are not considered in the recording system. Figure 2.2 shows an example of how the 1988 new entrants of 'Apifo'ou College in the Tongatapu Group may be isolated from the other members of the school, and monitored in their years of schooling from Form 1 to Form 5 for the calculation of the cohort rate.

New entrants (d) to 'Apifo'ou College in 1988 = 600

\[
\begin{align*}
&n = 20 \text{ (leavers from Form 1, 1988)} \\
&n = 10 \text{ (leavers from Form 2, 1989)} \\
&n = 48 \text{ (leavers from Form 3, 1990)} \\
&n = 30 \text{ (leavers from Form 4, 1991)} \\
&n = 12 \text{ (leavers from Form 5, 1992)}
\end{align*}
\]

Total \( n = 120 \) (leavers from 1988 - 1992) = (B - C)

\[
d = 600 \text{ (total new entrants of 1988)}
\]

Cohort Rate = \[
\frac{n}{d} = \frac{120}{600} = 20\% 
\]

Figure 2.2 Cohort rate of early school leaving of the 1988 new cohorts between 1988-92
According to Morrow, (1987) the cohort rate of early school leaving “presents a more accurate picture of the success and failure rate” of a given cohort of new entrants (p.43). The reason for this is that the rate derived from the True Cohort Method is calculated from the early leavers of each year from Form 1 to Form 5 as we have done in Figure 2.2, whereas the rate from the Age Cohort Method is calculated in Figure 2.3, from the number of early school leavers from Form 1 to Form 5 in 1988, and multiplied by 5 (since there are five years from Form 1 to Form 5) to predict the age cohort rate of early school leaving over five years.

Total number of students in ‘Apifo’ou College in 1988 = 2000

\[
\begin{align*}
n &= 20 \text{ (500 students in Form 1)} \\
&= 18 \text{ (400 students in Form 2)} \\
&= 35 \text{ (400 students in Form 3)} \\
&= 30 \text{ (400 students in Form 4)} \\
&= 27 \text{ (300 students in Form 5)} \\
&= 130 \text{ Total school leavers in 1988}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
n &= 130 \\
d &= 2000 \\
\text{Rate over five years} &= \frac{130 \times 100 \times 5}{2000} = 32.5\%
\end{align*}
\]

Figure 2.3 Age cohort rate of early school leaving for the whole school over five years

In general, rates calculated by these two methods will give different results as shown in the rates found in Figures 2.2 and 2.3. These differences highlight the difficulty of trying to compare rates which resulted from different methods of calculation.
The baseline population or the sample population is influenced by two factors: the grade level distribution and the student reporting procedure. The grade levels used in the calculation could include all the grades from Kindergarten to Grade 12 or only grades 7 to 12. Variations in rates have resulted from either restricting the number of grades or including all the range of grade levels in the baseline population. If the number of grades is limited only to the secondary school section of the school, for example, the denominator automatically increases the rate of early school leaving, but if all grades in a school are included in the sample population, the rate alternatively decreases as shown in Figure 2.4. The number of grades included in the calculation will depend on the hidden agenda that individual school authority would have at the time. Although it seems quite unjustified, it is at the same time an illustration of the difficulty in getting consistency in the measurement of early school leaving.

No. of students for Tongatapu School District in 1989 for Grades K - 12 = 45272
No. of students for Tongatapu School District in 1989 for Grades 7 - 12 = 17317
No. of early school leavers for Tongatapu School District in 1989 for Grades K - 12 = 2150
Grades K - 12: \(\frac{2150}{45272} = 4.7\%\)
Grades 7 - 12: \(\frac{2150}{17317} = 12.4\%\)

Figure 2.4 Two different grade levels for calculation of rates

Student reporting procedure is the approach used to count the number of early school leavers. Traditionally, this is done either by Average Daily Attendance (ADA) or Average Daily Membership (ADM). 'Membership' (ADM) refers to all students who are enrolled in a school, whereas 'attendance' (ADA) is the average number of students who attend the school on a daily basis. A district using 'membership' (ADM) as the baseline population for the
calculation of the rates would have a bigger denominator than one using attendance (ADA) as illustrated in Figure 2.5. In effect a district that uses 'membership' (ADM) would calculate a lower rate of early school leaving than the same district employing 'attendance' (ADA). In this example, the rate was 3.3% for the 'membership' and 4.7 per cent for the 'attendance'.

\[
\text{Educational District of Tongatapu} \\
\text{(1989)} \\
d = 2150 \text{ early school leavers} \\
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{ADM} & \text{ADA} & \text{Attendance Rate} \\
K - 12 & n = 65427 & n = 45272 \\
K - 12 & \frac{2150}{65427} = 3.3\% & \frac{2150}{45272} = 4.7\% \\
\end{array}
\]

Figure 2.5 Comparison of annual rates of early school leaving using different grade levels and student accounting procedures

A further complication can also result in the calculation of rates from the maximum number of days used to define an 'unexcused' student as an early school leaver. The district that uses 'membership' allows the unexcused student 60 school days to remain on the rolls. Such practice maintains an inflated baseline population for the calculation of the rate, which produces a low rate of early school leaving simply because long-term truant students are included in the calculation. The district that employs 'attendance', on the other hand, includes only those attending school. Thus, the 'unexcused' students do not skew the baseline population, and this results in a much reduced rate of early school leaving.

The context in which the data gathering and reporting processes takes place has important implications for the quality of the data collected. Hammack (1987), for example, wrote of one
school official who reported that considerable pressure had been applied to principals in the school districts to keep the rate of early school leaving low. One of the ways of carrying this out was for the record keepers at school to intentionally mis-code students who were "not found" by placing them under the code of "transferred to private schools". Because there was no way in which data were shared and compared between public and private schools, such codes effectively meant that the schools' codes could not be checked, and their rates of early school leaving were recorded to be lower than they actually were. Other students who had in fact left school were thought to have been coded as having moved out of the district. These practices led the district's central research office to be sceptical of the data presented to them by each school. An indication of the distortion could be shown by the fact that one school in a particular system reported an "official dropout rate of 1.9 per cent but its actual rate was calculated by the central office to be 58.3 per cent" (Chicago Panel on Public School Finances, 1984 : 6).

Recommendations for the measurement of early school leaving

It would seem that the annual rate of early school leaving which is derived from all the grades at school is appropriate for any serious effort to reduce early school leaving because of the annual attention that it gives to the problem. However, when such annual rate is simply multiplied by a certain number of years, as employed in the Age Cohort Method, to determine the extent of early school leaving, its product is questionable because of the possible discrepancies arising from the averaging involved in the method. It would seem from a quest for consistency and efficiency that both the Age Cohort Method and The True Cohort Method should use all the grades in a school. The annual rate, on the other hand, should employ 'attendance' as its baseline population, and the cohort rate should be restricted only to all those students entering together to the first class in a school. However, the transfers to and from other schools to the same cohort of students would make the tracking down of early school leavers doubly difficult especially if they are not recorded accordingly at school.
The researcher agrees with Natriello, Pallas and McDill (1987) when they maintained that what is required is a new set of incentives to direct research efforts to link data on student characteristics and school processes to data on the phenomenon of early school leaving. Since previous efforts to collect early school leaving data had generally failed to link such data to the school programs, there had been few uses of early school leaving data to the efforts to improve schools except for public relations purposes. If schools were to mobilise efforts to address the issue of early school leaving in a serious way through variations in programs, then perhaps the collection of accurate data would assume somewhat greater importance. While it may be naive to suggest that such will be the case in most places, in those places that made a major effort to deal with the problem of early school leaving, the collection of valid and reliable data would assume some priority (Weis, Farrar and Petrie, 1989).

Assessment of the Methods of Calculation of Rates

Both the Age Cohort Method and The True Cohort Method have their own difficulties, however it is argued that the True Cohort Method would yield more reliable results because it avoids a lot of the difficulties identified by Weis, Farrar and Petrie, (1989 : x) in the gathering of the national data on which the Age Cohort Method relies for its calculation. Morrow, (1987) has argued in the previous discussion that the true cohort rate of early school leaving “presents a more accurate picture of the success and failure rate” (p. 43) of a given cohort of new entrants. The fact that many studies do not clearly report the way their rates were calculated adds to the complication. Further complications arising from the disagreements over definitions and the various components of the calculation of rates previously discussed highlight the difficulty of comparing rates.

Hammack and Morrow in their respective enquiries (in Natriello, 1987) argue that researchers must arrive at standard measures of early school leaving because while there were technical,
financial and time-related problems in collecting reliable data, the political problems may still prove to be the most difficult to address (Neill, 1979). Not only do teachers and students tend to protect students from the negative consequences of being listed as absent, but school records may also systematically exaggerate attendance in order to protect the school's resources, which are based on measures of average daily attendance. Because of these two reasons, 'many students who made only an occasional or brief entry into the school may be continuously listed as present' (Meyer, Chase-Dunn & Inverarity, 1960).

4. The extent of early school leaving

In view of the difficulties that have been discussed in the previous sections about the definition of early school leaving and the calculations of its rates, no attempt is made here to compare the rates in the countries of the North or those of the South or still less so between these two set of countries. The rates must be treated as only indicative of the magnitude of the problem of early school leaving in those countries. However, realizing that in the literature, no school district or country would for a variety of reasons prefer to have high rates of early school leaving, we can be confident that the reported rates, although they may be high, have tended to be lower than they actually were. It should also be noted that in most studies of early school leaving, as has already been pointed out, authors do not always make clear what method is used to calculate the rates of early school leaving.

Extent of early school leaving in the South

According to the Unesco figures during 1960 - 1970 "out of 20 pupils in Africa, only 10 completed primary education, and 10 out of 13 in Asia" (Dreier, 1982 : 70). In summing up the situation in countries from the South during the 1960s Coombs (1968) asserted that in virtually all developing countries, whatever their policy of admission at the secondary and higher levels, dropouts are enormous at the primary stage and have
been a widespread cause for concern...It is not unusual for at least half of the children entering the first grade in these countries to leave before the end of the fourth, without even having acquired permanent literacy" (p. 71).

Table 2.1 Estimated early school leavers from primary schools in the South (%)


Table 2.1 clearly illustrated the high rates of early school leaving in some of the countries from the South. Realizing that the rates from the countries in the South could be notoriously unreliable, Coombs (1968 : 71) presented Table 2.1 to suggest the order of magnitude of the problem rather than to give an accurate account of the situation. Furthermore, he added that "it is not unusual for at least half the children entering the first grade in one of these countries to leave before the end of the fourth year, without even having acquired literacy".
Most of these early leavers are destined to join the ranks of permanent adult illiterates at the bottom of the social economic pile. They are regarded as the 'wasted generation'. Table 2.1 is certainly sufficient to indicate the magnitude of the problem which according to Colclough and Levin (1993) has continued to challenge the South even to the present day. Coombs admitted that Table 2.1 concealed the socially important fact that early school leavers tended to "run a good deal higher in rural than in urban areas. The rate is also often higher for girls than for boys, depending on the traditional local attitudes toward women" (p.71). Colclough and Levin (1993) writing thirty years later also agreed with Coombs that a greater number of girls tended to leave school earlier than boys.

Table 2.2 Estimated percentages of the population of primary school entrance age attaining and not attaining Grade 4, and not entering school, 1980 and 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Attaining Grade 4</th>
<th>Not attaining Grade 4</th>
<th>Not entering school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>71.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribean</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least developed countries</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Education Report 1993

The figures in Table 2.1 may be considered to be dated but as Table 2.2 shows, the problem of early school leaving has only marginally improved between 1980 and 1990. The percentage of the population of primary school entrance age attaining Grade 4 actually declined
in the Sub-Saharan region from 60.2 in 1980 to 54.5 in 1990. While the percentage of students not attaining Grade 4 remained the same at 22.7 per cent between 1980 and 1990, the percentage of those not entering school increased from 17.1 in 1980 to 22.8 in 1990. In the two regions of the Arab States and Eastern Asia between 1980 and 1990, an overall improvement is found in the percentages of those attaining Grade 4, not attaining Grade 4 and not entering school.

However, in spite of the slight improvement found in the three regions of Latin America/Caribbean, Southern Asia and Least developed countries, the magnitude of the problem of early school leaving for all of them is still high with a range of 43.2 to 46.1 per cent in 1980 and a range of 30.6 and 36.5 per cent in 1990. The percentages of those not entering school have increased in the three regions of Eastern Asia, Southern Asia and Least developed countries between 1980 and 1990. From a regional perspective, the situation has generally improved but a regional approach tends to hide the sizeable differences among countries in a given region.

The more recent studies have shown that the incidence of early school leaving has improved only marginally in some countries and worsened in others. As a way of addressing many of the issues identified previously a preliminary country case study of early school leaving in Bangladesh was undertaken. The researcher analysed 10 of the studies that had been conducted on early primary school leaving in Bangladesh, and what stood out was the lack of uniformity in the rates (Ahmed, 1969; Mia, Alauddin & Islam, 1987; Qadir & Ahmed, 1980; Ahmed & Chowdhury, 1987; Ahmed & Hasan, 1984; Ahmed, 1986; Gani Rashid, 1988; Khan, Islam, 1986; Jabbar and Saifuddins, 1990; and most recently Islam & Booth, 1994). As Table 2.3 shows the rates ranged from 9 to 90 per cent in the same decade.
Three observations can be made from Table 2.3. First, although there are variations in the rates observed and these must have arisen from a number of sources, the fact remains that the rates are generally very high. Second, it is also important to note with regards to Bangladesh that almost 90 per cent of the population is rural, and this is reflected significantly in the rates of early school leaving which are much higher in the rural areas. This is also similar to the rates in Sri Lanka shown in Coomb's Table 2.1 above which are higher in the rural than in the urban. Third, there is a gender difference in the rates in Table 2.3 in that there are far more boys leaving early from primary schools than girls. It is important to note that the generalisation made by Coombs about the gender difference in early school leaving does not apply to the situation in Bangladesh where there are more boys leaving school early than girls.

Table 2.3 Rates of early school leaving from primary schools in Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Urban Rates</th>
<th>Rural Rates</th>
<th>Gender Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mia et al., (1987)</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>only girls were surveyed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed (1969)</td>
<td></td>
<td>88</td>
<td>more boys leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qadir &amp; Ahmed (1980)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>more boys leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam and Booth (1994)</td>
<td>much less</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>more boys leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed &amp; Chowdhury (1987)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>little gender difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed &amp; Hasan (1984)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>more boys leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed (1986)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>little gender difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gani &amp; Rashid (1988)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>more boys leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan et al., (1990)</td>
<td>much less</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>more boys leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan &amp; Mohsin (1993)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>more boys leaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam (1986)</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>little gender difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Constructed from those studies

Other countries of the South have rates of early school leaving similar to those of Bangladesh. For example, the overall rates of early school leaving for Brazil according to Davico, (1990)
were high with 84 per cent in the first level of education, grades one to eight. In a study conducted by Saif, (1981) on early school leavers from primary schools in North Yemen, the rates of early school leaving were found to be as high as the rates from Bangladesh and Brazil at 80 per cent. Can (1982), although not giving any figures, maintained that free primary school education from grade one through six in Indonesia was not able to be met because "large numbers of children usually drop out of elementary school after completing the third grade" (p. 67). The incidence of early school leaving in Papua New Guinea is even more serious. Fox (1996) found that about 60 per cent of students who enrolled in Grade 1 leave school before completing Grade 6. After Grade 8 another 20 per cent left school, and by the end of Grade 10, another 90 per cent left school. In fact, less than one per cent of those who started in Grade 1 managed to continue through to Grade 12. For girls the percentage is closer to 0.3 per cent.

The extent of early school leaving in the North

The extent of early school leaving from secondary schools in the North is generally lower than that for primary schools in the South. For example, in 1900 the rate of early school leaving for United States was about 90 per cent but by the mid 1960s it had reached its lowest level where it has remained relatively stable at its current 25 per cent. However, higher rates of early school leaving have been observed, for example, among the blacks with 50 per cent and the Hispanics with 70 per cent (Mann, 1986).

In a state-by-state comparison, the southern states generally have higher rates. For example, the national rate of early school leaving in 1985-86 was 29.4 per cent (Weis, 1989). During the same year, the States of Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina respectively reported their rates of early school leaving as 45.3, 38.2 and 37.6 per cent. It was not surprising to find that individual districts in these states reported rates which were higher than 50 per cent.
There was a gender difference among early school leavers - Peng (1983) found that there were more boys leaving school than girls. The difference in the study of Peng (1983) was 14 per cent of black females, compared to 20 per cent of black males, left school before graduation. Kolstad and Owings (1986) showed that early school leaving also varied by socioeconomic status. They reported that 9 per cent of students from the highest socioeconomic class left school early, compared to 22 per cent of students from the lowest socioeconomic class.

Rumberger (1987) and Hodgkinson (1985) showed that the rates of early school leaving varied significantly not only by gender but also by race, ethnicity and class, and that these rates were highest among black and Hispanic youth, the two groups that have lived predominantly in major cities. Using the 1980 sophomore data from *High School and Beyond* and the 1982 follow up data of the same study, Peng (1983) reported an overall rate (sophomore to senior year only) of 14 per cent. When it was calculated by ethnicity, the rates varied from a low of 3 per cent for Asian Americans and 12 per cent for whites to 17 per cent for blacks, 18 per cent for Hispanics and 29 per cent for American Indians.

One of the important conclusions that can be drawn from these studies from the United States about the extent of early school leaving is that the problem is much more widespread than the national statistics would have us believe. Studies in the United States that have used national data on early school leaving have suggested that early school leaving was a problem that was linked to particular segments of the population, especially the inner city minority groups. It would seem that it is closer to reality to maintain that a significant number of all groups - whites, blacks and Hispanics - have succeeded in school, and at the same time a significant number of each group are represented among the early school leavers (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack and Rock in Natriello, 1987: 54-60).
Assessment of the extent of early school leaving in the North & South

In trying to generalise about the extent of early school leaving in the North or the South, one must be conscious of the fact that there is a variety of rates between states and even suburbs within the urban and the rural environments. Depending on the methods used in the calculation of rates and the definitions used for 'early school leaving', studies do vary a great deal in their findings. It seems that the best one can make out of such a situation is to be aware of the risk of misrepresentations by making generalisations about countries in the North or the South from studies from countries of either category. The reality is that each study is particular to the research environment and the research methodologies used. Other people from similar situations or countries can benefit from these studies by comparing and contrasting them with what they could find in their own situations. What is generally true is that rates of early school leaving from high school in countries from the North are generally lower than those in the primary levels from the countries in the South.

5. Causes of early school leaving

Three major causes in the North

The literature on early school leaving has identified three major inter-related causes of early school leaving: social and family backgrounds, students' personal characteristics, and school factors. Almost every study of early school leaving correlated low socioeconomic status with high early school leaving (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack and Rock, 1987). Since minorities and children from solo parents were generally poor, they suffered the same educational disadvantage. Similarly, children whose parents had low educational achievement were also more likely to leave school early (Finn, 1987). The second cause of early school departure
was the 'personal problems of students' which were mostly independent of social class and family background. The list of such problems would include mental and physical health problems, drug problems, difficulties from death in the family or divorce, pregnancy and learning difficulties. There were other personal problems which were normally hidden from teachers but they usually surface unexpectedly. The third cause of premature school departure related to 'school factors'. Included in this list were: retention in grade, course failure, truancy, suspension and other disciplinary problems, unsuitable curriculum, poor teaching and adverse school climate (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez, 1989 : 25-27). Ekstrom et al., (1986) in their analysis of the national data of early school leavers in United States concluded that the most important correlates of early school leaving were school performance, as measured by grades, and behaviour problems.

Wehlage et al. (1989) demonstrated how these three factors may combine and interact with one another in the following hypothesis which they produced to explain the correlates of early school leaving:

If one comes from a low socioeconomic background, which may signify various forms of family stress and personal difficulties, and if one is consistently discouraged by the school because of signals about academic inadequacies and failures, and if one perceives little interest or caring on the part of teachers, and if one sees the institution's discipline system as ineffective and unfair, but one has serious encounters with that discipline system, then it is not unreasonable to expect that one would become alienated and lose one's commitment to the goals of graduating from high school and pursuing more education (p. 37).

The three sets of causes are clearly outlined in Table 2.4 which was developed from the study of fourteen secondary schools (in United States) that "were selected to guarantee a broad range of intervention strategies, as well as diversity among students" (Wehlage et al., 1989 : 2).

However, there have been a number of authors (Cervantes, 1965; Combs and Cooley, 1969; Bachman, Green and Wirtenen, 1971; Rumberger, 1983) who maintained that the schools
should not be blamed for students' early leaving from school, because they believed that the culprits were the 'personal and social characteristics' of the early school leavers themselves. These characteristics had been grouped under the two columns of 'family and social background' and 'personal problems' in Table 2.4. A discussion of this controversy will subsequently be offered.

Table 2.4 General characteristics of at-risk students

| Please see print copy for image |

Source: Wehlage et al., 1990: (p. 50)

Early school leavers are at fault

The commonsense construction of this proposition runs as follows. Because schools have had success with the majority of students, it is argued that it is the early school leavers and not school factors that are at fault. The assumption is that if the majority of students graduate at the end of their secondary school education, the school must be successful (graduation rate of 75 per cent since 1960s). The early school leavers, on the other hand, are "aberrant
individuals who are deviant, dysfunctional or deficient due to personal, family or community characteristics" (Wehlage, 1990: 35).

Since the 1960s researchers have typically examined early school leavers in terms of the 'personal and social characteristics' that they had in common. This argument suggested that it was these characteristics that caused students to leave school prematurely. The causes are within the early school leavers but not the schools. Finn (1987) has argued that if the problem of early school leaving resided in the students and not in the schools, then the problem could not be regarded as an educational one. In fact, the problem was considered to be anchored squarely on the shoulders of early school leavers and on factors external to the school, such as family and community characteristics.

A number of authors have espoused this view and their research have continued to maintain this line of reasoning. Combs and Cooley (1969) employed Project TALENT data on 440,000 ninth graders. Bachman, Green and Wirtanen (1971) used the Youth in Transition data on 2000 boys. Rumberger (1983) analysed the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labour Market Experience. Finally, the national data base of High School and Beyond, a longitudinal study of a national sample of 1980 sophomores have been analysed by different authors. These studies focused closely on the student characteristics which were considered to be associated with early school leaving. However, the most dramatic example of the research tradition which concentrated entirely on considering early school leavers in this way was Cervantes' (1965) study.

**Student characteristics correlated with early school leaving**

Cervantes (1965) through a series of case studies, developed a social-psychological portrait of the early school leaver. He arrived at a list of bipolar characteristics which distinguished the
early school leaver from the graduate. His list of characteristics, pairing early school leaver against graduate, included those outlined in Table 2.5 (Wehlage, 1990: 35). Some of his categories would seem humorous except that they reflect a persistent definition of the problem that continues even to this day. As in the past, today we see a construction of the problem that identifies the early school leavers, their personal characteristics along with their families and cultural backgrounds as the primary causes for their early departure from school. In short, researchers had not questioned whether the school is part of the solution or part of the problem. In fact, in their view the school was producing graduates except for a few who were incapable of succeeding mostly because of their own personal, home and community backgrounds.

Table 2.5 Characteristics of early school leavers and graduates

| Please see print copy for image |

Source: Wehlage, 1990: (p. 35)

A number of authors from the North have researched the background characteristics of students most likely to leave school early, and the experiences these students have in school (Natriello, 1982; Mann, 1987; Hammack, 1987; Morrow, 1987; Ekstrom et al. 1987; Wehlage and Rutter, 1986; Fine, 1984; McDill et al., 1983; Hamilton in Natriello, 1987;
The two background characteristics that are most strongly related to early school leaving were socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity. Students of lower socioeconomic status have been consistently shown to have higher rates of early school leaving than higher socioeconomic students (Alexander, Ackland and Griffin, 1976). Higher rates of early school leaving in the United States schools occur more often among minority groups (e.g. Hispanic) than blacks, and more often among blacks than whites (Brown et al., 1980). Other background factors include coming from a single parent family (Neill, 1979), coming from a large family (Rumberger, 1980), and living in a large city (Stice & Ekstrom, 1983). However, after controlling for student characteristics, race was not a variable that correlated with early school leaving.

While there are student characteristics closely associated with those leaving school early, what remained unclear was whether characteristics "such as low educational/occupational aspirations, weak sociability, negative school attitudes, low self-esteem, and external sense of locus of control were brought to the school or produced by school experiences" (Wehlage and Rutter in Natriello, 1987 : 71). It was suggested in the Youth in Transition Study that there was some correlation between disciplinary problems in schools and early school leaving. Deschamps, (1992) examined research from 1980 to 1992 and found that some of the more common characteristics of early school leavers included ethnicity, low socioeconomic status, coming from a single-parent family, a high rate of absenteeism, disciplinary problems, grade retention, low academic performance and poor achievement test scores. However, to know the characteristics of students as Wehlage and Rutter (1986) pointed out, is only the initial stage in the search for solutions to the problem of early school leaving.
The school as a cause of early school leaving

While the previous view has some legitimacy, it has the disadvantage of, as it were, absolving the school and other factors from having any impact on the decision for a student to remain at or leave school. A number of researchers (Ekstrom et al., 1986; Fine, 1986; Wehlage et al., 1989) have tried to change the one-sided view of blaming the individuals by suggesting that students had left school early because of factors other than their personal and home backgrounds. Wehlage and Rutter (1986) highlighted the need to focus on school processes.

Early this century some anecdotal evidence highlighted the need for school reform to mediate the problem of early school leaving. Todd, a factory inspector, questioned 500 children from Chicago in 1913 as to whether they would rather work in the factory or go back to school, if their parents could afford it. It was found that 412 of the 500 students would rather stay in the factory labour than "experience again the monotony, humiliation and even sheer cruelty at school" (Kliebard, 1986). This study was perhaps the first to suggest that the school environment could be responsible for early school leaving. In 1910 the rate of early school leaving from primary schools was 50 per cent (Gulick, 1910). These early leavers, it would appear, were driven out of school by various forms of corporal punishment and ridicule.

Laggards In Our Schools, was one of the early classic educational studies of the problem of non-promotion and early school leaving in the U.S. primary schools (Ayres, 1909). These were some of the questions that Ayres investigated: 'When did students leave school prematurely, and for what reasons?' 'Were there any schools that succeeded in educating a larger percentage of students than others?' 'If so, how was it done'. It was found that average students could not keep up with the courses offered at school, and slower students had an even smaller chance of succeeding in it. Ayres (1909) maintained that schools taught the 'habit of failure', and it was the obligation of the schools not to continue with those practices.
which resulted in students leaving school early because all students were capable of learning.

The issue of schools' holding power resurfaced in the 1930s. Eckert and Marshall (1938) in *When Youth Leave School*, saw the solution to the problem of early school leaving as one of school reform. From the interviews of the early school leavers, Eckert and Marshall (1938) found that one of the major problems was that the curriculum was narrow. It was geared more for students who were destined for college education. The average and the less than average students could hardly cope with the curriculum. Furthermore, the schools in which early school leavers were enrolled were considered to be unresponsive to the lower class and less academically talented students. These educators were unfamiliar with the students' home backgrounds, and where there was some knowledge, it was related to the negative aspects of those students. There was virtually no formal efforts to identify student characteristics, and much less to consider such knowledge as part of their responsibilities. There is a strong parallel here with contemporary schooling in Tonga.

The research tradition triggered by Ayres (1909), and Eckert and Marshall (1938) was followed by two studies of Boston middle schools (Wheelock, 1986) and in Milwaukee high schools (Witte and Walsh, 1985). The evidence from these studies questioned the policies and practices which caused many students to be suspended, to receive failing marks, and to be retained in a grade. The wisdom of these policies was questionable if schools were concerned about their rates of early school leaving, since research indicated a strong correlation between such policies and the incidence of early school leaving (Ekstrom et al., 1986).

The Boston school system reported a rate of early school leaving of about 50 per cent, and to help explain the problem, Wheelock (1986) used the Boston district data to examine the way in which school policies and practices have contributed to early school leaving. He examined the policies and practices that focused on attendance, non-promotion, failure and suspension, and
he found that students' experiences in these areas indicated that schooling was no longer a viable option for them.

The student retention policy in Boston seemed to worsen the problem of early school departure. The policy had worked under the assumption that 'social promotion' would be more harmful. The result was that one in six students were not promoted to the next class during the 1985/86 school year. As a result a large number of over-aged students saturated the middle schools, and being dissatisfied with their plight, they caused more disciplinary problems in the school. For students to leave school would be considered in such a situation to be an attractive alternative. To maintain high academic standards is an important task for the schools but high rate of course failure and non-promotion are hardly an effective way of achieving this purpose. The policy of suspension was also considered by Wheelock (1986) as a contributing factor to the incidence of early school leaving. Suspension, it was argued, was an indication that the student was not welcome any more at school. One in ten students was suspended from the middle schools in Boston between 1980 - 1986, and the rate was on the rise. In addition, the high rate of truancy revealed the inability of the schools to engage students.

The student experiences that Witte and Walsh (1985) found in the Milwaukee public schools were similar to those in the Boston area. The Milwaukee school data pointed to the fact that many ninth graders finished their first year at high school with credit deficiencies, indicating that the chances for graduation were beginning to be doubtful. Thus, it was not surprising to find that the rate of early school leaving for the Milwaukee schools was at least 40 per cent. The suspension policy in a school system which resulted in literally 18,812 suspensions out of 24,857 students being issued during 1984/85 was not considered to be effective. The attendance rates averaged about 87 per cent in the fifteen Milwaukee high schools. Again it was not surprising to find that high rates of early school leaving highly correlated with weak
attendance rates. The likely outcome of suspensions, failures and grade retentions in the Boston and Milwaukee schools was that students disengaged themselves from the schools and from learning in general. Consequently they seriously questioned the legitimacy of school, and for many the more attractive alternative was departure from school (Wheelock, 1986; Witte and Walsh, 1985).

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) produced evidence of the influence of schools from the comparison that they made between Catholic high schools and other private and public schools in the United States. They found that the Catholic schools were more effective than their private and public counterparts in retaining to graduation students who were likely to leave school early. Thus, school processes and student characteristics are considered by a number of researchers as the major influences on the incidence of early school leaving (Husen et al., 1978; Heyneman and White, 1986; Solman, 1986; Chubb and Moe, 1990). The situation is made more complex by the findings of McDill & Rigsby (1973) and Epstein, (1985) who maintain that the background characteristics of students determine the kinds of schools and educational processes to which they have access, and the characteristics of schools play a role in attracting students with certain characteristics.

School processes responsible for early school leaving

A number of school-related factors have been found in the literature to be associated with early school leaving. Low academic achievement, as determined by low test scores and low grades, has been consistently related with high incidence of early school leaving (Pallas, 1984). Low scores on standardized tests have been found to be good predictors of early departure from school (Walters, H.E. and Kranzler, G.D., 1970 : 97-101). Hunt and Wood (1979) showed that students had left because they were dissatisfied with school and reported lower self-esteem. Students who did not have any plans for further education were more likely to leave
school early (Stice and Ekstrom, 1984). Student behaviours that were likely to be associated with early school leaving were: enrolment in vocational curriculum, delinquency and truancy (Quay and Allen, 1982). The school factors that the North literature has found to correlate with early school leaving are as follows: course failure, truancy, disciplinary problems, credit deficiency and grade retention.

Deschamps, (1992) examined research from 1980 to 1992 that addressed characteristics of early leavers from high schools in the United States. Four major categories of early leavers' characteristics were found: demographic, social and family, deviant behaviour in society, and in-school. What is interesting about this recent study is the fact that all together there were more school related factors identified among the causes than the personal and social factors which indicated the important role that these factors have played in the problem of early school leaving.

Causes of early school leaving in the South

There is evidence that the contribution of the school factors to early school leaving from the countries of the South did not rank as high as the students' family and social characteristics. For example, with regards to India there were two studies edited by Gudren (1992) which focused on the causes of early school from primary schools. The first study conducted by Rosen, (1992), attributed the causes of early leaving to the following: the need to have children contribute to the family income, teacher drop out, lack of communication between parents and schools, and accessability of schools. In the second study by Hestrom, (1992) it was found that early school leaving was correlated with lack of student motivation which was attributed to a complex interaction of factors including socioeconomic status, social characteristics and poverty. 'Poverty' in its various forms (e.g. inability of parents to pay for school fees and for school materials, lack of school physical facilities, and others) was also
highlighted as a cause of early departure from primary schooling in the study carried out by Lynn, and Moock, (1991) on 2,500 households in the rural areas of Peru.

Carvajal, Morris and Davenport (1993) in their study of 'school desertion' in the Guatemala Highlands were concerned with the importance of ethnicity which played a crucial role in the determination of economic and social relations. The division between the Hispanicised Spanish-speaking Ladinos and Mayan-speaking Indians had governed virtually every facet of life. The Indians, the disadvantaged group, have concentrated in the highlands. With regards to school desertion Carvajal (1993) stated that "although in principle elementary schooling had been compulsory in Guatemala, in practice less than half of rural children (Indians) actually attended school" (p. 60). The causes were similar to the list that had been produced so far because they included 'demand for domestic work', 'demand for income earning activities', 'absenteeism', 'harsh treatment by poor-quality teachers', 'inability to cope with the medium of instruction', 'lack of student interest in education', 'lack of schools and teaching materials'. The three major groupings of causes - family factors, school factors and personal factors - were evident from this list, and again 'family poverty' seemed to dominate the list of causes.

The findings of the following authors from Bangladesh (Ahmed, 1969; Mia, Alauddin & Islam, 1987; Qadir & Ahmed, 1980; Ahmed & Chowdhury, 1987; Ahmed & Hasan, 1984; Ahmed, 1986; Gani Rashid, 1988; Khan, Islam, 1986; Jabbar and Saifuddins, 1990; and most recently Islam & Booth, 1994) on the causes of early school leaving have been summarised in Table 2.6.
Table 2.6 Causes of early school leaving from the 10 studies from Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main causes of early school leaving frequently mentioned in the ten studies</th>
<th>No. of times a particular cause is mentioned in the ten studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack of parental interest in education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Lack of student interest in education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Poverty and domestic work</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Lack of school facilities</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Income earning activities</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Failure in school examinations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Corporal punishment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Early marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Lack of transport to and from school</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Death of parents or family crisis</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


If the causes of premature departure from school shown in Table 2.6 were to be grouped into the three causes of: 'family and social factors', 'school factors' and 'personal factors', then the 'family factors' would figure most prominently because five of the eleven causes, namely the 'lack of parental interest in education', 'poverty', 'demand for domestic work', 'demand for income earning activities' and 'lack of transport to and from school' would be included under that category. To some extent these family factors can be regarded as 'poverty factors' because they are all related to some aspects of poverty. The 'personal factors' were associated only with the two factors of 'students' lack of interest in education' and 'early marriage'. Those two factors could easily be 'family factors' especially 'early marriage' which could be linked to cultural demands. 'Students' lack of interest in education' could also result from 'family' and 'school' factors. In general most of the ten studies did not mention 'school
factors' as frequently as the others. They included only the three factors of 'lack of school facilities', 'failure in school examinations' and 'corporal punishment' which were respectively identified by six, four and three studies.

Table 2.7 Causes of early school leaving in Bangladesh according to school leavers and parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Source: Adapted from 'Early School Leavers and School Attractiveness' (Islam and Booth, 1994 p. 56)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* This includes poverty, income earning activities, domestic work and lack of student interest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main reasons for early school leaving in Bangladesh may be summed up in Tables 2.6 and 2.7 which were constructed from the study of a sample of 16 primary schools in Bangladesh conducted by Islam and Booth in 1994. The findings from this study have a ring of familiarity about them. Table 2.7 is of particular interest because it ranks the causes in the order of importance according to the number of respondents to the questionnaires and percentages of total responses from early school leavers and their parents.

It is not surprising to find that the first four main causes - 'poverty', 'lack of student interest in education', 'demand for income earning activities', and 'demand for domestic work' - stood out among others because they were also the causes most frequently identified in the ten
studies. For 'no clothes' to come second was a reflection of the dire poverty of the sample population. As for the rest of the causes, they were all included among the ten causes found in Table 2.6. In accordance with the findings in Table 2.6, most of the causes were related to family factors. The personal and school related factors each accounted for only two of the causes. In general the responses from early school leavers and their parents in terms of the percentages of the total respondents were similar except in the factors of 'income earning activities', 'death of father/mother' and 'lack of instructional materials' where there were differences of at least three per cent.

Table 2.8 Causes of early school leaving in Bangladesh according to community leaders

Please see print copy for image

Source: Adapted from 'Early School Leavers and School Attractiveness' (Islam and Booth, 1994)

* This includes poverty, income earning activities, domestic work and lack of student interest.

The community leaders as shown in Table 2.8 and early school leavers in Table 2.7 saw 'poverty-related factors' as the main cause of early school leaving. As for the 'parental lack of interest in education', the parents and their early school leaving children ranked them not surprisingly tenth and sixth respectively in Table 2.7. It seemed that parents did not want their
lack of interest in education to be blamed for the early school leaving of their children. What was of particular interest in the responses from the community leaders in Table 2.8 was that the low value placed by the community in education was considered an important cause of early school leaving, alongside the parents' inability to buy learning materials for their children. Moreover, both the community leaders and early school leavers agreed that the 'lack of student interest' was one of the main causes of early school departure because it was one of the related aspects of poverty.

Assessment of the causes of early school leaving in the North and South

What must be emphasized is that students leave school for many different, often interrelated, reasons. For example, course failure, the most accurate predictor of early school leaving, is often the result of a complex web of students' personal and social characteristics that interact with the school factors. Students do not fail simply because they are black, poor, pregnant or come from a single-parent home. They fail, in part, because schools are not responsive to the conditions and problems relating to these personal and socioeconomic characteristics. This is clearly illustrated in this case study of the white American girl, Tammy, who was not black or Hispanic, and nor was she a resident of the inner city or on welfare services (Wehlage, 1990). She did not seem to lack parental support nor did she dislike school or had low aspirations. She was, however, a 'teenage parent' who resided in a 'single-parent home'. Though Tammy shared these two characteristics with many early school leavers, it would be inaccurate and misleading to say she left school because of them. Being in a single-parent family contributed to Tammy's departure from school only in that there was no one to care for her child when the regular babysitter was not available. Tammy failed courses and eventually left school because demands of being a responsible parent conflicted with the attendance requirements of her school. Being part of a school system which punishes absences with suspensions, the school was unable to respond to the unique demands placed on this teenage mother.
Unlike the causes of early school leaving in the South which were largely associated with family and community factors, the causes in the North had been related primarily to school and secondarily to personal, and social factors. The two most important causes relating to family were the 'lack of parental support' and 'family crisis'. Understandably the problem of 'poverty' figured more prominently in the literature from the South. However, 'drug problems' and the drug-related disciplinary and academic problems were more important in the literature from the North. 'Distrust of authority' at school was one of the main causes in the North but it seemed that the countries in the South dealt adequately with that problem through the kind of respect attached by community and cultural traditions to authority in general and to school authority in particular. In short, the differences in the cause of early school leaving between the North and the South would call for differences of approach to the types of measures that would be implemented to reduce the problem.

6. A theoretical framework to incorporate the causes of early school leaving

It is necessary from the outset in any research enquiry to provide a description of the factors involved in the investigation and of the relationships between them, as indicated by Runkel and MacBrath (1972). These relationships will subsequently be tested empirically. The term 'theoretical framework' is used here in a context similar to that used by Blau et al. (1956) when in their early work on occupational choice, they used the term 'conceptual scheme': "The function of a 'conceptual scheme' of occupational choice is to call attention to different kinds of antecedent factors, the exact relationships between which have to be determined by empirical research before a systematic theory can be developed" (p. 532). The practical side of the conceptual framework is that it enables the derivation of a set of propositions about the factors involved in the study and their inter-relationships, which in turn would guide the selection of the sample, the design of instruments for the collection of data, and the conduct of
In his study, *Early School Leavers in Australia*, Rosier, (1978) produced a theoretical framework which was developed from the following four main studies which he reviewed: *Youth in Transition Study* (Bachman et al, 1971); *Equality of Educational Opportunity Study* (Mayeske et al., 1973); *IEA Science Project* (Comber and Keeves, 1973); and *Blau and Duncan Studies* (Duncan et al., 1972). It is recognised that most major studies have themselves reviewed a large number of studies on the problem of early school leaving, and they have incorporated relevant and important results into their own theoretical frameworks. Rosier's review concentrated on what he termed 'the blocks of factors' or the wide categories of factors associated with the decision of early school leaving. In fact, it was these blocks of factors which were considered to have impacted on what he referred to as the 'school termination decision'.

The theoretical framework developed by Rosier was based on the assumption that there were two major blocks of factors influencing a student's decision to stay at or leave school as
shown in Figure 2.6. The first block was external to the student and it was the range of different environments within which he or she moved. The family and the school were considered to be the most relevant environments. The other major block of influence was internal to the student and it was a set of personal characteristics. For his particular study it was important to identify relevant personal characteristics at ages 14 and 16, the two periods in which data were collected. Since it was also considered important to isolate the effects due to the gender of the student, a fourth block was included in the theoretical framework. These four blocks of factors were considered to be in a temporal sequence, beginning with gender and family factors at the earliest stage of the theoretical framework, followed by the school factors and the personal factors at ages 14 and 16. Gender and family environment factors influence school environment factors, and they in turn impact respectively on age 14 personal factors and age 16 personal factors. Each of those five factors in Figure 2.6 impact on one another and on the criterion which is the decision to either leave or stay at school.

The relevance of this framework for the current study is that it focused on early school leaving as the criterion and it highlighted the three correlates of early school leaving which were identified in the literature: family and social backgrounds, personal characteristics and school factors. They were the block of factors that the current researcher needs to pay special attention to in the search for the reasons for early school leaving in Tonga. However, the researcher is also aware that these factors do combine and interact with one another, and they individually belong to a particular system in which they interact with other components in that system. Hence, the decision to include the theoretical framework used by Islam and Booth (1994) in the development of the framework for this current study.
Choice of the 'systems analysis'

Specifically, the theoretical framework used by Islam and Booth (1994) is selected because "it is grounded in the systems analysis" (p. 21). A system has been defined as 'a group of related elements perceived as organised for a purpose' (Mountcastle, 1980). A 'systems analysis' according to Coombs (1968) "functions as a wide-angled lens trained on an organism so that it can be seen in its entirety, including the relationships among its parts and between the organism and its environment" (p. 8). In fact, the 'systems analysis' as a method for analysing an education system was popularised by Coombs in his well known book, *The World Educational Crisis: A Systems Analysis*, where world education was examined "not piecemeal where every facet stands alone, but as a system - a system with interacting parts that produce their own 'indicators' as to whether the interaction is going well or badly" (p. 8).

To see the factors responsible for early school leaving not individually and independently but as belonging to systems is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it makes the determination of the factors directly responsible for the problem of early school leaving more focused because it forces the researcher not to accept readily a factor as a cause of early school leaving without delving more deeply into the impacts of all the components of that particular system at its different levels. It could be that a change discerned at the micro level may have been caused ultimately by some factors at the macro level. Secondly, it provides the policy makers with the information that they need for the determination of the policy measures most appropriate for reducing early school leaving. The assumption here is that knowing where the problem lies is an important step in the quest for solutions. Often the failure to address a problem springs largely from the failure to determine what the problem is and what factors have led to it (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984). Systems analysis then is considered an important tool for a more comprehensive indentification of the issues involved in the problem of early school leaving.
Although systems do differ among themselves in some respects, in common in a given context, they all have a set of inputs, which are subject to a process, designed to attain certain outputs, which are intended to satisfy the system's objectives. These form a dynamic and organic whole. If one is to assess the health of an educational system in order to improve its performance and to plan its future intelligently, the relationship between its critical components must be examined in a unified vision (Coombs, 1968, p. 9).

**Major components of the education system for systems analysis**

Table 2.9 under the heading 'Education Process' shows some of the more important internal components of an educational system. It does not show the whole of what must be looked at in a systems analysis because it is limited to the internal components of the system, and it is also divorced from the environment. However, since it is 'society' which supplies the educational system with the means for its operation, society must be added to the picture of systems analysis. Thus, education's 'inputs' and 'outputs' must be examined in their external relationships with society, for these reveal both the resource constraints that limit the system and the factors that ultimately determine its productivity to society. Hence, under the heading, 'Inputs from Society', Table 2.9 shows the multiple components of the inputs from society into the educational system, followed by the multiple outputs from the system to society (Coombs, 1968: 10 - 11).

'Imports' from other countries in the form of foreign teachers and/or students, foreign-made equipment or teaching materials, new teaching methods developed overseas to the local components in Table 2.9 adds an international dimension to the 'systems analysis'. Similarly, it 'exports' outputs such as teachers, students, new curriculum ideas and so on from the local components which become input components of foreign education systems, and this completes the circuit of international educational trade. The 'imports' are transmitted to the
local education system through the various levels of inputs from society.

Table 2.9 The major components of an education system with inputs from and outputs to society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs from Society</th>
<th>Education Process</th>
<th>Outputs to Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• knowledge</td>
<td>• aims and priorities</td>
<td>better equipped to serve themselves and society as:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to guide the system's activities)</td>
<td>• individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• values</td>
<td>• students:</td>
<td>• family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(whose learning is the main aim of the system)</td>
<td>• workers in the economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• goals</td>
<td>• management:</td>
<td>• leaders and innovators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to coordinate, direct &amp; evaluate the system)</td>
<td>• local and world citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• students</td>
<td>• structure &amp; timetable schedule:</td>
<td>because education improved their:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to deploy time and students)</td>
<td>• basic knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• teachers</td>
<td>• content:</td>
<td>• intellectual &amp;manual skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(essence of what the students intended to acquire)</td>
<td>• powers of reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ancillary workers</td>
<td>• learning aids:</td>
<td>• powers of criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(books, blackboard, maps, films, laboratories etc)</td>
<td>• values, attitudes, motives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• finances</td>
<td>• facilities:</td>
<td>• powers of creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to house the process)</td>
<td>• powers of innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• physical items</td>
<td>• technology :</td>
<td>• cultural appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(all techniques used in doing the system's work)</td>
<td>• sense of social responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• attitudes</td>
<td>• quality controls:</td>
<td>• understanding of the modern world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(admission rules, marks, exams, 'standards')</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• research :</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(to improve knowledge &amp; performance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• costs :</td>
<td>(indicators of the efficiency of the system)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Constructed from Charts 1 & 2 of Coombs, (1968), p. 11-12
Islam and Booth (1994) have organised some of the components in Table 2.9 into factors in Figure 2.7 which could influence students to leave school early. The three causes of early school leaving - *family and social backgrounds, personal characteristics and school factors* - identified in the literature are presented here not as individual blocks of factors but as factors within a particular system. This framework is chosen not only because it identifies the 'inputs' and 'outputs' but it also organises them into the macro, meso and micro levels of operation. At the *macro* level is located the government which supplies resources and produces policy measures for the improvement of the school system. The school system is kept under surveillance at the *meso* level by the state’s local level of school administration. School Management Committee (SMC) and/or the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is also located under the *meso* level to indicate its role as a community level monitoring agency which has salience for the school system. Thus, it is linked to a feedback loop. For the sake of simplicity the other systems at the macro level have been excluded from Figure 2.7. At the *community level* the vertical dimension specifies the following systems: cultural system, social system, economic system, personal system and physical environment system. Each system is associated with one or more characteristics which impacts both on the school system and on the dependent variable of early school leaving which is specifically mentioned under outcome because it is the main focus of this study.

Thus, the 'systems' from which the resources flow into the school system are outlined along the vertical dimension in Figure 2.7. The school system 'processes' the inputs into outputs or graduates. The final stage in the linear sequence is the outcome level (Holmes, Williams and duPlessis, 1994) which stipulates the consequences of the output for other systems. The school system may have a set of characteristics (e.g. low endowment, poor curriculum, orthodox teaching, short contact hours and teachers' shortage) that lead to output failure.
Early school leaving is one such output failure.

Figure 2.7  Systems analysis for early school leaving

The classification of the various levels into macro, meso and micro in Figure 2.7 is based on the scale or the size of the impact of a particular system on the outcome of early school leaving. At the macro level, the impact of the government on early school leaving would be on a larger scale than that of either the local government at the meso level or the school system at the micro level. As for the ‘community level’, on the other hand, the same basis for classification has been applied. For instance, at the macro level of the community level, the influence of the cultural system on other systems would be on a larger scale than that of either the village system at the meso level or the family system at the micro level.
However, since in the final analysis the decision for the student to remain at or leave school is usually taken at the micro level of the family, the influences of the systems at the macro level which can be very real and powerful, are often overlooked. For example, Islam and Booth (1994) found that of the twenty indepth case study causes of early school leaving that emerged from their study, the “lack of community awareness of education” came third to the “lack of parental interest in education” and “demand for domestic work”. It would seem from this instance that it is the widespread effect of the lack of community awareness of the importance of education, which in turn influenced particular families in their decision for their children to remain at or leave school early.

There are two sets of characteristics shown in Figure 2.7 which are purported to have impacted on the decision for a student to depart from school early. First of all, there are those derived from the school system (Wehlage, 1989) which are considered as ‘push factors’ (Islam and Booth, 1994) because, they, as it were, push students out of school. Secondly, there are factors from the community level (Sinclair, 1983) which operate simultaneously with the push factors of the school system in drawing students away from school. These factors are termed ‘pull factors’ (Islam and Booth, 1994) because they act as forces that pull students away from school. Although there are different systems and levels of operation stipulated in Figure 2.7, the impacts of all these systems are channelled to the students through the school and community levels.

*Criticisms of the theoretical framework in Figure 2.7*

The first criticism of Figure 2.7 is that it separates the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors in that the former is restricted to the school system while the latter is associated only with the various systems in the community level. In real life the influence on the decision to leave school is not so dichotomous as it is portrayed in the framework because the factors at the community level,
for example, would not all be 'pull factors'. As for the factors from the school system they would not all be 'push' factors. It would seem that it is closer to reality to consider each system as having both 'push' and 'pull' factors in its influence on early school leaving (Coombs, 1968; Erickson, 1987; Davies, 1984).

The second is that there is no clear demarcation line between the different levels of operations in the community level. For example, the micro level of the family and the meso level of the local community are all bundled together with the macro community level of social and economic systems. One would have thought that a set of clear categories would go a long way towards organising the factors that operate in different levels to influence the decision to either stay to leave school early. These two criticisms are important when the framework from Islam and Booth are reorganised in the light of the research situation in Tonga in chapter 3 to form the framework which will eventually be used in this study.

7. Policy measures for reducing early school leaving

School policy measures

It has been discovered in the literature so far that there is a diversity among early school leavers and also among the reasons for their premature departure from school. It follows then that a corresponding diversity in the prevention measures is called for, if students are to complete their high school education. Three correlates of early school leaving (personal characteristics, social background and school factors) have been identified in the literature but this part of the review restricts itself to the school factors because of their direct application to the current study. In view of the diversity of students' characteristics and needs, schools should develop a variety of strategies to meet them especially in the students who are likely to leave school early. It was clear from the study of educators in the fourteen selected secondary
schools from the United States that "a continued diet of more of the same curriculum and teaching was unlikely to engage at-risk students (students likely to leave school early) who had a history of failure" (Wehlage et al., 1990 : 26).

The concern for diversity in preventive measures must simultaneously be accompanied by a recognition that students do share common needs and goals that schools can help them fulfil. All students irrespective of their conditions have the following needs: the need to acquire a personal sense of competence and success; the need to develop a sense of identity and social integration; and the need to acquire the socially useful knowledge and skills that make an individual a good worker, parent and citizen (Wehlage et al., 1990 : 27). The assumption here is that these goals have been well established and that schools have traditionally been helping students to achieve them.

Thus, any effort to retain students who are likely to leave school early and to provide them with a worthwhile education must at the same time recognise the importance of these common goals. To successfully combine the diversity and the commonality factors in measures for the reduction of the incidence early school leaving, there is an urgent need for schools to undergo structural changes which must include reforms in teaching, curriculum and social relations between adults and students at school (Sergiovanni, 1992). The concern for the reduction of alienation at school must be a necessary part of the reform (Newmann in Weis et al., 1989).

Three policy measures for North and South

There are three main policy recommendations for the reduction of early school leaving emerging in the literature (Wehlage, 1990): the development of stronger alternative schools; the promotion of systemic school reforms; and the establishment of a community partnership strategy with students who are likely to leave school early. The preventive measures in a
Community partnership need to be approached from different angles. Firstly, there is an economic focus in that the local economic conditions which disadvantage these young people need to be addressed. Secondly, there is a social service focus in that disadvantaged young people are helped to gain access to these services. Thirdly, there is a need to link schools with a range of resources and opportunities in response to the identified problems of these young people (Sergiovanni, 1992).

McDill, Natriello, Pallas and Hamilton in Natriello, (1987) listed characteristics of successful early school leaving-prevention programs that included the following: small size, individualised approaches, small student-teacher ratios, and more counselling resources. Furthermore, they advocated that when school programs were consistent with the cultural and community conditions under which students lived, educators were able to be more responsive to the needs of individual students. Together these factors tended to make the school organisation more responsive to the concerns and problems of students. The ‘care’ advocated by Mann (1987) suggested similar strategies.

An example of an attempt to address the adjustment problem was seen in the ABCs provided by the Wayne Enrichment Centre in Indianapolis. "A" stood for attendance, emphasizing the need for measures to ensure that students attended school daily. "B" stood for behaviour, and that signalled the fact that students who would behave well would find it easier to learn and to be successful. "C" stood for credit which students must accumulate in order to show that they had completed the work assigned to them (Weis et al., 1989).

Perhaps the most crucial aspect of the school organisation in being responsive to the needs and concerns of students lay in the capacity of the school teachers to assess on a continuing basis the impact of their programs on students, especially students who are likely to leave school early. Gottfredson (1984) and others have argued that we could only begin to make progress
in developing effective school programs for students if we engage in the systematic design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of school programs. If schools were to develop the capacity to assess their own programs, the probability would be that researchers and practitioners would collaborate to generate evaluation processes that could help increase the responsiveness of schools to students.

7.1 School as a community of support

The logic of the attempts so far to deal with the problem of early school leaving is that the policy measures must be specifically tailored to meet the identified needs that a particular group of students have in common. What is suggested here is that while there is definitely a crying need for those carefully tailored programs, there is also a need for what is coined by Wehlage, (1990 : 223) as the 'School as a Community of Support'. The essential components of this broad concept are 'school membership' and 'educational engagement'. School membership is associated with a sense of belonging and social bonding to the school and its members but educational engagement is concerned with involvement in school activities especially the traditional classroom and academic work. The example of school as a community of support and of the catholic schools will be dealt with later for two reasons. Firstly, they would demonstrate that schools can be effective in dealing with students who are likely to leave school early, and secondly what these two examples have successfully demonstrated is put forward as effective measures towards addressing the problem of early school leaving.

School membership and social bonding

School membership and educational engagement comprise the central concepts of a theory towards the reduction of the problem of early school leaving. School membership is considered to be established through a reciprocal relationship between the students and the
adults who represent the school. The following authors - Shils, 1961; Wehlage, Stone and Kliebard, 1980; Wehlage, 1983; Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1984; Wehlage, Rutter and Tumbaugh, 1987; Tinto, 1987 - laid the groundwork for the theory of school membership. The most recent and more extensive treatment of the theory of school membership is found in the work done by Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez (1990) and Sergiovanni and Starratt (1993). School membership is important for all students but most particularly to those students who have histories of school failure and who lack the support of strong homes and communities outside the school.

Wehlage et al. (1990) examined a number of comprehensive and alternative schools in order to determine the reasons why students either left school early or remained at school. Social bonding which connected students to the school and to one another emerged as an essential component of the school membership theory. Social bonding was a state in which students were attached, committed and involved in the beliefs, norms and activities at school (Hirschi, 1969). Thus, a student was said to be socially bonded to the extent that he or she was "attached [italic added] to adults and peers, committed [italic added] to the norms of the school, and involved [italic added] in school activities and had belief in the legitimacy and efficacy of the school" (Wehlage et al., 1990 : 117). It had been envisaged that some of the existing norms in some schools were questionable as to whether they would help disadvantaged students at school. However, belief in the value of the institution was considered to be pivotal because it would be difficult to be attached, committed and involved, if one did not have faith in the institution. If, for example, teachers believed that only certain students could be successful at school, it would be very difficult for the school to be committed to the education of all students. On the other hand, if students were to believe that school activities and practices were inappropriate and unrewarding, then student commitment would be either weak or non-existent.
The valuable contribution that Tinto (1987) made to the development of the theory of school membership was seen in the number of impediments to school membership which he organised under the following terms: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence and isolation. One of the major difficulties that most students experienced when they entered secondary schools was a failure to adjust to the new learning environment. The inability to adjust often resulted in both academic failure and alienation from the school. It was found by Wehlage in Weis (1989) that secondary school teachers deliberately placed a social distance between themselves and students because it helped students "to 'grow up' and become more independent and responsible, and yet this social distance was a major source of strain for students" (p. 13). Schools need to be more approachable and supportive of students than they had traditionally been to make the transition to school environment less detrimental and more conducive to learning. The need for social distance between staff and students had to be re-considered seriously in consultation with students, and strategies for orientation and adjustment to school environment must be put in place in the school programs.

Difficulty was associated with a number of factors. Rarely was there found any difficulty with literal inability to do work; what many students required was more time and more intensive tutoring. Some experienced difficulty with sustaining interest and effort. Students often complained that teaching was boring and unattractive. Taking notes from the board and the lecture type of teaching, which was often based on reading assignments, were often mentioned as examples of 'unattractive and boring teaching'. The unfriendliness of some teachers and the sheer inapproachability of others became an obstacle to learning especially for students who are likely to leave school early.

Incongruence refers to the cultural mismatch between the student and the school. The question is whether the student fits well into the school situation. Thus, incongruency applies to students who could not identify themselves with the system. In fact, they perceived
themselves as outsiders. Students' race, places of origin, (perceived by themselves and/or others) class made them outsiders in schools which represented a mainstream middle class culture. Students often perceived that teachers favoured certain students. Academically bright students, for example, were preferred to those who struggled with their school work. Thus, schools which failed to consider the incongruency that some students might experience at school contributed to students' early departure from school.

Isolation relates to both students and teachers. A major concern of the school membership theory is the need for more frequent and high-quality interactions between students and teachers in the schools. Since families, churches and other institutions which have traditionally been responsible for the development of the relationship between students and adults have declined, the schools need to be more powerfully complementary in their roles. Teachers need to be approachable and friendly to students, and students, on the other hand, need to make the courage to enter into new relationships. The main claim here is that what happened at school was far more important than what had occurred prior to coming to school. Admittedly, some damage may have already been done but adults in the schools can help to break down the isolation by contributing in words and actions to a general belief that students are important and worthy of adult attention.

Educational engagement

The other main component of the theory towards reducing the problem of early school leaving is educational engagement which is concerned with the student commitment to the essential task of comprehending and mastering knowledge and skills offered in the school. Educational engagement is manifested when students answer questions, discuss issues, write papers, complete homework, do work in the laboratory and so on. It is also shown in their interest in the work that has been accomplished. Thus, educational engagement which requires intention,
attention, concentration and commitment from students is always the result of interaction between students, teachers and the curriculum (Wehlage et al., 1990).

The danger of an education system where educational engagement had been widely neglected was examined by Goodlad (1984); Sizer (1984) and Powell et al., (1985). It was suggested that sustained efforts in academic matters would be generated by extrinsic and intrinsic awards. The extrinsic rewards could include reward from parents, social approval from peers, the prospect of a good job and a corresponding life style. These rewards would have to be perceived by students as valuable assets before they could motivate them to be seriously engaged in educational pursuits. Thus, to be intrinsically motivated students would have to perceive academic tasks to be worthwhile in themselves. For example, some students may find it personally satisfying to learn about the history of their own country, while others may be fascinated by a sense of achievement when they were able to master certain knowledge and/or skills.

The other factor that could help promote educational engagement was the perception of students that there was a match between the value systems of their own personal and cultural backgrounds and those of the school (McDill, Natriello, Pallas and Hamilton in Natriello, 1987). In this regard significant adults outside the school would have to be proactive in promoting educational values and respect for educational success. Parents and guardians must ensure that impediments to educational engagement are kept to the minimum, and opportunities for educational engagement are made readily available to them. The schools themselves must not contribute to the disengagement of students by concentrating their efforts on a limited number of success stories, and leaving the majority to experience failure. Thus, educational engagement requires attention to the characteristics of students, the work the students are asked to do, the school environment, and the external environment which affects both the students and the schools.
Impediments to educational engagement

While there are conditions outside the school which militate against educational engagement, it is believed that there are three impediments that educators would need to address in order to increase the educational engagement of students (Newmann, 1988). Firstly, school activities are not sufficiently attractive to students because achievement is not tied to any valued goal. Secondly, the main learning process is too narrow, and it consequently makes the intrinsic rewards unacceptable for many students. Thirdly, classroom learning is often unrewarding because there is a preoccupation with superficial coverage of subject matter, which usually results in students not gaining the competence and the achievement that they need. Any reform to cater for students who are likely to leave school early would need to address those three impediments to educational engagement.

Teachers' beliefs and behaviours

So far the concern has been with the student membership at school and educational engagement but it seems obvious that a good school would have to be good for students and teachers as well, if the institution were to sustain its efforts on behalf of disadvantaged students. There are four basic beliefs accompanied by corresponding sets of behaviours which would constitute a teacher culture that would facilitate membership and engagement for students. Firstly, teachers must believe that they are accountable for success of each student. In accepting this responsibility they help each student to overcome impediments to success. Secondly, teachers must be willing to do more than just teaching students in the required period of time. The teachers must also be involved in: counselling, helping students who are in trouble, resolving anti-social behaviour and so on. Thirdly, teachers need to be persistent with students who are not ideal pupils. A deep sense of tolerance is needed especially when
dealing with students who would naturally merit suspension and even expulsion in other schools. Fourthly, teachers need to have optimism that all students can learn if they build on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses. To act on this belief is to be accountable, to be willing to do more, and to be persistent in building on students' strengths rather than focusing too often on their weaknesses.

The findings from the study of Paredes (1993: 15) sum up the type of climate that is conducive for the fostering of these beliefs:

(S)chools with positive climates had higher achievement and lower dropout rates. The school climate variables most significantly related to student achievement are teacher expectations for student success and teachers' instructional goals. The findings support the idea that school climate is an important variable in school improvement.

Workplace for teachers

This part of teacher culture is concerned with creating control and ownership of the school in order to make it a desirable place in which to work. Three interdependent elements of teacher culture include the following: educational entrepreneurship, self-governance, and professional collegiality (Rosenholtz, 1989; Wehlage et al., 1990; Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991). In the real life of the school these three elements constantly interact but they are separated here for the sake of analysis. The phrase 'educational entrepreneurship' applies to the context in which a vision is born and it is transformed through action to produce an intended outcome. Principals and teachers are called upon to be innovative and creative in their efforts to respond to the needs of students. Not only will they be responsive to students' needs but they develop a sense of ownership of their own efforts which will result in promoting school membership and educational engagement (Mintzberg, 1973).
The strategy of self-governance and democratic decision making by the staff of the school has the effect of creating a sense of control of the working environment and of making the school a desirable place in which to work. Because of the sense of ownership teachers have in school, they are motivated to gain further rewards, resulting in teachers' further involvement and commitment to the school. The third factor is collegiality which is concerned with both a feeling of sharing and a set of actions for the common good. It is also described as 'collective good' which challenge every teacher to work together for the good of all the people associated with the school, teachers and students alike. Collegiality is also expressed in the teachers' willingness to be supportive of professional efforts. Teachers should not be satisfied that their individual practice is professional but that the staff as a whole is professional in their work (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Enabling school structures

Gregory and Smith (1987: 212) demonstrated the powerful impact that enabling young people to shape their own education can have on their engagement and desire for further schooling. Wehlage and his colleagues (1990) argued that there are two structural characteristics - small size with one-one-one relations and autonomy - which would help mobilise school membership and educational engagement, and sustain teacher culture. A school with an enrolment that is greater than 500 pupils is no longer small. It is essential to the concepts of school membership and educational engagement that teachers have frequent contact with students but this would be difficult to achieve if the school is too big. It is argued that it is only through frequent one-on-one relations that care, support and personalised teaching are possible. It is important that teachers do not only understand their students but that they have the time and space to interact with them meaningfully. Small size has also important consequences for teacher relations because it would promote collegiality, make governance easier and mobilise educational entrepreneurship (Sergiovanni, 1992).
The other structural characteristic that would promote school membership and educational engagement is autonomy (Chubb and Moe, 1990). Teachers are autonomous when they control the school environment to the extent that they are able to do their work as they see fit. Autonomy is thus considered as a prerequisite to entrepreneurship, governance and collegiality because those factors can only become realities if teachers have the freedom to control their working environment. The freedom to establish a curriculum, to determine course content, to schedule student time and to use resources to meet desired goals are expressions of this autonomy. This autonomy gives the teachers the flexibility that they would need in order to respond effectively to the needs of students especially those who are likely to leave school early.

7.2 Confirmation of conclusions: High School and Beyond

Bryk and Driscoll (1988) analysed the *High School and Beyond* data in terms of their definition of school as a community, and their conclusions were parallel to the those that we have dealt with. Thus, their analysis was further confirmation of the conclusions that Wehlage et al., (1990) had derived from their empirical data. Bryk and Driscoll found that schools in United States that were high on their scores on 'school as community' were more effective in terms of student achievement and retention of students who were likely to leave school early. They also had more satisfied teachers than the others. The following conclusions were associated with these types of schools: classroom disorder was lower, teacher and student absenteeism was also lower, smallness contributed to meaningful interactions between teachers and students, student achievement were higher, rates of early school leaving were lower, and sense of school membership was stronger.
Further confirming evidence of the above conclusion was the culture and ethos of the Catholic schools which have been effective in dealing with disadvantaged students. In their analysis of the data from the *High School and Beyond*, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) focused on the Catholic schools and their students. Empirical evidence was provided to show that Catholic schools were more responsive to students who were likely to leave school than public and other private schools. In short, in their findings Coleman and Hoffer found that Catholic schools were much more effective than public or other private schools in 'retaining to graduation', not only poor and minority youth, but also other students who had come from what they defined as 'families with deficiencies' and students who had academic and disciplinary problems that typically made them more likely to leave school early.

Coleman and Hoffer produced two indicators to operationalise the term, 'family deficiency'. The first one was structural deficiency which included single parent households and working mothers. The assumption that such homes were deficient is highly debatable. Nevertheless, these "disadvantaged homes" which include those in which the mother was head of the house or in which the mother worked outside the home, do show high levels of early school leavers. The second indicator was functional deficiency which referred to the situation where there was a lack of shared activities and verbal communication between parents and their children. The four categories employed by Coleman and Hoffer to operationalise 'at risk students' were: minority, poor, "deficient families" and school problems. Coleman and Hoffer found as shown in Table 2.10 that Catholic schools were effective with families having both 'functional and structural deficiencies'.
Coleman and Hoffer summarise the situation as follows:

The Catholic sector benefits are especially great for students from families with deficiencies, whether structural, functional or combined. The relation of dropout to deficient families is small or absent in Catholic school, which show very low dropout rates for students from all types of families. In contrast, the public sector and the other private sector show strong relationships of dropout to family deficiencies, whether structural, functional or combined" (p. 129).

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) also revealed that Catholic schools were more effective in retaining students who had academic or disciplinary problems. In analysing the data on students who had academic and disciplinary difficulties, Coleman and Hoffer found that Catholic schools performed better than other schools as shown in Table 2.11. The early school leaving rates of other schools were similar and much higher than those of the Catholic schools. Their findings produced a clear empirical case for the effectiveness of Catholic schools. Thus, the Catholic schools were more successful than their other counterparts in retaining students who were likely to leave school early.
Table 2.11 Early school leaving rates by sector for students with scholastic or disciplinary problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Problem</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other private</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades below C</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more absences</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Philosophy of Catholic education

The overriding twin purpose of Catholic education is for students to know and love God and their neighbours, and to be taught a variety of skills and knowledge on a number of subjects. Most Rev. Bishop Finau of the Catholic Diocese of Tonga who worked most of his priestly life as a teacher, a principal and a Director of Education in the Catholic schools in Tonga, had written and spoken much about different aspects of Catholic education. In his analysis of the four most recent Church documents from the Vatican on education - *The Second Vatican Council Decree on Christian Education* (1964), *The Catholic School* (1986), *Lay Catholics in Schools* (1987) and *Witness to Faith* (1989) - Bishop Finau prioritised the aims of Catholic education in a chapter in the book, *He Spoke the Truth in Love*, as follows:

1. The life of those in the school and all the activities in the school are centred in Christ.
2. Christ is the one who reveals God to man, and man to man. His revelation gives new meaning to life.
3. His values become the gauge of life both for the individual and for social life.
4. The school is committed to the development of the whole person.
5. Those responsible for education are the parents, teachers, students and school
authorities. They must pool their resources and work together to provide a service to both the state and the church.

6. Catholic schools have a special concern for the poor and the weak to improve their lot and to participate in the formation of a just society.

7. In a rapidly changing time and cultural pluralism, the Catholic schools contribute Christ's values to redeem, purify and promote all that is good and noble in culture.

8. To promote in the school the dignity of the person, awareness and participation in the social life of the community (Mullins, 1994, p. 144).

There are three major features of these aims which have important implications for students who are likely to leave school early. Firstly, the centrality of Christ and his values gives a special emphasis to the fact that Christ's life was lived basically for the good of others. The whole school administration, teachers, parents and students have been encouraged to care for others in school especially the 'unattractive students' due to their academic and disciplinary problems. Secondly, the social aim of education calls upon all those associated with schools to be concerned about the good of society as a whole, the 'bright' and 'not so bright' alike. One of the expressions of this aim was a concern for the formation of a just society, and this demanded first and foremost that teachers and educators be just in their dealings with the students especially the less academically oriented students. Thirdly, the special concern for the poor and the weak would motivate those responsible for education to have a special concern at school for the children of the poor and the weak.

Those aims have found concrete expressions in the Catholic schools in Tonga with which the researcher is familiar: fees concessions for poor families, special scholarships for children of families who cannot afford their children’s education, academic performance is only one of a number of criteria for enrolment, and teacher recruitment is conditioned by the acceptance of the Catholic philosophy of education which calls on all teachers to be genuinely concerned for
the total welfare of every student, irrespective of their background, social status and religious affiliation. In his Lenten message for the Catholic Church in 1995, Pope John Paul II called on the whole church to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to educate all children especially the poor.

What is the most effective way of fulfilling those aims? Bishop Finau said that the christian atmosphere of a school created by a community of christian believing teachers is a must. What the young people look for is not so much teachers but witnesses, and if they listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses. This may mean that the principal and staff of a school have to review the entire programme of formation (Mullins, 1994 : 149).

Chubb and Moe (1986) maintain that it is important for Catholic schools, if they were to achieve their aims, that the members of the staff have a common vision, a common outlook on life based on adherence to a scale of values in which they believe. The vision that the Catholic schools espouse is that the purpose of education is the “development of the person from within, freeing him or her from that conditioning which would prevent him or her from becoming a fully integrated human person whose life is patterned on that of Christ” (Witness to Faith, 1989 : 78).

_Treating school as a ‘black box’: input-output model_

The theory that Coleman and Hoffer advocated about the difference between Catholic schools and other schools was that it arose from outside the school. In fact, it was derived from what they referred to as ‘functional communities’. Apparently there was a set of values that parents of children who attended Catholic schools shared, and these values were generated and sustained through face to face interaction among adults and children. Such interactions reinforced values about schooling for children, parents, teachers and the school itself.
This theory may have some validity, but it offered only a partial explanation for the effectiveness of Catholic schools. Its fundamental inadequacy was that it was based on a theory that treated the school as a 'black box'. Coleman and Hoffer offered an input-output model which treated communities, students and families as input, early school leavers and achievement data as the output. Between input and output is the internal workings of the school which cannot be ignored in any explanation of differential success of schools. In fact, a theory of school effects must include factors both from within and without the school environment. Hence, part of the explanation for the effectiveness of Catholic schools should have been related to factors from within the schools which are briefly outlined below.

**Evidence from a look 'inside' Catholic schools**

The evidence from the studies of Catholic schools showed that Catholic schools had both in theory and practice a culture and ethos that were different from those of the public schools because of the doctrines and ideology of Catholicism (Lesko, 1988). The basic philosophy of Catholic schools has been to provide a school environment where its members would develop themselves and their Christian faith through the interactions of their love of God and their neighbours. The overriding twin purpose of Catholic education is for students to know and love God and their neighbours, and to be taught a variety of skills and knowledge on a number of subject areas. Evidence from Chubb and Moe (1986), Lesko (1988) and Bruk et al. (1984) suggested that those two aims have generally been fulfilled in the internal workings of the Catholic schools.

Chubb and Moe (1986) also found that the Catholic schools were organised differently, responded to students differently and therefore produced different effects on students. The difference was due partly to the fact that Catholic schools 'tended to be small, less bureaucratic
and more client oriented' and partly to the influence of the doctrines and ideology of the Catholic Church. It was also suggested that the culture of Catholic schools was generally supportive of all students especially students who were likely to leave school early. School was regarded not as an organisation but a 'community' which emphasized naturalistic over mechanistic relationships among the people involved in schooling (Sergiovanni, 1993).

Lesko (1988) confirmed that the 'love of God and neighbour' and the 'caring for others' were more than mere doctrines because they influenced the actions and attitudes of the entire school population. These principles were actually communicated to students in religion classes, Masses, school bulletins and various school activities, and they certainly had some impact on peer group relations. The school culture was such that teachers actually put extra efforts into supporting young people to succeed. Teachers in general viewed their role as much more than just passing on knowledge to students in the classroom. In fact, their responsibility was also concerned with the character and moral integrity of the students.

Bryk et al. (1984) reported that a number of teachers in Catholic schools saw their work as a 'ministering for others' rather than just a job to do. In other words, they considered their work as a 'vocation' (to which they were called by God) which committed them to do all they could to help students to be successful and to become better people. In a sense the Catholic school was a 'safety net' that protected all of its students, even those who were not ideal students. The ideals and the philosophies that have given life and dynamism to the Catholic schools lend strong support to the education of the 'disadvantaged' children - in particular the students who are at risk of leaving school prematurely.
8. Concluding remarks

The literature review has clearly shown that 'early school leaving' is a challenge to the schools. It challenges schools to be more circumspect in their task of educating not only the bright students but also those students who need particular care. It is also a challenge to families and the society at large. It calls first and foremost for families to bring up their children in values which would be conducive for educational achievement. As for society at large, the findings from the study of Apple (1989) have offered worthwhile suggestions. First, the availability of job opportunities for successful students would be a motivating factor for future students. If students, for example, can only see unemployment as the reward for their efforts, then it would be difficult for them to be serious about schooling. Second, the life in society which is characterised by violence, drug abuses and other pathological dislocations inevitably influence students; and as long as there is no concerted and consistent efforts to reduce these social problems and their impact on children, students would have to make the constant efforts to, as it were, swim upstream in their schooling because once those efforts are relaxed, they are automatically drifting downstream. Perhaps, St. Augustine's analogy relating to the need for constant efforts to achieve progress in the spiritual life, may be applicable to the type of efforts needed to address the problem of early school leaving - "Not to go forward is to go backward". In a word, 'early school leaving' is an all-encompassing problem which calls for the genuine, concerted, and constant efforts of all.
The true wealth of a nation is its children who will be the men and women of tomorrow - not coconuts, bananas and peanuts ... no matter what vast sums are spent in the development of material resources of a country this comes to nothing if there is not a continuous stream of men and women well enough equipped to make use of this expenditure. (Quoted by Thaman, 1988 : p. 141)

The statement above was taken from a Report to Cabinet made by the present King of Tonga, His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV in 1951, while he was the Minister of Education. He unmistakably placed the task of educating children higher than any other issue. This aim has been realised in the primary school level for education for all (EFA) has been achieved in Tonga since the turn of the twentieth century. The law of the country provides for this and more importantly the Tongan people have seen and accepted education as the most important means for developing one's capacities and for earning a living in a country with limited opportunities and natural resources (Samate, 1993).

The success at the primary school level is not repeated at the secondary school level because the enrolment rate is 77 per cent for males and 80 per cent for females (Funaki in Cole, 1993, p.131). Secondly, the Ministry of Education figures for 1991 and 1992 show that 37 per cent of the secondary school population leave before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination, the public examination at the end of Form 5 (Report of the Ministry of Education, 1991-92). Thirdly, on average the figures from the Ministry of Education between 1988 and 1992 indicate that about 90 per cent of those sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination were unsuccessful. On the whole, secondary schooling is academically successful for only 10 per cent of the secondary school population.
The specific research environment for this study comprises one Anglican and four Catholic secondary schools in Tonga. However, these schools do not exist in a social and administrative vacuum for the ways in which they are organised may vary with the social and educational policies of the country (Andrew, 1985; Gordon and Lawton, 1978). The structure of those schools may vary with the society in which they are located (Stebbins, 1976). Thus, the research environment cannot be adequately surveyed without referring to the other systems impinging on it. In other words, the major aspects of the various systems of the Kingdom of Tonga are part of this specific research environment.

Structure of this chapter

The general theoretical framework which was developed in section six of the literature review in chapter two will be re-examined in the light of the research context in Tonga. This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section deals with the geography of Tonga, its social and cultural system, economy and the schooling system. The second section discusses the various factors which are perceived to have had some impact on early school leaving in Tonga. Taking into account that discussion and the theoretical framework that was developed in the previous chapter, a theoretical framework for this study will be finally constructed in the third section. The belief is that a theoretical framework specifically tailored to take account not only of the literature but also of the specific research context would be the most appropriate for this particular research. A concluding remark will be made in the fourth section.
1. A brief explanation of the research context in Tonga

Geography of Tonga

The Kingdom of Tonga or the "Friendly Islands" is an island nation comprising about 150 small islands; most of which are uninhabited because the entire population "is distributed over 36 of the islands" (Thomas, 1984, p.238). It lies between latitude 15 and 23.5 degrees south and longitude 172.5 and 177 degrees west within the Pacific basin. It covers a total area of 362,000 square kilometres, of which 747 square kilometres is land. On the largest island of Tongatapu is the national capital, Nuku'alofa, which is 3582 kilometres north east of Sydney, Australia. The islands of Tonga are divided into three main groups: the biggest group of Tongatapu lies just below the Tropic of Capricorn, the Ha'apai group is about 150 kilometres north and the Vava'u group is of similar distance to the north of Ha'apai. The other minor island groups are 'Eua and the Niuas.

Population

The most recent population census of Tonga was undertaken in 1986. The total population in 1986 was 94,535, more than 96 per cent of whom are Tongans. The population growth rate was steadily decreasing from 3.09 per cent in 1966 to 1.51 per cent in 1976 and even further to .49 per cent in 1986. Heavy emigration and slower natural increase have been responsible for this phenomenon. The annual rate of net emigration and of natural increase had respectively been 2 per cent and 2.3 per cent between 1980 and 1987. The age composition of the population showed that 44 per cent of the 1976 population was under the age of 15, and 40 per cent in 1986. This trend had been reflected in a decrease in the school age population (Sixth Development Plan, 1990-1996 : 61-64). This factor has already become a
cause of concern for some schools including the Catholic schools because the decrease in the number of pupils has meant a decrease in the school fees on which the schools have traditionally relied. The effect of this on students is that school fees would inevitably increase steadily, and that would adversely affect those families who could hardly afford to send their children to school at the current level of school expenses.

The regional distribution of the population shown in Table 3.1 indicated a continuous trend of migration from the outer islands to the main island of Tongatapu. The high population density in the Tongatapu island group was clear from the fact that 30.5 and 36.7 per cent of the total population of Tonga were found respectively in the capital city of Nuku'alofa and in the rest of the island group of Tongatapu. In effect, the combined population of the other four island groups shown in Table 3.1 amounted to only 32.8 per cent, as compared to 67.2 per cent in the island group of Tongatapu.

Table 3.1 Population by census division and district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. TONGATAPU</td>
<td>31,264</td>
<td>47,920</td>
<td>57,411</td>
<td>63,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. VAVAU</td>
<td>12,477</td>
<td>13,533</td>
<td>15,068</td>
<td>15,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. HA'APAI</td>
<td>9,918</td>
<td>10,591</td>
<td>10,792</td>
<td>8,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 'EU'A</td>
<td>1,925</td>
<td>3,391</td>
<td>4,486</td>
<td>4,393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. NIUAS</td>
<td>1,254</td>
<td>1,994</td>
<td>2,328</td>
<td>2,379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>56,838</td>
<td>77,429</td>
<td>90,085</td>
<td>94,535</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from *Tonga Statistical Abstract, 1993*

Although there has been a decline in the population growth rate, the increasingly high population concentration in the Tongatapu island group has correspondingly put severe pressure on all the services and in particular on the efficiency of the schooling system. Overcrowded classrooms and increasing teacher student ratio have become a common
experience in most schools in Tongatapu. One would have thought that educational efficiency would be more enhanced in the other island groups in view of their smaller population concentration, but factors usually characteristic of the peripheral areas (for example, general lack of services and in most cases lower quality services) as compared with those in the core have impacted adversely on the educational efficiency of these areas. Thus, both the strain on the educational services in the high population density in the main island of Tongatapu and the generally lower quality services in the other four island groups have meant that the whole system faces difficult problems.

Social system

The social system in Tonga is based on the network of relationships and obligations between the King (tu'i), nobles, (nopele) talking chiefs (matapule), professionals (mu'a), commoners (tu'a) and slaves (popula) (Gifford, 1929). The three tiers (Afeaki, 1983) of the royalty (tu'i) on top, nobility (nopele) in the middle and the commoners (tu'a) at the bottom represent the core structure of the current social system instead of the six tiers stipulated by Gifford, (1929). Since it is the King and the nobles who own the land, and the land has traditionally been given to every male Tongan who reaches the age of 16, there is a reciprocity between the commoners, the nobles and the King. The loyalty, respect, rank, kinship and the obligations that exist between those three levels have up to this decade made Tonga a stable and peace-loving country. The influence of Christianity has been strong on promoting those relationships and obligations. For example, the practice of the people coming together to meet the King and their nobles with gifts in the new year's day is also done to the Head of Christian Churches and their Ministers.

The two concepts of "pule" (authority, boss) and "eiki" (chief, noble) are essential to the stratified structure of the Tongan society. Every Tongan is taught to respect their "eiki" and
their "pule" from an early age. "Eiki" in the context of kinship is associated with rank first and foremost, and only secondarily with authority (pule). "Pule", on the other hand, is related primarily to the power to influence those 'lower' than oneself. The power is legitimatised when it is accepted and recognised by those who are being influenced. While these two positions can be occupied by the same person, they can exist independently of each other (Thaman, 1988, p.42-45). The interplay between these two concepts is further complicated by females having higher ranking than males in the context of certain cultural events. For example, in the case of a funeral or marriage, it is the aunt or the eldest sister of one's father who calls the tune. She is referred to as the 'fahu' or the female who is socially recognised as having the authority and the rank to be in charge of the funeral or marriage. It is the respect and the obligations that one level of ranking has to those in other levels which generate the reciprocity that has apparently kept the Tongan society together.

Thaman (1988) notes that the Tongan society has been variously described by its observers as "stable", "traditional", "conservative", "authoritarian", "chiefly", and "oppressive" (p. 36). It is argued that while there are some elements of truth in these labels, on the whole the social system in Tonga has served Tonga well for centuries. It has made them "a respectful people" (kakai anga faka'apa'apa). It has helped them "live for one another in their obligations" (fai fatonga ki honau kainga'). Some Tongans under the auspices of the Pro-democracy movement have advocated changes to some of the elements of this stratified society. They have some supporters in the community but the majority of the people still hold firm to the traditional structure of the Tongan society (taufatungamotu'a o e fonua) as the basis for its viability and stability.
Economy

The economic indicators of the real GNP growth of only 2.1 per cent between 1980-90, GNP per capita of US$1010 for 1990 and real GNP per capita growth of 1.5 per cent between 1980-90 (Cole and Tambunlertchai, 1993, p. 13) supports Gannicott when he states that "Tonga...has had poor economic performance in recent years, and with very low growth of wage jobs" (Gannicott, 1990, p. 27). With the inflation rate at 14.4 per cent in 1990, the merchandise trade balance of -44.9 US$ million in 1991, and the aid per capita of US$301, one can clearly see that the level of economic development is indeed low. In fact, the figures provided by Cole and Tambunlertchai (1993) show that it is lower than most of its Pacific neighbours.

Tonga is an agricultural country, relying on squash pumpkins, vanilla, bananas, water melons, taro, yams and other cash crops for most of its exports. The physical problems associating with the whims of nature (e.g. hurricane, drought, and pests) are not as devastating to the agricultural viability of the country as the behaviours of the markets. For example, the export of water melons and bananas has been at the mercy of the New Zealand markets. Samate (1993) pinpointed the problem when she stated that "if farmers in Tonga are given the right products with the right markets, they will produce. They can work very hard and they can come up with the right returns" (p. 6a).

Manufacturing projects have been avenues for export but many have failed because of a number of factors. The dessicated coconut industry failed due to the use of wrong technology; lack of consistent supply of raw materials was responsible for the closing down of the passionfruit drink factory. Other problems like ineffective management, lack of specialised skills, poor working attitudes and marketing problems have not helped the development of the manufacturing sector. However, some limited successes have kept this
sector moving forward and it makes some contribution to the economy of the country (Samate, 1993).

The figures from the Ministry of Labour, Commerce and Industry (1984-1990) and the Statistical Abstract (1989) show that the trade deficit, imbalance of payments, both domestic and foreign debts will continue to increase at an almost unmanageable rate if some traditional resources (e.g., fishing) are not developed. As an indicator of the economic level of the country, the per capita income of US $500 is very low (Fairbain, 1992). Thus, it is not surprising to find that the greatest earners of foreign exchange for the country are remittances and tourism. However, without foreign aid and overseas loans, Tonga will not be able to effectively conduct its own affairs.

Schooling system

A major part of the schooling system will be discussed in the later section of this chapter. Suffice it here to offer only a summary. More than 90 per cent of the primary schools in Tonga are run by the government. It is free and compulsory for all children to attend at the age of six and to complete six years of primary schooling (Class 1 to Class 6). The rest of the primary schools are controlled by Christian Churches mainly the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. All children attend primary school and the secondary school enrolment rate, as previously stated, for males is 77 per cent, compared to 80 per cent for females (Funaki, 1993).

The curriculum used in both primary and secondary schools was developed and designed by the Government Curriculum Unit. The emphasis of the curriculum has been largely "academic" in the sense that it is examination driven. This has been well expressed in the Report of the Department of Education (1965) quoted by Thomas (1984, p. 248):
The objective of students is to acquire a certificate and if possible the opportunity for study overseas. The value of the achievement is too frequently seen as the claim to government employment rather than ability to do a particular job well or, in the case of the majority, to be capable developers of the agricultural resources, or artisans.

Thomas (1984) sums up the major concern of the academic curriculum in this conclusion: Hence, it has been the traditional colonial examination system [italics added] rather than the requirements of the daily life in Tonga that has served as the principal determinant of what is studied at school. Although the language of instruction at both primary and secondary levels has been predominantly Tongan (with English used increasingly in secondary schools), and such vocational subjects as agriculture and homemaking have been included among secondary-school offerings, the main thrust of the curricula has been academic and foreign.

Every student sits the Secondary School Entrance Examination at Class Six. The cream of those who gain the highest marks is selected by the government to attend its own high schools. Those with lower pass marks together with a host of students who did not pass the Secondary School Entrance Examination would end up in the high schools controlled by the various Christian Churches. Thus, from the outset students who attend non-government high schools, as it were, begin their schooling from a different academic level to the students studying in government high schools. Since the cream of the Secondary School Entrance Examination results are concentrated in government high schools, they form a small elite from whom most high positions in government departments are traditionally derived.

The government caters for only 20 per cent of the secondary school population in 1990, and 80 per cent come under the jurisdiction of the Christian Churches (Submission to Cabinet, 1992). The dual nature of the Tongan education system has both positive and negative aspects (Samate, 1993). The government high schools are staffed with more qualified and degreed teachers than their non-government counterparts. Their schools are also better resourced. By and large their academic results are higher than those of the Church schools (Tatafu, 1994).
While it is good for the country to have a variety of education systems "because there is vitality in variety" (Samate, 1993), it is at the same time realised that the government education system is perpetuating elitism at the expense of the Christian Churches struggling to provide for their schools. The government offers some financial assistance to non-government secondary schools, but they hardly help to reduce the costs in those schools. The non-government schools have pushed the government since 1991 to increase its annual per capita grant but it has remained at $50 per enrolled students since 1990, compared to the $500 per enrolled students in the government high schools (Submission to Cabinet, 1992).

The first five years of secondary schooling (Forms 1 to 5) comprises what is regarded as the 'general education'. At the end of Form 5 students sit the *Tonga School Certificate Examination*. Those who are successful in gaining the required number of credits proceed to Form 6 and they would sit at the end of the year the *South Pacific Senior Certificate Examination*. The few who gain the required number of credits will attend either National Form 7 in Tonga, Tupou High School, University of the South Pacific Unit or equivalent schools in other countries. It is those who pass the examination at the end of Form 7 who will be qualified to do further studies.

This, in brief, is the educational context in which the problem of early school leaving is situated.

2. Factors perceived to be impacting on students to leave school early

*Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers*

The "early school leavers" and "unsuccessful completers" form what the researcher has described as the "failure syndrome" of the Tonga secondary school systems. The thesis
indicates that both groups can be regarded as school failures. They are sometimes referred to as "kau ta'e ako" (uneducated), a term which is more than "being uneducated". In fact, it is an insult because it is often said of them when one wants to hurt a person with this expression. In various social interactions they are not vocal because they know that the label of "ta'e ako" (uneducated) can be levelled against them. Thus, society keeps reminding them that they are failures. The fact that the term "ta'e ako" (uneducated) is used interchangeably of the two groups makes one wonder if the general perception is that these two groups have similar characteristics. The other concern is whether the early school leavers and unsuccessful completers consider themselves to be in the same boat of educational failure. If similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are found in this study to be significantly close, then Tonga is facing schooling problems of monumental proportions. These two groups represent more than 80 per cent of the total secondary school population.

Government monopoly of schooling policy

Responsibility for Tongan schooling have been shared largely by the government and a number of Christian Churches. The Minister of Education, under the Education Act (1974), is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the country's education policy. The Director of Education and other staff of the Ministry assist the Minister in this work. The Education Act (1974) made provision for the immediate establishment of an Educational Advisory Body in which non-government schooling systems would be represented. The reluctance or unwillingness on the part of the Ministry of Education to set up this representative body in spite of constant pressure from the other schooling systems has been indicative of their determination to monopolize the educational policies in Tonga (Submission to Cabinet, 1992).
The elitist schooling system in Tonga has been firmly preserved and perpetuated by this educational monopoly of policy making. This elitist educational orientation has had two serious implications for the problem of early school leaving. Firstly, it has actually bred generations of failure because approximately 10 per cent of those sitting the public examinations - Tonga School Certificate and Pacific Senior Secondary School Certificate - has experienced successes. Secondly, it has strongly influenced the attitudes of people for more than a century now to accept academic success as the predominantly important reason for schooling. It meant that the vast majority of students who were not academically inclined, would have to be subjected to the inevitable fate of trying to cope with an academic curriculum which was definitely beyond their personal academic capabilities. Furthermore, where there was an alternative curriculum specifically tailored to the needs of the less academically oriented students, students and/or parents were either unwilling to take the opportunity seriously or they would refuse to accept it altogether simply because it would not lead to academic successes. A good example of this was the close down of the Catholic Agricultural School at Fualu because of increasingly declining enrolment.

The experiences of the researcher in talking with people in Tonga about the reasons for sending their children to school agree with the views expressed in the interviews conducted by Samate (1993) of government and non-government people in Tonga. Those views vary from: "basic literacy like 3 Rs; to fulfilling 11 years of schooling (six primary and five secondary) and getting to Form 5; to a balanced schooling which prepares them for life especially skills" (p. 13). Thus, when they were asked about the meaning of quality schooling, the answers range from:

- being able to read and write to a high level up to Form 5;
- to being measured by the number of passes (in public examinations) and to be successful academically;
- to achieving a balanced life where the intellectual, physical and spiritual aspects of life are being developed (p. 13-14)
It would seem from the researcher's experiences and Samate's findings that there are a variety of reasons for schooling. However, such a variety is often forgotten and suffocated by the prevailing attitude in the community that successful schooling is associated almost entirely with passing public examinations. The high priority given to this rationale for schooling is graphically expressed by one of my colleagues in Tonga when his son failed the Tonga School Certificate Examination in 1994: "As if I experience anew the whole pain and burden of the expenses and the demands of my son's (secondary) schooling, when his name was not read out on the radio (among those who passed the Tonga School Certificate Examination)".

"Hangē tofo pe 'oku toe ongo mai 'a e mamahi mo e kanongatamaki 'o e ngaahi fakamole mo e ngaahi fiema'u kehekehe 'a e ako 'a hokufoha', 'i he 'ikai ke ui mai 'a hono hingoa' he leotoo' ('i he kau lava he Sivi Fakamooniako 'a Tonga')." Most Tongans would have heard that expression or similar renderings of it in the context of someone failing one of the public examinations. It is a testimony to the glorification, on the one hand, of academic successes, and the damnation, on the other, of academic failure. Thus, the "early school leavers" from secondary schooling in Tonga and those who were unsuccessful in the Tonga School Certificate Examination, or the so-called "unsuccessful completers" would be included among the academic failures.

**Primary and secondary schooling**

Primary schooling in the Kingdom of Tonga has been compulsory and free since 1876, and the most recent *Education Act (1974)* which became effective in July 1975 continued to require that every child between the ages of 6 and 14 living within reach of a government primary school should attend that school or a similar school unless the child had completed six years of primary schooling. In 1989 as shown in Table 3.2, 93 per cent of the primary school students' population attended government schools, while the remaining seven per cent had opted for Church primary schools. The Christian Churches in Tonga except the Mormon
Church have had financial difficulties with their schools, and this had been reflected on the conditions of their primary schools which are generally perceived to be of lower quality than their government counterparts.

Enrolment in government secondary schools had grown by seven per cent over the duration of the Fifth Development Plan (1991-1995). The fact that most of the secondary schools have been the responsibility of the Christian Churches, and they have been more expensive to run than primary schools meant that most Churches have not been able to adequately cater for the schooling of the children entrusted to their care, as compared to those under the control of the government. Their schools have been relatively poorly supplied and under resourced; their teachers have been paid in a much lower scale than their government counterparts; their teachers had not been as well trained as those appointed to the government schools (Tatafu, 1994).

Table 3.2 Students enroled in primary and secondary schools in Tonga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUPILS ENROLLED</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOVERNMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>18,393</td>
<td>19,791</td>
<td>18,449</td>
<td>18,469</td>
<td>18,548</td>
<td>18,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Training</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical &amp; Vocational</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NON-GOVERNMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>12,618</td>
<td>11,936</td>
<td>12,603</td>
<td>12,938</td>
<td>12,980</td>
<td>13,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>1,105</td>
<td>1,178</td>
<td>1,095</td>
<td>1,222</td>
<td>1,275</td>
<td>1,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical &amp; Vocational</td>
<td>11,354</td>
<td>10,106</td>
<td>11,186</td>
<td>11,274</td>
<td>11,288</td>
<td>12,392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>159</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from the *Tonga Statistical Abstract, 1993.*
A brief history of the Tonga School Leaving Certificates

In the 1960s the school leaving certificates in Tonga consisted of the Lower and Higher Leaving Certificates which students sat respectively at Form 4 and Form 5. In passing those two examinations, students could proceed to sit for the New Zealand School Certificate Examination whose syllabus was of a considerably higher standard than that of the other two examinations.

A big number of students actually passed the Lower Leaving Certificate and naturally fewer students gained the pass marks in the Higher Leaving Certificate, and by the same token, there were even fewer students passing the School Certificate Examination. This meant that many students who passed the Lower and the Higher Leaving Certificates felt that their schooling had been successful even if they failed the School Certificate Examination because they could in those days use the Lower and Higher Leaving Certificates to find jobs.

With the phasing out of the Lower Leaving in 1970s and the Higher Leaving in the early 1980s, students had to pass the Tonga School Certificate Examination which is now the first public examination. Unfortunately most students found the Tonga School Certificate difficult to pass, as this study would show. Thus, most students who could have passed the Lower and Higher Leaving face the high probability of failing the Tonga School Certificate Examination. The chance for them to find some success in their schooling is very limited. Thus, it is understandable that the feeling of failure among students is widespread. With the constraints in the job market and the demand for qualifications for employment going largely beyond the passes from the Tonga School Certificate Examination, students who would expect to fail would seriously consider leaving school early. As for those students who felt that they could pass the Tonga School Certificate, they would either become "unsuccessful completers" or "successful completers" but with no jobs available for them.
Inequity of government assistance to non-government schools

Government's assistance to the non-government schooling sector mainly involved the provision of curriculum, examination materials, duty-free concessions on the importation of schooling materials and providing funds through the Central Planning Department for selected capital works. In 1987 the Government began providing direct financial assistance to non-government secondary schools. The amount granted to each secondary school was initially based on an allocation of $20 per enrolled student. This allocation was raised to $50 per student in 1989, and it still remains the same in 1996. Submissions made from the Directors of non-government school systems to the Tongan Cabinet and the Legislative Assembly to increase the grants to non-government secondary schools have failed (Submission to Cabinet, 1992) up until 1997.

In spite of the government's annual grant of $50 per student to the non-government secondary schools, and of the duty exemption to certain materials destined to the schools, there was much more to be done to achieve equitability in the allocation of government resources to non-government secondary schools as clearly shown in Table 3.3. For the government to allocate 77.26 per cent of the grants to its own secondary schools which catered for only 20 per cent of the secondary school population and only 22.7 per cent to non-government schools which were responsible for 62.2 per cent was hardly equitable. The exception was the Mormon schools which chose not to take any grants from the government. One of the outcomes of this inequitability of distribution was that the school fees of non-government schools (whose income is derived almost entirely from school fees) have been much higher than those of the government controlled high schools. Moreover, the parents and ex-student associations of those non-government schools have been further overburdened by increasing numbers of fund-raising activities for their schools.
Table 3.3 Recurrent allocation of government grants to secondary schools, 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Systems</th>
<th>No. of pupils</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>% of Government Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Church</td>
<td>3710</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon Church</td>
<td>2603</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>2599</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>77.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Church</td>
<td>2596</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrews School</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Tonga</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Schools</td>
<td>1334</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Submission to the Tongan Cabinet, 1992.

Primary school curriculum

The government has adopted and developed an examination driven curriculum for both primary and secondary schooling in Tonga. The primary school curriculum has been heavily concentrated on the academic subjects, namely English, Mathematics, Science and Tongan Language. The prescriptions outlined in Table 3.4 may be regarded as being dated but they virtually still hold today.

A primary school teacher expressed to the researcher in March 1995 what has generally become a truism among primary school teachers:

It does not matter how many subjects there are in the primary school syllabus, every teacher knows that his or her performance will be assessed on the marks that his or her students would have on English and Mathematics at the Secondary School Entrance Examination at the end of their primary school schooling.
He admitted that it was a common practice among teachers to use other periods for teaching English and Mathematics. The length of time allocated to each subject in Table 3.4 presumably indicated the importance of that particular subject in theory.

Table 3.4 Primary school subjects and length of teaching hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Length of Teaching Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Afeaki, 1980: (p. 9)

Slight modifications have been made since 1980 to Table 3.4 but the general structure remained virtually the same, which showed the determination of the Ministry of Education to retain the examination and selection orientated nature of the curriculum. It naturally followed that English has been made the most important subject in primary school education. The reason was clearly stated in the Third Development Plan (1975-80): "Increasingly as more Tongans seek employment overseas, a command of functional English is an essential ingredient for a good general schooling" (p. 284). In addition, English is the official medium of instruction in secondary schools. With the exception of Tongan Studies, all subjects have been taught in English in all high schools, and the use of oral English within high school
community has been encouraged and even made compulsory in some schools. Thus, in practice primary school education has been geared more towards those who would proceed to secondary schooling, and to those who could secure the chance to leave the country.

The situation has become tragic in that a lot has been at stake for the primary school teachers because their promotion has been largely determined by the number of their students gaining a place among the top quartile of those sitting the Secondary School Entrance Examination. In such a situation the academically capable students have been helped in their studies while the less academically gifted are often allowed to decline even further. By the time they come to high schools, they have been far behind the others. The vast majority of the less academically talented students end up in non-government secondary schools, among which are the five sample schools for this survey.

Since the government has only limited resources it argued that it could only provide for the bright students of the country who have been selected from the primary schools through the government Secondary School Entrance Examination. While there has been an opportunity for every primary school student to compete for a place in government schools, students who were less academically capable were further disadvantaged by the fact that some teachers concentrated only on those who demonstrated promise of success. Not only were many given special attention in class some teachers ran special classes for them before and after school hours especially within four or six months before the examination.

Secondary school curriculum

The secondary school curriculum for years has followed the same academic orientation with the following core subjects - English, Mathematics, Tongan Studies, Science, History and Geography - from Form 1 to Form 5. The determination of the Government to concentrate on
those subjects was clear from the Sixth Development Plan (1991 - 1995) where it is stated that there "are demands for the provision of other subjects in the curriculum, but the concentration on the core subjects is a necessity that must be met as of the highest priority. The other subjects will be improved but as second priority" (p. 296).

The official philosophy of the Ministry of Education had been that schooling was geared for the provision not of immediate workers but of a good basic general schooling for students attending Form 1 to Form 5 (Bloomfield, 1980). The aim of such a policy was apparently to provide a flexible workforce. This philosophy of schooling was based on the assumption that almost every student would complete Form 5. This assertion has not been realised because the figures from Ministry of Education, for example, indicated that more than 35 per cent of students from secondary schools actually left school before completing Form 5 (Report from the Ministry of Education, 1991-92).

The figures from the Scholarship Review (1991 : 15) indicated that more than 70 per cent of the unemployed in Tonga had some form of secondary schooling between Forms 1 and 3, and only 28 per cent had completed Form 4 or 5. There was virtually no unemployment among graduates of Form 6 and Form 7. Clearly, secondary schooling in Tonga has been largely oriented towards white collar jobs. Thus, non-Tongan workers have been introduced in recent years to fill technical employment vacancies. Technical schools have not been popular among Tongan students because of the widespread belief among Tongans that schooling has entitled students to white collar employment. The limited places and courses available in those technical schools together with the reluctance of employers to take those local graduates have not improved the image of these courses among students and parents. Thus, the future of early school leavers has not been considered in the policy space, and no official attempts have been made in the education policies to rectify the conditions which are leading students to leave school early.
What kind of person is the schooling system in Tonga hoping to form by administering its present educational programs? The response made by Afeaki (1980) in her research of early school leaving from primary schools is:

It has been shown that right through the history of formal schooling in Tonga, its aim is to prepare the younger generation for life and to train them to contribute to national and individual growth. But this claim is not a reality...there is a disparity between theory and practice [italics added], and it is possible to argue that here lies the root of the problems of early school leaving (p. 6).

The schooling system has not fulfilled that aim because it has not prepared the majority of students to be "economically productive as wage earners, farmers and fishermen". (Development Plan, 1975-80 : 287). The more recent study conducted by Samate (1993) confirmed that today there are "some major disparities between theory set out in Tonga's policy documents, and the reality of the development process and the quality and type of education for development, actually provided in the education system" (p.10).

Afeaki (1980) found that on average only 49 per cent of students sitting the Secondary School Entrance Examination proceeded to secondary schools in Tonga. However, not everyone that goes to high school gains the pass mark of 50 per cent or more in the Secondary School Entrance Examination. In fact, on average only about 20 per cent would be successful in that examination, and most of them would find a place at one of the government high schools. Thus, the primary school curriculum has produced generations of students whose endeavours have largely been characterised by schooling failures and uncertainties. Despite these inevitable consequences, the emphasis in primary schools has been largely on those with the ability to succeed in the Secondary School Entrance Examination. The same is true of the
high schools where the emphasis is on students who could be successful in the Tonga School Certificate Examination in Form 5 and the Pacific Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination in Form 6. Thus, the principal feature of primary school schooling has been that the courses were geared to, and therefore dictated by, the Secondary School Entrance Examination which is still strongly oriented to students with academic abilities.

Although the average of students proceeding to high schools had increased from 49 in the early 1980s to 77 per cent in 1991, the magnitude of what Afeaki (1980) observed has not vastly improved when one realises that 35 and 39 per cent of students entering secondary schools in 1991 and 1992 respectively left school altogether before completing what has been considered as the good general education which culminated in sitting the first local public examination known as the Tonga School Certificate Examination (Report of the Ministry of Education, 1991-1992).

This academic emphasis has been faulty in that the teachers' energy has concentrated on students who could pass either the Secondary School Entrance Examination at primary school or the Tonga School Certificate Examination at secondary school (Afeaki, 1980). Those who were not likely to be successful in that venture were, in fact, not provided for in the curriculum (Samate, 1993). They were sent home unprepared for successful living on his or her community and some educationalists seemed to regard the situation as a social problem to be dealt with by parents. But why were these people sent to school in the first place if parents could have given them the schooling they needed at home right from the start? It is argued here that the schooling system has failed and will continue to fail to provide successful learning outcomes for the vast majority of students if reform of the schooling system is not undertaken.
The strained relationships between school administrators and teachers are damaging to the school (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1993). It is reported in this study that one of the problems contributing to the inefficiency in the school is the poor relationships between the school administrators and the teachers. One of the issues that sometimes causes conflicts between administrators and teachers is the use of corporal punishment at school. It is forbidden by the law of the country and, in most cases, by the rule of most schools. The researcher as a school administrator found that teachers and school administrators believe that Tongan students would do as they are told if corporal punishment is applied. They said that since corporal punishment is used frequently at home, many students would respond only if they are corporally punished. The problem is still not resolved but it has been reported in this study to be associated with students leaving school early. It was thought that, parents running to school to beat up the teacher who corporally punished their children, was something of the past. It actually occurred in one of the schools during the research fieldwork for this study.

If a child suffers from some form of physical handicap, he or she may not be willing to go to school in the first place because of shame or fear of being ridiculed by other children. If he or she has enough courage to begin schooling, he or she may find that a minor unfavourable comment from a fellow student or a teacher could be a possible reason for him or her to leave school. Children with specific learning difficulties may find themselves in the same situation. Fellow students and even teachers may be responsible for the early departure from school of such people by acting in a way which is not sufficiently sensitive to their vulnerability. Many of these children would see themselves as "outsiders" (Wehlage, 1989).
It seems that the same would apply to children with normal intelligence who, due to prolonged illness, for example, may be considered to be among those with learning difficulties. In their school work they would be far behind their own age group or they would find themselves in the same class with children of much younger age. Unless the school pays particular attention to these students, they would be at a high risk of leaving school early. Due to some purely personal reasons, children with normal ability sometimes show little interest in schooling. They are at school because of the push from parents. At the slightest inconvenience at school they would tend to run away from school, followed by repeated absence, and it will not be long before they leave school altogether (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez, 1990).

The lack of help for students who are "slow learners" is a serious problem because most schools in Tonga do not have a program to specifically target that group. Thus, students who are likely to be 'early school leavers' and 'unsuccessful completers' are not included in the overall planning of the school. In fact, the school concentrates on those who are likely to be successful in the public examinations.

Social systems

The social systems in Tonga have some implications for the problem of early school leaving. As previously identified, the social structure of the society is three tiered (Latukefu, 1974). On the top level, the royal family is situated; the second level is occupied by the nobility; and the commoners (or the rest of the people) are found in the third level. Schooling has provided some mobility to some commoners in that positions in government which were traditionally allocated to nobles and their children, have been filled by commoners, for example, the current Deputy Premier and Ministers of Education and Civil Aviation.
One impact of this structure on schooling is often seen in the responsibility or the favours that the commoners owe to their king and nobles (Marcus, 1980). Since the commoners, as previously indicated, are given their land by the king and nobles, culturally they feel that they have an obligation to meet the demands from them. Thus, it is not uncommon to find that parents would feel more obligated to attend to the demands from them than to meet the demands relating to the schooling of their children. Similarly, the family obligations to religious bodies can also militate against parents' financial ability to educate their children. Families would be willing, out of love for God or probably out of fear of being ridiculed by the fellow Church members or both, to contribute more to the annual collection (*misinale or katoanga'ofa*) for the Church than to their children's schooling.

Sevele (1973) identified an intense spirit of competition among the Tongans in their attempts to, as it were, outdo one another in generosity. In 1980 this competitive spirit was still found by Afeaki to be very strong in her research. It is also the experience of the researcher that this spirit has enormous advantages and disadvantages. The advantages relate mostly to their striving even against the odds to be successful in what they do. The disadvantages are mostly moral and financial. The disadvantages are moral when people strive to outdo one another in their givings (ngaahi foaki), for example, at Church fundraisings not so much out of love for God but in view of the favourable comments from their neighbours. In my capacity as a priest, I tested this out in the yearly collection for the Church (*katoanga'ofa*) in one of the villages. When the amounts donated by families were announced in Church, the yearly collection was consistently high. They were also consistently lower when envelopes were given out to families to seal their donation inside and they were not publicly announced. The financial disadvantages are associated mostly with the other family commitments being neglected due to lack of funds. Schooling would be among those neglected commitments.
One of the key elements in the social system is the privileged place of women in society. Generally, women in the family are held in higher honour than their male counterparts. "They (women) are revered by men and are considered by them in certain roles such as mehikitanga (aunt), to posses mystical and sacred powers" (Marcus, 1980: 23). In cases where there is a shortage of money, it is often found that parents would pay the school fees of their daughters. Their sons' fees would be paid later, if at all, when finance is available. Moreover, when there is a decision for a child to remain or leave school, it is the boys rather than the girls who would be asked or told to leave school, unless the boys are obviously more academically inclined than the girls. The researcher only knows of one family who educated only their sons because daughters would be, as it were, 'lost' to the family through marriage. This is a rare exception.

**Family factors**

Family size can be decisive at times especially if the family is 'poor', and there are many of those families in Tonga. According to the 1986 census, the average family size in Tonga was 6.3 (Tonga Statistical Abstract, 1989: 13). The fact is that they can only afford to educate some of them. Family crisis (e.g. death or sickness in the family) can easily deal a death blow to some families, and their children's schooling would consequently suffer greatly even to the point of complete withdrawal of their children from school (Afeaki, 1980). One of the problems with big families is that the physical and psychological space together with good lighting conducive for studies at home is often hard to find. In some cases there is genuine difficulty with the limited space when other members of the family would like to watch a video or a program on television, for example, and the children try to study or do some homework. At times the pressure of household activities before and after school can distract students from doing their school work at home.
To provide opportunities for students to study at night, a grant from the Australian government has enabled the Ministry of Education in Tongatapu (the main island group) to meet that need for some students, by making facilities available and teachers to supervise those studies. Teachers involved in the project were specifically selected, and they were paid for their service. The non-government schooling systems also catered for this need by making their school buildings available for night studies.

Finally, with the GDP per capita of A$750, families in Tonga are generally poor (Fairbain, 1992), and while parents' priority has been to educate their children (Samate, 1993), some of them would find it extremely difficult to meet the school expenses of their children. More recently, a number of children were reported to have actually left school because their school fees could not be paid. Some relief in the past was provided for the children with fees problem through fees scholarship, but in the last five years those fees scholarships have gradually disappeared (Christopher, 1994).

**Subsistence economy**

The overriding concern in a subsistence economy like that in Tonga is survival (Scott, 1976; Jasen, 1981). It is not difficult to speculate from such an economy that it would have some repercussions on the problem of early school leaving. For the commoners what is of utmost importance is survival. In this situation there are far too many obligations competing for the little money that the family has. Moreover, the desire to outdo one another in generosity (e.g. spending all the money they have collected for months on one occasion like a wedding or birthday) has often depleted the family resources (Sevele, 1973). The help of children before and after school with household duties (e.g. baby sitting) has been expected but families would not agree for their children to leave school in order to do household work. However, families who survive on subsistence means would most likely be unable to pay the school
expenses of their children, and this could easily result in their children "being asked to leave the school". The caution with which it was done, was often reported in the survey. Apparently, no student was ever told to leave because parents have failed to pay school fees. What actually happened was that students were told to go home, and do not return until they get their fees. Some students got their fees and returned, while others left because their parents have taken a long time to get the money, and the students themselves at the same time felt that they could not catch up in their studies.

Unreliable transport system

Since there is no official public transport in Tonga running at regular intervals, many children face the possibility of coming late to school every day. Some of them will even miss school altogether if they miss the only bus that leaves from their village. In a number of cases the bus fares and the daily school-related expenses for some children who travel from more than ten kilometres to the school are more than the school fees they struggle to pay to the school. In the case of a number of students from 'Apifo'ou College, for example, they would have to catch two or three vehicles before they reach school. Inter-island transport especially for the students in the Ha'apai island group is even more unreliable. Thus, many of the students from the outer islands live with relatives in the main islands, where schools are located. In these circumstances, school environments and future rewards for schooling would have to be very attractive for these children to attend school daily, and students would have to be truly motivated to pursue schooling at such costs.

School-related Associations (e.g. PTA)

Each secondary school has its own Parents and Teachers Association (PTA). It operates at the school level and it has a number of functions to perform for the schools. Frequently,
schools would ask the PTA to work on a particular improvement project for the schools. This function takes on a particular importance because of the constant need for extra labour and financial help for the school. School fees and fund-raising from PTA have helped the schools' financial resources. When there are difficulties with the PTA's support, schools are under great stress to make ends meet. In more recent years the financial situation has become critical to the point where all the Catholic secondary schools even with the help of the PTA struggle financially to keep their heads above water. Moreover, the PTA are not slow to point out to the school where they should improve in their performance or where policies could change. With the perception of a steady decline in the quality of schooling in recent years, some PTAs have become reluctant to support the schools, resulting in further difficulties for the schools which inevitably affect students' schooling. The Ex-student Associations (EA) perform similar functions for the schools.

Changes in social indicators

It is becoming very common to see young people roaming the streets of Nuku'alofa, the national capital of Tonga, both day and night. Johnstone (1987) noted the phenomenon of "youth cadres being established on the fringes of the urban areas in Tonga" (p. 92). Begging especially among young people is becoming a social problem in the main urban centres because of the beggar's insistence and even insult that they be given money. The researcher had a very unpleasant experience with one of these beggars. After speaking on the radio on Sunday night on the love of one's neighbours, on Monday morning I went to Morris Hedstrom Department Store to see someone. As I left the store, female youngster asked me for some money and when I told her that I did not bring any money with me, she yelled at the top of her voice: "Kuo mei tuli hotau telinga 'i ho'o kaikaila he letioo 'anepō ke tau 'ofa ki he käinga', pea kole atu eni ia, kuo 'ikai ke ke 'omai 'e koe ha'aku seniti. Fakamā mo'oni!" (Our ears are almost deaf with you shouting at the radio last night for us to love our
neighbours, and yet you refuse to give me some money. Shame on you!). Incidences of stealing and other crimes are often reported by the Police Department to be more common among young people.

Forming peer groups in the main centres of the three main island groups in Tonga (Tongatapu, Vava'u and Ha'apai) has increasingly become a social and economic problem. It has become a social problem because of the verbal harassment often associated with members of the groups as previously indicated, for example, in the researcher's unpleasant experience with the beggar at the store. Economically, they put pressure on people to contribute, as they often say, "out of the Christian love that you talk so much about". The Pro-democracy Movement has lobbied vehemently that the social problems experienced among our young people are reflections of the government's failure to provide opportunities for them. In fact, the government has no official policy or program to address these problems, apart from jailing those who break the law. The Christian Churches have tried with little success to attract these young people away from those groups. The problem is that the alternatives are not as attractive as the comfort of these groups.

In 1980 Afeaki found in her research in Tonga that forming peer groups in the villages was associated with early school leaving. It is argued in this study that involving in peer groups in the village has had strong influences on students to leave school early. The village community through their examples and social activities have competed students' with attempt to be serious about their studies. The lack of facilities in the village for student recreational activities have led to students seeking leisure and pleasure in night clubs and other forms of recreation which distract them from their studies.

There is a big number of young early school leavers, as reported in this study, creating similar problems in the villages. It was found that a lot of the problems arises from having virtually
nothing to do. The insight traditionally attributed to St. Eusebius in the first century seems to apply here when he said: "The devil finds work for idle hands". Idleness seems to be closely associated in some ways with some of these behaviours: stealing, drinking, fighting, distaste for manual work and general law breaking in the villages. Thus, the consequences of early school leaving for the early school leavers themselves and for their families are increasing felt in the community.

The prisons in Tonga, as clearly indicated in Table 3.5, are heavily populated by early school leavers, because the prisoners who failed to complete Form 5 ranged from 77 to 90 per cent between 1984 and 1995. For the Tongan population as a whole, on the other hand, the Ministry of Education figures for those who fail to complete Form 5 is 35 per cent. The high percentages in Table 3.5 would be much higher if the unsuccessful completers were also included.

Table 3.5 Early school leavers among prisoners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Prisoners</th>
<th>Early school leavers (%)</th>
<th>Non-early school leavers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tonga Prison Records, 1994
Suicide was never heard of in Tonga, but in recent years it has occurred mostly among youth, and regrettably the rates have gradually increased. The incidence of suicide is symptomatic of the decline in the social and economic structure of the country. Prostitution is illegal in Tonga but it has increased lately because, in the words of one young woman in a seminar joint-hosted by the Health Department and the Tongan National Council of Churches in 1992: "ko e toe 'ai ke ma'u 'emau mo'ui mo homaufdmili' meife?" (from where can we and our families earn our living) (Report of Committee for Prevention Against Aids, 1992). She said that she represented a number of women especially from the outer islands who could not make a living in Tongatapu in any other way.

The steady breakdown of families is another social problem for the country. Table 3.6 shows that the number of registered divorces for hearing have generally been high, compared to the number of registered marriages between 1987 and 1992. The fact that rarely any petition for divorce is withdrawn or struck out (Tonga Statistical Abstract, 1993), means that the ratio of divorce to marriage is as outlined in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Registered marriages and registered divorces in Tonga, 1987 - 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Registered Marriages</th>
<th>Registered Divorces for hearing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>668</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Tonga Statistical Abstract, 1993

If one were to speculate further and count the number of separations and marriages in difficulties, then the situation speaks for itself. The experiences of the researcher in dealing
with 'dislocated families' in the priestly ministry have testified to the problems that such families have brought on themselves and on society at large. It is this kind of family situation that is closely associated with early school leaving in the literature (Finn, 1987).

Cultural changes

Defining culture as "a set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people" (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1993: p. 92), one can include all the preceding factors under the umbrella of culture. However, the changes in the cultural value system and in the impact of the Christian Churches are increasingly becoming a cause for concern. Changes have occurred in the traditional cultural values of 'conformity', 'respect for the older generation', 'reluctance to criticise openly those in authority', 'centrality of love', 'importance of kinship' and 'maintaining the status quo' (Marcus, 1980). A similar list of these values is found in Thaman's (1988) thesis. Marcus (1980) maintains that the Tongan culture has been profoundly affected by the Western cultures, resulting in what he refers to as the "compromise culture". The implication here is that there is some kind of a mutual giving in to one another. Thaman's (1988) metaphor of a "composite culture" is more appropriate because it acknowledges the contribution of both the Tongan and the palangi (European) cultures to the formation of the living culture of Tonga today.

One of the unfortunate ways in which the traditional cultural values have changed is the increase in the severing of 'kinship relationships', especially through disputes over property. It, in turn, adversely affects the 'importance of love' as the central virtue of the Tongan culture (Kavaliku, 1977). The criticism of those in authority is becoming more frequent and confrontational. This is conflicting with the traditional demands for 'conformity', 'respect of the older generation', 'reluctance to criticise openly those in authority' and the 'maintenance of the status quo'.

122
The other important cultural force in the Tongan society is the Christian Churches. The indicators of the impact of the Christian Churches show that their influence on the people is decreasing. It was found in the survey leading up the Catholic Church Synod of 1992 that the attendance at Church services has dropped. The incidences of suicides, marriage separations, divorces and crime rates are on the rise. There is also a growing dissatisfaction with the political system in Tonga. The 'Pro-democracy Movement' in Tonga which advocates a change from the traditional monarchical government into a Western type of democracy is gaining some momentum. It calls for social equity and political justice, and for greater opportunities for people to be involved in the decision making processes affecting their lives.

In summary, in trying to be as holistic as possible, the researcher has dealt with a number of factors which could be associated with students leaving secondary school early. In some ways some of these factors may be more remote while others may be more immediate in their influences.

3. The theoretical framework for this research

In the review of the literature, it was decided that the systems analysis framework which Islam and Booth (1994) employed in their research of early school leaving in Bangladesh will form the basis for this framework. Here, the theoretical framework will be adjusted in the light of what we have seen so far in the research context in Tonga.

At the outset it is important to point out that the three causes of early school leaving which were identified in the literature review - personal and family factors, social factors, and school factors - have not been focused on exclusively in this framework, because the probability is that other factors which could be important may be excluded. It is the quest of this study to
be all-embracing in the sense that it allows all the possible factors in the interacting systems in Tonga to emerge.

The personal, family, social and school factors identified in this chapter are grouped under the two parallel systems of: school and community. The main reason for this is that Tonga is still a close-knit society where people strongly identify themselves within systems. Society in Tonga is still organised to a large extent according to a family's clan, tribe, kinship, and church. The other reason is that the factors arising from this chapter would all fall naturally into either one of the two systems of schooling and community. These two systems have impacted on students either positively or negatively. Some students have been negatively influenced either to leave school early (early school leavers) or to be unsuccessful in their pursuit of academic credentials (unsuccessful completers), while others have been successful in their schooling (successful completers).

The systems analysis framework employed by Islam and Booth (1994) is restructured in Table 3.7 by grouping the factors of the research environment under the two interacting systems of School and Community. The community systems are seen to be at the same levels as the school systems. The influence of the school systems and the community systems are perceived to have resulted in both 'push' and 'pull' factors. Between these two complementary systems is the 'Decision Space' into which the complex competing forms of 'attraction' and 'repulsion' interact, resulting in the student and/or family deciding for him or her to either stay or leave school early.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schooling Systems</th>
<th>Decision Space</th>
<th>Community Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Macro level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[School Controlling authorities]</td>
<td>Students are being impacted upon</td>
<td>Macro level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government or Non-government</td>
<td></td>
<td>[National community]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meso level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Education Department]</td>
<td>either positively to complete</td>
<td>Meso level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Government and Non-government</td>
<td></td>
<td>[Village community]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Village people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• EAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Micro level</strong></td>
<td>their schooling</td>
<td>Micro level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Individual schools]</td>
<td>or negatively to leave school prematurely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School administrators</td>
<td></td>
<td>[Family community]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Parents and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Students</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Grand parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PTAs</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Extended family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The factors previously identified in the research context are regarded as "agents" influencing students to leave school early. Under both the 'Schooling' and the 'Community' systems there are "agents" operating on the macro, meso and the micro level. With regard to the Schooling Systems in Table 3.7, the 'school controlling authorities' of the government or the Church are the "agent" operating at the macro level. In particular, the government's influence through the examination driven curriculum at both the primary and the secondary school level, for example, has been identified as a possible influence on students' failure. The inequity found in the distribution of government grants to secondary school students is included in the influence of the government at the macro level. The Church's decision on the salary levels of its teachers is made at the macro level and may have adverse effects on teacher's performance.
At the meso level of the Schooling Systems is found the "agent", the Department of Education of either the government or the Church. It is the Department of Education which formulates and implements the policies indicated by the Government or the Church school controlling authorities at the macro level. Its influence on students is more immediate than the government because it deals directly with the primary and the secondary schools. It is often said the success or failure of any policy depends to a large extent on the implementers dealing directly with those to whom the policy is directed (Hogwood and Gunn, 1992). The rivalry reported in this study between the Government Department of Education and other Education Departments has made the implementation of policies difficult.

The individual schools operate at the micro level of the Schooling Systems. There are three "agents" at the school level identified in the research context: school administrators, teachers and students. The schooling policies indicated by the Government or the Church at the macro level, formulated and implemented by the Department of Education at the meso level, are specifically implemented at the micro level of the school by school administrators, teachers and students. Thus, the interactions between these three "agents" in the school environment are postulated to be important for the schooling outcomes of the students. The other "agents" that can be closely associated with the individual schools are the Parents and Teachers Associations (PTA) and the Ex-student Associations (EA). These two associations can be placed with good reason in the village community under the 'Community Systems' because the bulk of its members live and work in the village communities.

The Community Systems, on the other hand, in the Tongan context in Table 3.7, the cultural forces expressed in the cultural, social and economic systems which were identified in the previous section are the "agents" that operate at the macro level. They have been suggested to have some negative impacts on students. The low economic level of the country
with a per capita income of US $500 may have adverse effects on parents' ability to pay for their children's schooling. The social obligations that parents have for their king, nobles, church and other organisations could compete with parents' obligation for their children's schooling. The changes in some of the cultural values identified by Thaman (1988) have had some impacts on students' relationships with parents, teachers and school administrators.

The village people are the "agents" operating at the meso level of the Community Systems in Tonga. The influence of the village people on students can be strong. Afeaki (1980) located the village adverse effects on students in the operation of the peer group networks. Their influence is examined in this study including the addition in recent years of the other social activities like the night clubs which are located in close proximity to most villages.

The family operates at the micro level of the Community Systems. The "agents" included in the family are the parents, children, and, in many cases, the grand parents. The extended family is taken to be part of the family in that the obligations to other relatives figure prominently in the consideration of the family life. As previously explained, the social and the cultural indicators maintained that families are undergoing many changes which may have impacts on students' schooling.

Under the School and the Community Systems the following nine "agents" are identified in Table 3.7 as the avenues through which the schooling systems in Tonga can be examined because they are perceived to be impacting on a student decision to leave school early: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, local (village) community, the Tongan Government, the Department of Education (government and non-government) and the Tongan culture. Needless to say one or more people and/or factors would be included under some of
the "agents" already innumerated. For example, in Tonga under the agency of culture the following factors may be included: church, nobility, extended family and the economy.

The other principal aspect that is introduced into the framework in Table 3.7 is that the impacts that the Schooling and the Community Systems (be it in the macro, meso or micro level) would have on the decision space is dynamic for the student to remain at or leave school can be both positive and negative. The School System and the Community System do influence one another simultaneously, and in their different levels impact both positively and negatively on the decision for the student to either remain at or leave school altogether. The target group of the government, for instance, at the macro level of the School Systems can be accredited with the positive contribution that it makes to the decision for a student to leave or remain at school through the adequate supply to the school of resources and the application of measures for school improvement. However, when the same government adopts the strategy of "wide open system of school" which gives very child a chance to remain at school as long as he or she likes, or to go as far as he or she so desires, it impacts negatively on that decision because such a system according to Coombs (1968) is well known for the fact that it "has often resulted in high rates of early school leaving" (p. 9).

The same would apply to the impacts that the Community Systems would have on the decision for the student to remain at or leave school. At the micro level of the Community System, the family can be very positive in its contribution towards the schooling of the children through parental support and other specific educational incentives. However, it is not uncommon to find that when there is a family crisis, for example, death of one of the parents, the decision for one or more students to leave school almost becomes inevitable (Ahmed, 1969; Mia et al., 1987; Qadir & Ahmed, 1980; Ahmed & Chowdhury, 1987). At the macro level the cultural demand for early marriage can be a powerful reason for early school leaving (Khan et al., 1992). The influence of the peer group at the meso level of the
village community has been singled out as being a powerful factor for early school leaving in Tonga (Afeaki, 1980).

4. Concluding remarks

The factors that have been considered in the first part of this chapter are related to one or more of the nine "agents" shown in Figure 3.7 which could have been responsible for students leaving school early. However, it must be realised at the same time that other factors may arise from the research which were not considered in our treatment of the Tongan context. The all-important advantage of this theoretical framework is that it allows and encourages all the possible interactions between systems and their impacts on students to leave school early to surface in their entirety.
Research Design

*From the ground up makes good sense for building.*
*Beware of from the top down. (Frank Lloyd Wright)*

The findings from the literature review in chapter two together with the researcher's personal experiences of the school situation in Tonga and the research context in chapter three have provided the basis for the research design. The *first part* has two sections. In the first section the rationale for the choice of the topic of early school leaving is briefly outlined before stating the research questions and elaborating on the different components of each question. In the second section the sample schools and respondents will be discussed together with the location and rationale for the choice of the field sites. In the *second part* the rationale for and the number in the five group of respondents will be dealt with. The third part discusses each of the five questionnaires, beginning with rationale, the development of the questionnaires, the trialling and final revision. Data analysis techniques and limitations of the research fieldwork will be dealt with in the *fourth part*, and in the *fifth and final part* of the chapter the trustworthiness of the data will be examined.

1. *Rationale for the choice of the topic of early school leaving*

The researcher had been working all his life in the Catholic education system in Tonga prior to the research study, and the problem of early school leaving has been a cause of concern but there was no time and resources available to study it seriously. The problem has been viewed as an educational one because the researcher believes that school factors have been more responsible for early school leaving than non-school factors. It has also been considered a justice issue in that parents have literally sacrificed themselves to pay
for the secondary schooling of their children, and yet the schools have, as it were, failed to deliver. The plight of early school leavers has serious repercussions and consequences for themselves and indeed for the society at large. The researcher's strong belief is that early school leaving is an indicator of deeper schooling and societal problems.

There is a new avenue that the researcher sets out to determine in this study which, as far as the current search in the literature shows, no other study of early school leaving has attempted before. It is to determine if the perception in Tonga that early school leavers and unsuccessful completers have experienced similar problems, can be substantiated. If close similarities between them are found, then the problems relating to early school leaving are only symptomatic of the major educational problems that Tonga has been facing for years. The centrality and the importance of this issue is shown by the fact the comparison of these two groups runs through the entire length of the data analysis in chapter five.

There has not been any study done on early school leaving from secondary schools in Tonga. Only one study was conducted in 1980, and it was on early school leaving from primary schools (Afeaki, 1980). Not only that it is quite dated but early school leaving from primary schools is not as serious an issue as that from the secondary schools. The reason for this is that the student who leaves primary school prematurely, almost naturally follows what the mother or father does at home. A girl would learn weaving, tapa making and other crafts from her mother while a boy would learn agricultural, fishing and other skills from the father. There is a ready acceptance of their situation. The student who leaves early from secondary schools, on the other hand, expects to achieve much more than his or her primary school counterparts. In failing to attain it, the student does not take the domestic education as an acceptable alternative. There seems to be a general distaste for manual work and a preference for loafing and begging (Afeaki, 1980).
Thus, this study will offer a current account of the problem and it targets the greatest number of early school leavers because less than 10 per cent of children in Tonga fail to complete primary school education but an average of 37 per cent left before completing their secondary schooling between 1991 and 1992 (Report of the Ministry of Education, 1991 & 1992). The inclusion of the one non-Catholic secondary school was the wish of their principal as an avenue to address the same problem in their school, and only secondarily for the researcher to view the problem from another perspective.

Research questions

The purpose of this research is to explore in five secondary schools (one Anglican and four Catholic secondary schools) in Tonga the extent and the causes of early school leaving, and the policy measures for the reduction of its occurrence through five closely related questions:

1. What is the extent of early school leaving?
2. What are the personal and social characteristics of early school leavers?
3. What are the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers?
4. What are the causes of early school leaving?
5. What are the most appropriate policy measures for reducing early school leaving?

The first question, which deals with the extent of early school leaving, has three components: definition of early school leaving, measurement of the rates of early school leaving and the rates of early school leaving in Tonga. Each of these three components will be discussed separately.

Definition of early school leaving

The review of the literature has shown that early school leaving is a difficult term to define. However, in a quest for a consensus on definition, it is suggested that an early
school leaver is a student who at one time was formally enrolled in a particular school, and for whom all the three questions would be answered in the negative (Morrow in Natriello, 1987: 40):

(a) Is the student actively enrolled in a particular school?
(b) If not, has the enrollment been formally transferred to another educational institution?
(c) Has the student satisfied local standards for graduation?

A student who died during schooling is not counted as an early school leaver.

In the Tongan context and for the purpose of this enquiry, an early school leaver is defined as a student who is firstly not actively enrolled in a particular school, secondly has not formally been transferred to another educational institution and thirdly, failed to sit the first public examination known as the Tonga School Certificate Examination. For most students in Tonga the Tonga School Certificate Examination is undertaken after five years of secondary schooling. The significance of this for Tonga is that an early school leaver has failed to complete the basic formal schooling programme available to all high school students. To that extent he or she is considered to have a reduced opportunity to develop adequate skills, knowledge, and attitudes to function as a responsible citizen of his or her community.

*Measurement of the rates of early school leaving*

The literature review has dealt with the complexity of the issue of measurement of rates. A summary is given here to locate the issue in the Tongan context. The traditional method of determining the extent of early school leaving is the *Age Cohort Method* (Barber, 1984) which relies entirely on the statistics provided by the official government body or the respective ministry of education. This method calculates the percentage of the total number of sample students who leave school from a particular year, and multiply that by the number of years they were supposed to be in education before a given exit point. The product is the age cohort rate of early school leaving. Evidence suggests that there
are problems relating to the reliability of the figures presented by each school to the government body or obtained by that body through some other census methods. In addition there are shortcomings associated with the averaging involved in the calculations (Morrow, 1987; Gustavsson, 1990; Heyneman, 1979).

The researcher chooses to employ the True Cohort Method which was employed by Islam and Booth (1994) in their research in Bangladesh. It is argued here that the True Cohort Method is more accurate than the traditional Age Cohort Method. Morrow in Natriello, (1987) after assessing both methods arrived at the same conclusion by asserting that "cohort drop out rates (rates derived from True Cohort Method) presents a more accurate picture of the success and failure rates of the district school program" (p. 43).

With the True Cohort Method the total number of new students coming to a high school, for example, in a given year is recorded. Over the six years of high school education, each student is traced meticulously to determine if he or she left school before the end of their high school educational cycle. The students who left their first high schools for other high schools will be further pursued to see if they completed their secondary schooling. After determining the number of the new students of that particular year who did not complete their secondary school education, the extent of early school leaving can be calculated as the percentage of the total enrolment. To apply the True Cohort Method is tedious and time consuming but it has the advantage of gaining more accurate and reliable data for the calculations of the extent of early school leaving.

Students repeating a year could be a problem in using the True Cohort Method. However, in Tonga there is no repeating between Form 1 and Form 5 in the sample schools except where a student has actually missed most of a particular school year due to ill health or some unavoidable misfortune. To that extent he or she does not repeat but actually completes the school work that he or she has failed to cover. In fact, repeating a class comes for most students at Form 5 and Form 6 after failing the Tonga School
Certificate Examination and the Pacific Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination respectively.

*Rates of early school leaving in Tonga*

The reports from the Tonga Ministry of Education revealed that the extent of early school leaving was 35 per cent in 1991 and 39 per cent in 1992 (Report of the Ministry of Education, 1991 and 1992). The method used for calculating those rates was the *Age Cohort Method*. While the secondary school population consists of 53 per cent boys and 47 per cent girls, the extent of early school leaving was much greater for male students with 65 per cent of leavers being boys, as compared to only 35 per cent being girls (Report of the Ministry of Education 1991 & 1992). The incidence of early school leaving occurred mostly between Form 3 and Form 5.

*Comparison of early school leavers with others*

The second question, which focuses primarily on the personal and social characteristics of early school leavers, has two other components. The first component compares the personal and social characteristics of early school leavers with the characteristics of the national population of Tonga. The reason for this is to determine if there are differences in those characteristics.

The second component of the second question compares the personal and social characteristics of early school leavers with those of the unsuccessful completers. One of the important propositions that emerged from the research context in Tonga in chapter three is that there is a perception in Tonga that the problems associated with early school leavers are much greater than the early school leavers themselves. In fact, the unsuccessful completers are perceived to have experienced similar problems. Thus, the reason for the inclusion of the unsuccessful completers in this question is to determine if
their characteristics are similar to those of early school leavers. If they are found to be significantly close, then the problem of early school leaving would include the unsuccessful completers as well. However, similar characteristics between the two groups do not necessarily mean there is a problem. It is only if the outcomes of secondary schooling are the same for the two groups that there is a problem.

Advantages of secondary schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

The third question, which deals with the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers, also includes the consequences of secondary schooling for the unsuccessful completers. Thus, both the early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers were asked to list the three major advantages of secondary schooling for them in order of importance. The reason for this is that there is a need to determine the consequences of secondary schooling for both groups. If the similarities are found to be significant, then the assumption that they are similar is further confirmed.

Disadvantages of secondary schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

Again both the early school leavers and unsuccessful completers were asked to provide three major disadvantages of secondary schooling for them in order of importance. The reason for this exercise is similar to the reason for the previous comparison. If the disadvantages that both groups have derived from their secondary schooling are found to be similar, then there is an added reason for the increasing perception in Tonga that both groups have experienced similar problems. The perception of the other three groups of respondents - teachers and school administrators, community leaders and parents of early school leavers - was sought by asking them to list the three major problems associated with early school leaving in order of importance. The reason for this is to determine further if their perception of the problems relating to early school leaving is similar to the disadvantages provided by early school leavers and unsuccessful completers. Again, if
further similarities can be established, then the perception that the problems of early school leaving are much greater than the early school leavers themselves is further substantiated. The accumulated effect of such an evidence is that early school leaving is only the tip of the iceberg and Tonga is facing massive educational problems.

Perception of secondary school attractiveness

The *fourth question*, which focuses on the causes of early school leaving, has two components. The first one seeks the perception of the five groups of respondents on the attractiveness of the secondary schools which influenced the sample students during the secondary schooling years (1988-1995). The reason for this is to determine the possible effects that the school facilities, teachers, school administrators and students may have had on students to leave secondary schooling prematurely.

Causes of early school leaving

In the second component, each of the five groups of respondents - *early school leavers, unsuccessful completers, parents of early school leavers, teachers and school administrators, and community leaders* - was asked to provide three major causes of early school leaving in order of importance. This question was asked nine times because of the nine "agents" which were perceived to have influenced students to leave school early. They are: *the teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Education Department (government and non-government), Tongan Government and the Tongan culture*. Taking the "agents" of teachers, for example, the question was: What are the three major causes of early school leaving related to teachers in order of importance? It is important to determine if there are similarities in the responses of the five groups of respondents especially those of the early school leavers and unsuccessful completers. The reason is again to determine if there are further similarities between those two groups.
Policy measures for reducing early school leaving

The fifth question, which deals with the most appropriate policy measures for reducing the problem of early school leaving, focuses on the kinds of policy measures that each of the nine "agents" would implement to help students to successfully complete their secondary schooling. Thus, the question was asked nine times in the same way as it was previously done with the causes. Taking the "agents" of school administrators, for example, the question was: What are the three "things" in order of importance that school administrators can do to help student successfully complete their secondary schooling?

The choice of the sample of schools

The four Catholic and one non-Catholic secondary schools shown in Figure 4.1 represented about 22 per cent of the secondary school population in Tonga in 1990. They are the only secondary schools belonging to these two Churches. In 1995, they still accounted for an equivalent share of the secondary school population. This research was limited to those five secondary schools because of the need to focus more intensely on the Catholic Education System and of the limited funds and time available for research fieldwork. Obviously this sample could not be taken as being representative of the secondary school population in Tonga because more than 78 per cent of the secondary school population are not included. However, since a number of decision makers in other education systems in Tonga are interested in the findings of this research, it is hoped that these findings could be instrumental in moving those in other education systems to address the problem of early school leaving in their own systems.
Figure 4.1 Secondary schools in Tonga in 1990

Source: Submission to the Tongan Cabinet 1992

The Location of the five sample secondary schools

St. Andrew Secondary School is located to the south of the capital city of Tonga, Nuku'alofa, on the main island group of Tongatapu. Most of the students attending this school would have come from the urban areas of the township of Nuku'alofa, the capital of Tonga. The school is owned by the Anglican Church but the vast majority of its students are from other church denominations. It is a co-educational school of about 450 students. It is perceived to be among the good schools in Tonga.

Behind Queen Salote Wharf at the harbour front of Nuku'alofa, is the largest Catholic secondary school of 'Apifo'ou College at the suburb of Ma'ufanga which is about three kilometres from the centre of Nuku'alofa. Two thirds of the students of this college would have come from the suburb of Ma'ufanga itself and the other urban areas of Nuku'alofa. The other third would be found in villages situated within ten miles from the school. The majority of the 1300 students in the college are Catholics. About twenty percent of the students would be from Protestant churches. It was a boys' school until 1986 after the celebration of its centenary. It is considered as the "mother" of all the
Catholic schools in that the ex-students from that school and their work have given rise to the establishment of the other secondary schools.

In the same island of Tongatapu at Mu'a, the former capital of Tonga, is the second largest Catholic secondary school of Takuilau College about 21 kilometres from Nuku'alofa. It was established in 1975 as a co-educational institution, and it was placed under the control of the Marist Brothers of the School (FMS) who came from New Zealand for the purpose of inculcating the educational flavour for which they are known throughout the world of education. The school is situated in the most heavily concentrated population of Catholics in Tonga. 90 per cent of the 550 students at school are Catholics, and the rest are Protestants. Most of these students live within an area of no more than about 10 kilometres from the school. The specific character of the school is that it is the mainstay of the wealth of the Tongan culture and traditions which were nurtured and fostered for centuries in the locality through the residence and the impact of the royal lines of kings especially the Tu'i Tonga (literally - King Tonga), the spiritual and the highest line of kings.

In the island group of Ha'apai which is about 200 kilometres from the main island group of Tongatapu, is situated the third co-educational Catholic secondary school of St. Joseph's Community College. It is situated in Lifuka, the main island of the Ha'apai group. It is also the biggest secondary school there with about 300 students. Unlike the other Catholic schools, most of the students of St. Joseph's are non-Catholics mainly because Catholics are not as numerous in Ha'apai. Most of the students would have come from the main island of Lifuka, and the others from one of the many small islands forming the Ha'apai group. In most cases the students from the outer islands would have to stay with relatives on the island of Lifuka because St. Joseph's is not a boarding school, and to commute daily is a near physical impossibility because of the lack of daily transport to and from the main island of Lifuka. The special character of this school is
that it is a community in which the school and the local community share facilities and resources for the development of both.

In the Vava'u group further north from the Ha'apai group is the fourth Catholic secondary school of Chanel College. It used to be the main secondary school there until the establishment of the government school of Vava'u High School. Its size is similar to that of St. Joseph's Community College but most of its students are Catholics. The vast majority of the students live in the biggest urban centre of Neiafu, where the school is situated. Unlike a good number of the students of St. Joseph's in the Ha'apai group, very few of the students of Chanel College would have come from the small and scattered islands of the Vava'u group. It was established as a co-educational school in 1966 and it has benefitted from the contribution of three religious congregations: the Marist Fathers and Brothers (SM), the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary (SMSM) and the Christian Brothers (CFC).

In summary, these five secondary schools have produced some outstanding scholars, musicians, artists and sportsmen, to mention only a few, let alone a host of worthy citizens whose influence extends beyond the physical boundary of the Kingdom of Tonga.

2. Rationale for and the number in the five groups of respondents

Teachers and administrators of sample schools

The teachers and administrators who were selected to complete the questionnaires were all those in the sample schools in 1995 who had worked at least in one of the years that the early school leavers were in the sample schools. The assumption was that they would have known something about the school environment that had impacted on the early school leavers (Payne in Weis et al., 1989: 113 - 128). All of these teachers and school
Administrators were identified for the survey by the principal of each sample school. All together there were 122 of them and 110 of whom were included in the survey. They represented 90 per cent of the sample population of teachers and administrators.

**Teachers and administrators of non-sample schools**

The researcher was also interested in the responses of some of the teachers and administrators that were not included in the sample. Three secondary schools (one high school from the government education system, and two high schools from the education system of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga) representing another 10 per cent of the secondary school population, accepted the request for their teachers and administrators to complete the questionnaires. Of the 68 teachers and school administrators, 53 responded to the questionnaires. They were all teaching in 1995. They represented 78 per cent of the teachers and administrators in those schools.

With these responses one could attempt to see if there were some similarities emerging between the perceptions of these teachers and school administrators of the issues involved, and those from the teachers and school administrators of the five sample secondary schools. While these similarities in perceptions could not be taken as a basis for some kind of generalisability of the findings, they could be taken as being indicative of the nature of the problem of early school leaving in their schools.

**Early school leavers**

The *early school leavers* were the students who entered the first class of those five sample schools in 1988 and 1989, and did not sit the Tonga School Certificate Examination at the completion of what is termed 'general education' which consisted of Forms 1 to 5. The importance of this examination as a decisive measure of educational success was based on the fact that it was the first public examination that students had to pass to give them the
slightest hope of gaining some form of paid employment opportunities, and for some to thereby progress towards further schooling. Generally, it was the minimum schooling attainment that a student must get in Tonga before he or she could readily accept his or her schooling as being worthwhile.

The selection of 1988 and 1989 new entrants as the sample was related largely to the fact that they should have sat the Tonga School Certificate Examination by 1993 and 1994, and the majority of those students would be available to be interviewed in 1995. Secondly, they were still within the recent memory of teachers, parents and fellow students. Similarly, early school leavers and fellow students could easily remember what the school and the staff were like when they were there. Thirdly, the decision to select not only the new entrants of 1988 but also those of 1989 was to obtain a sample that was sufficiently large and representative of the early school leavers of the sample schools. The total number of students in the two cohorts was 1,042.

Unsuccessful completers

It would seem that the advantages accruing to secondary schooling would be more clearly determined through a comparison of its impact on the early school leavers and the successful completers of secondary schooling. However, the researcher was more interested in comparing the impacts of secondary schooling on early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers because it was thought that although one group stayed longer in secondary schooling, the outcomes of their secondary schooling for their lives may turn out to be similar. It could be that the unsuccessful completers belonged to another form of "early school leaving": those who remained in school but failed in their pursuit of academic credentials. "For both categories of early school leaving the end results are the same: they both fail to acquire the competencies and credentials necessary for social and economic advancement in adult life" (Solomon in Weis et al., 1989 : 79).
The selection of the sample of the unsuccessful completers was based on two criteria. Firstly, they were representative of gender, and secondly of the villages of the 1988 and 1989 new intakes to the sample schools. With the list of these students and their villages, the researcher went out to the villages and 200 questionnaires were given out to the unsuccessful completers. The number of questionnaires that were completed and returned to the researcher was 180. That was a 90 per cent response rate. Although the respondents represented only 58 per cent of the unsuccessful completers of the 1988 and 1989 new cohorts, the high response rate was indicative of the willingness of those respondents to participate in the study. One could argue that those who were not given the questionnaires could be different from those who completed them. The researcher maintains that the views of 58 per cent of those students would be sufficiently representative of the sample population because he believes that there are close similarities in their living conditions in the villages and in their educational experiences.

The community leaders

The sample of the community leaders was selected to represent the three levels of the society in Tonga: government, church and village. The views of those in government are important because they are the decision makers of issues relating to schooling in Tonga. Since most of the secondary schooling in Tonga is in the hands of Christian Churches, their views on early school leaving from secondary schools are necessary for a more comprehensive approach to the problem. The village environment plays an important role in the incidence of early school leaving because the attractiveness of the village life as an alternative lifestyle poses a strong challenge to secondary school students (Afeaki, 1980).

The researcher considered three categories for the community leaders from the village level. Firstly, there were the town officers who were selected every three years by each village as the government representatives whose task it is to look after the welfare of the village. Secondly, the district officers were the government representatives elected every
three years by a district to look after the interests of those districts. Thirdly, the senior
civil servants who had worked for at least 20 years were considered to be among the
leaders of the villages. There were 56 respondents from the village level. The numbers
who responded to the questionnaires were: 27 of the total number of 44 town officers
(61%), 5 of the 8 district officers (63%), and 24 of the 39 senior civil servants (62%).
On the whole they represented 62 per cent of the sample population. The response rate
was 89 per cent because 56 of the 63 questionnaires were completed.

There were three categories for the leaders from the Church level. They were the Heads
of Churches, Church Ministers, and Church Workers (including stewards, catechists,
work managers and other ministries). There were 46 respondents from the Church level.
The numbers who responded to the questionnaires were: 5 of the 10 Heads of Churches
(50%), 16 of the 23 Church Ministers (70%), and 25 of the 46 Church Workers (54%)
responded to the survey. On the whole they represented 58 per cent of the sample
population. The response rate was 77 per cent because 46 of the 60 questionnaires were
completed and returned to the researcher.

The community leaders from the government level fell into three categories. The first
category included the senior officials in government departments. Six out of 16
government senior officials (55%) were included in the survey. The second category
comprised the politicians. Five parliament representatives of the people out of the total of
nine (56%), and four of the nine nobles in Parliament (44%) were surveyed. The third
category consisted of the government most senior officials from the Ministry of Education
because of the fact that the education policies discussed or simply endorsed in parliament
were designed by them. Three of the top five education officials in the Ministry of
Education responded to the survey (60%). An overall response rate of 72 per cent was a
very satisfactory result because 18 of the 25 questionnaires were completed on time.
Most were personally collected by the researcher.
Parents of early school leavers

The sample of the parents of early school leavers comprises one of the parents or guardians of each early school leaver, and there were 365 of them. They represented 66 per cent of all the parents of early school leavers. Their questionnaires were completed during their interviews in the same way as those of the early school leavers. The views of parents were important in that they would present a different perspective on the problem of early school leaving from those of the other respondents.

Documentation search for early school leavers

The list of early school leavers was obtained through the application of the True Cohort Method. This meant that a list was drawn up from the school rolls of each school of all the students who were enrolled in Form 1 (first class of most secondary school in Tonga) in 1988 and 1989. Since it normally took five years to sit the Tonga School Certificate Examination, the results of the Tonga School Certificate Examination from 1992 to 1994 were examined. The names of students from the 1988 and 1989 new cohorts that were missing from the examination results of the five sample schools in those years were marked down as early school leavers. The students who were transferred to other schools would be traced down to see if they sat the Tonga School Certificate Examination. Those who failed to do so were included among the early school leavers. Thus, the rate of early school leaving was the percentage of the new entrants of 1988 and 1989 who left secondary school before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination.

3. Overview of purposes, questionnaires and respondents

Figure 4.2 presents an overview of the composition of the questionnaires employed by the researcher to collect data for this study. Across the top are the headings of each column:
purposes, early school leavers, unsuccessful completers, parents of early school leavers, teachers and school administrators, and community leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Early school leavers (ESL) N = 365 Appendix 2</th>
<th>Unsuccessful completers N = 180 Appendix 3</th>
<th>Parents of ESL N = 365 Appendix 4</th>
<th>Teachers and administrators N = 365 Appendix 1</th>
<th>Community leaders N = 120 Appendix 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the specific components of each sample?</td>
<td>Students who left secondary schools before completing Form 1 to Form 5</td>
<td>Selected to be: • representative of villages and • representative of gender</td>
<td>One of the parents or guardians of each early school leaver</td>
<td>• Sample teachers (110) • Non-sample teachers (53)</td>
<td>Three levels of: • Government (30) • Church (40) • Village (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the extent of early school leaving?</td>
<td>• The extent of early school leaving is the percentage of the 1988 and 1989 new cohorts of the sample secondary schools in Tonga which left secondary schooling before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination. The True Cohort Method was used for the calculation of it. The sources for the data were the school rolls, school examination results, interviews of early school leavers, and their parents or guardians.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Contents of the Questionnaires | Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers were asked to respond to these two opened questions: • What have been the three major advantages of your secondary schooling in order of importance? • What have been the three major disadvantages of your secondary schooling in order of importance? | School teachers, school administrators, community leaders and parents of early school leavers were asked to respond to these two open ended questions: • Do you think that leaving school early is a problem? • If so, what have been the three major problems associated with early school leaving in order of importance? |
| What were the personal, and social characteristics of the respondents? | • Years at school • Gender • Did you live with parents? • Occupation of parents • Education of parents • Family size • Friends while at school • Did you pass the secondary school entrance exam before entering high school? | • Are you a parent or guardian? • Gender • Education level • Occupation • Monthly family income? • Was any of you away during your child’s schooling? |
| What are the consequences of schooling for early school leavers? | | |
| What are the causes of early school leaving? | School teachers, school administrators, early school leavers and unsuccessful completers were asked to assess school attractiveness by responding to 35 multiple choice statements. All the five groups of respondents were asked to respond to this open ended question - • What were the three major causes of early school leaving in order of importance which were related individually to each of these nine “agents”: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Education Department (government and non-government), Tongan government and Tongan culture? |
| What are the most appropriate policy measures for reducing early school leaving? | All the five groups of respondents were asked to respond to this open ended question - • What are the three “things” in order of importance which each of these nine “agents” can individually do to reduce early school leaving: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Department of Education (government or church), Tongan government and Tongan culture? |

Figure 4.2: Overview of purposes, questionnaires and respondents
The 'purposes' simply reiterated the research questions. The other headings were the five different groups of respondents to the questionnaires. The number of respondents involved in each group and the appendix number identifying each of the questionnaire are also included in the five headings.

Each of the five questionnaires consisted of four general components:

• personal and social characteristics of the respondents
• consequences of schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers
• causes of early school leaving, and
• policy measures to reduce early school leaving.

As already indicated, the content of the questionnaires (Appendix 1, 2, 3, 4, 5) were developed from the findings of the literature review and the researcher's personal knowledge of the school situation in Tonga. Each questionnaire was trialed with a sample of twenty respondents from the Tongan Community living in the cities of Wollongong and Sydney, Australia. Adjustments to the questionnaires were made before they were finally printed.

Three groups of respondents - teachers and administrators, community leaders and unsuccessful completers - completed the questionnaires on their own. Early school leavers and their parents completed their questionnaires through an interview with the researcher whose task was to ensure that they understood the questions and their responses were correctly recorded. All the questionnaires were drafted in the English language, and they were translated into the Tongan language by the researcher for the trial. The field questionnaires employed for the data collection were all printed in the Tongan language except for 20 English copies for respondents whose first language was English and for those who might prefer an English copy.
3.1 Questionnaire for teachers and school administrators

Rationale

It was clear from the literature review that teachers and administrators of secondary schools played an important role in the successful retention of students (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). However, it was also suggested that they could have had negative impacts on the students, and these could have resulted in some of them being transferred to other schools or leaving secondary school altogether (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986). Furthermore, they could offer concrete suggestions on why students left secondary schooling, either from their own personal experiences of dealing with them or from a general knowledge of the problem. As for measures that could be employed for reducing early school leaving, their first hand experiences would be valuable especially if students had left secondary schooling mainly because of some serious failures in the school system itself.

Questionnaire content and development

The questionnaire for teachers and school administrators is shown in Appendix 1. The first part of the questionnaire sought to obtain some background information on each teacher and school administrator. Specifically, the background information included the following:

- gender
- age in 1994
- years of teaching in secondary schooling
- highest academic qualification between 1988 and 1994
- highest teaching qualification between 1988 and 1994
- monthly salary in 1994 in the Tongan currency which is similar to the Australian
The second part of the questionnaire consisted of a series of 35 multiple choice statements which focused on different aspects of each sample school in 1993 and 1994. There were five Likert options for the rating of the questions: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree and strongly disagree. There were 6 statements on school facilities and resources, 11 statements on school administration, 10 statements on teachers and 8 statements on students. Efforts were made to ensure that items were balanced in the sense that some expressed positive statements while others expressed negative opinions. This method was employed to improve the trustworthiness of the responses.

Each statement was a factor purported to have contributed towards the decision for a student to leave school early either in the literature review in chapter two or in the research context in Tonga in chapter three. This is really the first step in the search for the causes of early school leaving because the sections of the multiple choice statements relating to school facilities and resources, teachers, school administrators and students could reveal some of the factors responsible for students leaving school early.

The third part of the questionnaire was concerned with the possible causes of early school leaving. The impact of the nine "agents" on the decision for a student to leave school early were investigated in this section of the questionnaire. They included the teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Education Department (government or non-government), Tongan government and Tongan culture. This question was asked of each one of the nine "agents": What were the three "things" in order of importance that (e.g. parents) did which could have caused students to leave school before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination? For example, with regards to the teachers, the question was: What were the three "things" in order of importance that teachers did which could have caused students to leave school before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination?
The fourth section of the questionnaire dealt with the types of policy measures that could be employed to reduce early school leaving. The questions were presented positively to discover what could be done by each of the same nine "agents" outlined in the third part of the questionnaire, to improve secondary schooling so that students will not leave before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination. Again each respondent was asked to give three policy measures in the order of importance. For example, with regards to the teachers, the question was: "What are the three "things" in order of importance that teachers should do to help students to successfully complete their secondary schooling?"

**Trial**

Eighteen teachers and two school administrators from the Tongan Communities living in the cities of Wollongong and Sydney, Australia, took part in the trialling of this particular questionnaire. The researcher himself went out to the homes of these people and explained to each of them the purpose of the questionnaire. It was only after they agreed to take part in the survey trial that the questionnaire was given to them. All of them were quite delighted to complete the questionnaire. Five of the teachers worked in Tonga before coming to Australia.

After they completed the first section of the questionnaire, four questions (given below) were asked, and the respondents were requested to offer suggestions as to what could be done to improve this section of the questionnaire. The questions were:

• Were any of the questions unclear?
• Were any of the questions too long?
• Were any of the questions too difficult to answer?
• What else can be done to improve this section of the questionnaire?

The trial showed that there was no difficulty with the first section of the questionnaire. The second part of the questionnaire which consisted of 35 multiple choice statements was
carefully scrutinised in that each respondent was asked to indicate in the box provided under each multiple choice statement as to whether that statement was clear. The respondents were asked to employ the three options given below for the rating of their responses.

1. Very clear
2. Not too clear
3. Not clear at all

Each respondent was asked to place the number of the option that he or she had chosen in the box provided below each statement. For example, if he or she had judged the statement to be very clear then he or she was asked to put 1 in the box below that statement because 1 stood for very clear. The fact of the matter was that 19 of the 20 respondents selected number 1 as their responses to all the 35 statements. There was only one who had a number 2 answer for two of the 35 statements. These two statements were reworded so that ambiguity or lack of clarity could be avoided.

The third and fourth part of the questionnaire was subjected to the same test and no teacher or school administrator had any problem in understanding any of those statements and questions. At the end of the questionnaire each respondent was asked if there was any further comment for the improvement of the questionnaire. Three teachers thought that the questionnaire might be a bit long, and yet two of them thought that those questions were so closely related that they would be better off to remain as they were. Only one of them thought that perhaps some of the nine "agents" included in the third and fourth part of the questionnaire could be cut down from nine to eight, leaving out the Tongan Culture. The decision of the researcher was to leave the third and fourth part of the questionnaire unchanged.
3.2 Questionnaire for early school leavers

Rationale

Since the early school leavers are the focus of this research, it is important to get their views on why they left secondary schooling before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination. Furthermore, in view of the fact that they were the victims of early school leaving, their views may prove to be different from those of the other four groups of respondents. The assumption was that the views of teachers and school administrators of their school and of why students left their school could easily be biased by a conscious desire to make a specific impression. With the help of the early school leavers' responses to the 35 multiple choice statements, the researcher would be in a position to see the school from another perspective, and to assess the validity of their claims against those made by the teachers and school administrators of that particular school.

Questionnaire content and development

The questionnaire for early school leavers is shown in Appendix 2. The first part of the questionnaire focused on the background information of the early school leaver. This section included the following questions:

• What year did you enter secondary school?
• What class were you in when you left school?
• Are you a male or female?
• With whom did you live during your secondary schooling?
• Were both of your parents/guardians still alive when you were at school?
• Was any of them overseas when you were at school?
• If any, who was overseas & for how long?
• What was the occupation of your father/guardian when you were at school?
• What was the occupation of your mother/guardian when you were at school?
How many children were at your home when you left school?

What was the highest educational achievement of your mother/guardian?

What was the highest educational achievement of your father/guardian?

Who were your friends when you were at school?

Did you pass the secondary school entrance examination before entering high school?

The second part of the questionnaire sought the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers. There were two questions, one relating to the advantages of secondary schooling and the other to the disadvantages. Thus, the first question was as follows: "What have been the three major advantages of your secondary schooling in order of importance?" The second question was: "What have been the three major disadvantages of your secondary schooling in order of importance?"

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of the same 35 multiple choice statements which teachers and school administrators responded to in their questionnaire. The fourth and the fifth parts of the questionnaire were the same as the fourth and fifth parts of the questionnaires for teachers and school administrators.

**Trial**

The researcher with the help of the Tongans living in Wollongong and Sydney was able to locate twenty early school leavers. Sixteen of them attended the Catholic schools in Tonga, and that helped the trial because they were more than willing to take part. As for the four who did not attend the Catholic schools in Tonga, there was no difficulty because they belong to the Catholic Church. Again they were delighted to help with the trialling of the questionnaire. Most of them were located through the Catholic youth organisation known as the *Lataki*. Each one was personally approached by the researcher about the survey.
There was no difficulty with the first part of the questionnaire. There were two
difficulties associated with the second part of the questionnaire. There was some
confusion with the meaning of the phrase "in order of importance". The other problem
was related to the "advantages of your secondary schooling" which was interpreted by
some to mean the advantages of secondary schooling to them when they were at school.
There were difficulties also with the "disadvantages of your schooling" which was taken
to mean the disadvantages that they encountered when they were actually at school.

The trial of the third part of the questionnaire which dealt with the 35 multiple choice
statements revealed more problems. Only two of the twenty respondents seemed to have
had some clear understanding of the questions. It was clear from their responses that
either they did not understand the statements or they were confused about the Likert five
point scales. The alternation of the positive and negative statements probably added to
their confusion.

Similar difficulties were found in the third and fourth part of the questionnaire. On the
whole the researcher found the misunderstandings to be more numerous than expected
and he decided to complete the questionnaires through interview in the main study.

3.3 Questionnaire for unsuccessful completers

Rationale

The views of the unsuccessful completers were gathered through the questionnaire which
is shown Appendix 3. The researcher felt that a questionnaire to be completed by
unsuccessful completers would provide a different perspective from those of teachers and
administrators. The views of those students were expected to provide some kind of a
balance if, on the one hand, the teachers and school administrators of a particular school
may have wanted to make a particular impression, and the early school leavers, on the other hand, may have had negative attitudes towards the school.

The other reason that could prove more vitally important for having this questionnaire was that the researcher was interested to find out if there were differences in attitudes and in educational values and outcomes between the unsuccessful completers and the early school leavers. It was assumed that if there were great similarities between them, then it would not be unreasonable to maintain that the psychological and social problems associated with early school leavers would be similar to those experienced by the unsuccessful completers. Finally, it could be that the unsuccessful completers may belong to the version of early school leavers who remain at school without actually acquiring the competencies and credentials necessary for social and economic advancement in adult life (Solomon in Weis et al., 1989).

Questionnaire content and development

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of the same questions as those relating to the personal and social characteristics of early school leavers. Since the second, third and fourth part of this questionnaire were exactly the same as the corresponding parts of the questionnaire for early school leavers, they will not be discussed again here.

Trial

It was not difficult to find twenty unsuccessful completers because most of the Catholic youth in Wollongong and Sydney belong to the New South Wales Tongan Youth Organisation known as Lataki where they could easily be identified. The researcher personally knows a number of them from school, and have on invitation spoken to them on a number of occasions in Sydney and Wollongong. The researcher went to their homes, and explained to all of them individually the purpose of the questionnaire. They
were glad, in the words of one of them, "to take part in anything that could be helpful to your study" (‘oku ou mātu‘aki fu‘u fiefia ‘aupito ke u kau ‘i ha fa‘ahinga me’a pe ‘e ala tokoni atu ki ho‘o ako”).

The procedure for the trialing of the questionnaire for unsuccessful completers followed exactly the one that was employed for the trialing of the questionnaire for early school leavers and that for teachers and school administrators. As with the trialing of the two previous questionnaires, the trial of the first section of this questionnaire showed that the respondents did not have any difficulty understanding it. The test of - very clear, not too clear and not clear at all - was applied to the second part of the questionnaire. Eighteen of the twenty respondents did not have any difficulty with understanding the questions except for a couple of questions which two of the respondents regarded as being not too clear.

It was thought that the words “incentives” (faka’ai’ai) in one question, and “teacher development program” (polokalama fakalelei ‘i o e faiako’) in another, which could be familiar to teachers and school administrators, could easily be misunderstood by unsuccessful completers. The Tongan rendering of these two words were modified and alongside each word, their English renderings were placed in brackets. The third, fourth and fifth part of the questionnaire which respectively dealt with the 35 multiple choice statements, the causes of early school leaving and the exploration of policy measures for its reduction, did not pose any difficulty with any of the respondents.

There were only two incidences where one respondent put the causes of early school leaving which were related to teachers not in the category of teachers but in that of school administrators, and another one placed the causes of early school leaving which were related to parents not in the category of parents but in that of the village community. Since these misplacements of responses would be placed by the researcher in their proper
category if they would arise, it was decided that the fourth and the fifth part of the questionnaire would remain unchanged.

3.4 Questionnaire for parents of early school leavers

Rationale

It was felt that the responses of parents of early school leavers were important for a number of reasons. First of all, it was important for the researcher to get another perspective on the causes of early school leaving and on the measures that could be employed to reduce its occurrence. Secondly, their views would be helpful in either clarifying, confirming or denying some of the claims made by the early school leavers who would be interviewed before them. Thirdly, their perceptions of family problems and of life in general would provide an alternative perspective to those of early school leavers. Fourthly, the economics of the family would be one of the factors influencing the decision for early school leaving, and parents would know more about that than their children. Last but not least, the influence of parents on their children and their education has been identified in the literature (Rosier, 1978) as one of the main factors impacting on the decision for the student to leave secondary school early.

Questionnaire content and development

The questionnaire for parents of early school leavers is found in Appendix 4. The first part of the questionnaire was similar to the first part of the other questionnaires because it sought to obtain some background information on the parents of early school leavers. The questions in this part of the questionnaire included the following:

- What school did your child first attend?
- What year did you child enter that school?
- When did you child leave school?
• What class was your child in when he or she left school?
• Was your child a girl or a boy?
• Are you one of the parents or a guardian?
• What was your occupation at the time?
• How many children were in your home at the time?
• Was any of the parents/guardians away from home when your child left school?
• If so, for how long?
• Was it the mother or father?
• How many relatives with good education who could have been taken as role models for your children’s schooling?

The second part of the questionnaire deals with the sources of income for the family, including the ownership of land, the availability of plantations especially cash crops, wages of family members, overseas remittances, and other sources. The related questions were as follows: Was there any loan to be paid off? How much of the income was spent on: home, education, church, nobility and others?

The third part of the question seeks to determine if early school leaving is a problem for Tonga. There were two questions involved here. In the first question the respondents were asked if they consider 'early school leaving' a problem for Tonga. In the second question they were asked to provide three major problems in order of importance relating to early school leaving if they think it is a problem.

The fourth part of the questionnaire requires the reasons for the early departure of their children from secondary schooling. In seeking the causes of early school leaving, each of the previous nine "agents" was identified in the questionnaire as to what impact that each may have had on the decision for a student to leave school early. Respondents were asked to provide three causes relating to each of the "agents" in order of importance. The fourth part of the questionnaire focused on the policy measures or what could be done by
each of these "agents" to reduce the problem of early school leaving. Again three answers were asked to be provided in order of importance.

**Trial**

The twenty parents of early school leavers from the Tongan Communities of Wollongong and Sydney were not necessarily the parents of the early school leavers who were selected for the trialling of the questionnaire for early school leavers. However, 14 of them were parents of those early school leavers. The other six were parents who at one time had an early school leaver among his or her children. The researcher went to the homes of these people and personally asked each one of them, after explaining to them the purpose of the questionnaire, to take part in the trialing of it. They were all willing to participate in the trial.

The procedures adopted for the testing of the other questionnaires were applied equally to this questionnaire. Since a large number of parents of early school leavers were expected to be mainly early school leavers themselves, it was felt that they would probably have had difficulties with the questionnaire similar to those experienced by the early school leavers. This was clearly confirmed from the trial of the questionnaire. The confusion and misunderstandings were indeed similar in some ways to those experienced by the early school leavers.

It must be acknowledged that the parents were slightly better off in their understanding of some parts of their questionnaire. However, their levels of understanding were largely unsatisfactory for the researcher who required responses that came from a realistic understanding of the questions. It was decided by the researcher that personal interviews of parents would avoid possible misunderstandings from the text of the questionnaires, and it would be helpful in focusing their responses on the questions.
3.5 Questionnaire for community leaders

Rationale

Oftentimes the failure to solve a problem arises from a failure on the part of the decision makers to understand the problem, or perhaps their perceptions of the problem are vastly different from the perceptions of those who are affected by it. For example, the decision in Tonga to increase the number of secondary schools in the outer islands was taken "in an effort to mitigate the domestic migration trends (from the outer islands to Tongatapu) that has been primarily caused by school access constraints" (Tonga's Sixth Five-Year Development Plan 1991 - 1995: 296).

The perception of decision makers of the reasons for domestic migration is certainly mistaken because from the interviews of the parents (all migrants from the outer islands) of the village of Popua in Tongatapu in a student project in which the researcher was involved in 1988, it was found that access to secondary schooling was not a significant factor. In the order of importance, the most important factors were: availability of employment opportunities, greater access to all sorts of opportunities, more educational opportunities especially post-secondary education. Although the educational reason came third, it was not directly related to greater access to secondary schooling. In fact, it was related more to the type of educational opportunities that were not available in the outer islands.

There is a fear that the same could happen with the problem of early school leaving. Thus, it was felt that a third questionnaire to be completed by community leaders (decision makers) in the village, church and government levels would be important in surfacing some of their perceptions of the problem. It is possible that their perceptions of the problem of early school leaving would be different from those of early school leavers and their parents. However, if they were found to be similar then there would be a fairly high
probability that appropriate measures for the reduction of the problem would be likely to be wisely produced and effectively implemented. Conversely, if their understanding of the issues and concerns were found to be different, then the demand for careful and focused thinking on the formulation and implementation of measures towards reducing the extent of early school leaving would be great and indeed challenging.

*Questionnaire content and development*

The questionnaire for community leaders shown in Appendix 5 has only three parts. The first part of the questionnaire seeks the following personal information from the respondent:

- What is the name of the village in which you now live?
- What is your present occupation?
- What other important job did you do in the past?
- What is your gender?
- Do you see 'early school leaving' as a problem for Tonga?
- If so, what are, in the order of importance, the three major problems associated with early school leaving?

The open ended questions in the second and third part of this questionnaire are the same as the fourth and the fifth part of the questionnaires in Appendix 1, 2 and 3 which respectively deal with the causes of early school leaving, and the exploration of measures for its reduction. The significant addition in this questionnaire is these two questions:

- Do you see 'early school leaving' as a problem for Tonga?
- If so, what are, in the order of importance, the three major problems associated with early school leaving?

The responses were expected to reveal some of the consequences of secondary schooling for the early school leavers themselves and for the society as a whole in Tonga.
Trial

Twenty community leaders from the Tongan Communities of Wollongong and Sydney were not difficult for the researcher to identify. Eight Church officials were co-workers of the researcher in Tonga and to some extent in Australia as well. While four of the six teachers were co-workers in Catholic schools in Tonga, and the two retired town officers are known to the researcher as practising members of the Catholic Church, the four retired civil servants comprising a magistrate, two teachers and two policemen were either close relatives or class mates of the researcher. They were delighted to help with the trialing of the questionnaire.

The procedure followed in the trial was the same as that employed for the previous ones. It was discovered in the trial of the first part of the questionnaire that the twenty community leaders (eight church officials, six teachers, two retired town officers, and four retired civil servants) found it to be very clear. The second and third part of the questionnaire were subjected to the test of: very clear, not too clear, and not clear at all, and again they were found to be very clear. As expected the community leaders were more informed than the other respondents on these last two sections of the questionnaire, and this was evident from their responses. Thus, the questionnaire for them was left without any alteration.

4. Analysis of the data

The analysis of the data is divided into four sections:

* characteristics of respondents and general population,
* assessment of school attractiveness,
* causes of early school leaving and
* "policy" measures for reducing early school leaving.
Characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

The focus of this section is to determine if there are similarities between the characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers. Three components will be used in this comparison. The first comparison will be of the percentages of the personal characteristics of both groups found in their responses to the first part of their questionnaires. Included in this comparison is the information from parents' questionnaires about their income and educational levels for the determination of the socio-economic status of parents. The second comparison will be of the advantages and then of the disadvantages of secondary schooling for both groups. The scoring of responses will be three points for first response, two for the second and one for the third. From the sum of the scores a rank order will be determined. The outcomes of this comparison will be measured against the perception of the other three groups of respondents of the disadvantages relating to early school leaving. The reason for this is to determine if the perceptions of these three groups of the problems associated with early school leaving are similar to the perceptions of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers. The overall aim of this section is to determine if early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are similar in their characteristics and in their perceptions. The second aim is to determine if their perceptions can be confirmed or otherwise by the other three groups of respondents.

Assessment of school attractiveness

The part of the questionnaires for teachers, school administrators, early school leavers and unsuccessful completers - which deals with the 35 multiple choice questions or statements will be assessed according to the score given to each question. The five options for each question are: strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree. Thus, the score would range from one point for the strongly agree to five points.
for the **strongly disagree**. A mean score of those points will be calculated to yield the results that enabled the researcher to assess the findings that resulted from those multiple choice questions or statements. The reverse items will be scored in reverse in that where there is a rating of **strongly agree**, for example, the score given is one instead of five. Where there is a rating of **strongly disagree**, the score would be five instead of one. This method was applied to maintain the same rating of the scores throughout the 35 multiple choice questions or statements.

*Causes of early school leaving*

The causes of early school leaving will be analysed under nine headings in accordance with the nine "agents" identified in the theoretical framework: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Education Department (government and non-government), Tongan government, and the Tongan culture. The three responses relating to the causes and the policy measures were analysed in the same way.

There were four steps in the analysis of the open ended responses to the questions on the causes and policy measures. After individually writing down all the first responses, the second responses and third responses in three separate charts, the researcher faced the enormous task of placing them in categories. Given that the wording of ideas varied a great deal, the researcher attempted to put similar ideas together in appropriate categories. That process was difficult enough because the researcher had to deal with literally hundreds of responses and an enormous variety of expressions of the same ideas as will be illustrated in the example of the category of 'unemployment' (Figure 5.3) in chapter 5.

The most challenging part of the categorisation of responses came when there were ideas which could be placed in one or more categories. For example, should 'behaving badly', 'trouble making', and 'fighting' be placed in the same or separate categories? In view of their close similarities and of the need to clearly differentiate the categories, I decided to
place such similar ideas in the same category. However, when similar wordings increasingly emerged from the responses like 'trouble making' I decided to place them in a different category. Thus, at times categories were sub-divided while others were combined. This whole categorisation process was undertaken for each of the first responses, the second responses and the third responses to all the open ended questions.

The second step was the scoring of the responses which entails allocating three points to each first response, two to every second response and one for every third. The third step was the adding up of all the points to get the aggregate scores ($\Sigma$) for each category. In the fourth step these aggregate scores ($\Sigma$) were used for ranking those categories.

_Policy measures for reducing early school leaving_

The last section of the data analysis will be the exploration of the "policy" measures for reducing the problem of early school leaving. The responses to the questions on policy measures, as previously indicated, will be categorised, scored and ranked in the same way as those in the causes of early school leaving.

In summary, there will be four outcomes expected from the analysis of the data. Firstly, the proposition that the characteristics and the perceptions of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are similar, will be found to be sustained or not. Secondly, the section on the assessment of the attractiveness of the school environment will be able to provide some valuable information on whether the school environment is conducive for successful learning or not. If most of the mean scores will be closer to 5 then the school environment is conducive for successful learning but if they are closer to 1, then the school environment is far from being helpful to the schooling of the children. Thirdly, the causes of early school leaving that relate to each of the nine "agents" will provide a realistic perspective on the contribution that each of them makes to the problem of early school leaving. While there will be no weighing up of one set of causes against one
another, certain important issues are expected to emerge from these causes. Fourthly, the "policy" measures derived from the nine "agents" which are expected to influence students to leave school early will suggest the directions that the policy recommendations in the final chapter will take.

4.1 Limitations of research

*Restricted to the Catholic Education System*

One of the major limitations of this research is the fact that it was restricted to four Catholic and one non-Catholic secondary schools in Tonga. The inclusion of the non-Catholic secondary school is not sufficient to enable the researcher to generalise the findings to all the secondary schools in Tonga.

*Unavailability of respondents*

There was a difficulty with finding some of the respondents for interviews. Some of the parents were not available for interviews. This was particularly true of some of the parents of early school leavers from St. Joseph's Community College in the island group of Ha'apai. In the end the researcher had to satisfy himself with interviewing one of the senior members of the homes where they lived at Lifuka while they were at school. The same was true of 21 of the 365 early school leavers who were either overseas or in another island of the Tonga groups during the survey.

*Absence of successful completers*

The successful completers of secondary schooling are not included in this survey because of the particular focus that this study takes, but a survey of the successful completers would clearly highlight the differences between them and the early school leavers and
unsuccessful completers. The other important aspect for including them would be to determine how successful are the successful completers in their own estimate and in the perception of the wider community. It could be that they are not as successful as their academic credentials would make us believe.

*Inquiry Time*

The research fieldwork began on February, 1995 and it continued in some cases seven days a week until the second week of May, 1995. The researcher spent the first week seeing principals of the three secondary schools in the main island of Tongatapu, and distributing the questionnaires for the community leaders and the unsuccessful completers. They were asked to complete their questionnaires within a month since the researcher would begin the research for a few weeks in the islands of Ha'apai and Vava'u.

The research fieldwork was divided into three main sections. The first section was conducted in Chanel College in the Vava'u group and the second in St. Joseph's Community College in the Ha'apai group. Both sections took about a month. The third and the main section of the research fieldwork was carried out in the two Catholic secondary schools of - 'Apifo'ou College, Takuilau College - and the one non-Catholic College in the main island of Tongatapu for about ten weeks. The fieldwork was completed more quickly than expected because of the willing cooperation of former colleagues, friends, Church fellow workers and acquaintances.

5. Trustworthiness of the data

The trustworthiness of the data is perceived to be enhanced by the following factors: credibility of the researcher, preference for the researcher to do the interviews,
confidentiality and anonymity, questionnaires and interviews in the Tongan language, questionnaire trial, participant rapport and credibility of the research assistants.

Credibility of the researcher

The credibility of the researcher is essentially linked to the fact that he has been a Catholic priest, working in a variety of capacities both in the Church and other organisations. The responsibilities listed by the late Bishop of Tonga, Most Rev. Soane Lilo Foliaki, S.M., M.A., D.D. (1972-1993) speak for themselves.

The researcher was a secondary school teacher for a number of years; a Principal of three of the Catholic secondary schools; Deputy Director of Catholic Education (1984-88); Director of Catholic Education (1990-1992); Director & Composer of Music for the Catholic Church and others (1982 - ); a regular Adjudicator of various singing and brass band contests (1976 - ); Director of the Catholic Adult Education Programs & Catechetics Programs for Sunday schools (1978 -79); a Catholic priest (1975- ); a host of the Catholic radio programs (1977-79); a radio preacher for a number of years (1976-1988); the Regional Superior of the Marist Fathers and Brothers in Tonga (1985-88); Co-ordinator of candidates for Priestly Training (1982-85); Consultor to the Bishop of Tonga (1984-88); a Delegate from the Priests and Brothers of the Pacific to a General Chapter in Rome in 1985; a select member of the Government Scholarship Committee (1985-88), the Tongan Delegate in a Commonwealth Meeting in Ottawa (Canada) in 1978; President of the Principals' Association for the secondary schools in Tonga (1986-88), Co-ordinator of the Environment for the Tonga National Council of Churches (1990-1992) and a co-opt member of the Committee in Tonga for Prevention Against AIDS (see Appendix 6).

In support of the appropriateness of the researcher’s abilities and experiences for research in the education system in Tonga, the Bishop asserted that "(h)is (the researcher’s) many
abilities and wide experience make him a particularly suitable person to undertake research into the educational situation in Tonga" (see Appendix 6).

Those responsibilities of the researcher as an educator and as a priest have had a significant impact on the cooperation, access, level of response and the trustworthiness of the responses to this survey. The level of cooperation was clearly expressed in people's willingness to complete questionnaires seriously on time and to be readily available for interviews. People's cooperation was such that they were ready to come along to be interviewed even at the residence of the researcher when the researcher himself was unable to come to their homes. The response rate of the twenty people from the Tongan Communities of Wollongong and Sydney, who were selected for the trialing of each of the five questionnaires was almost 100 per cent. As for the response rate in Tonga to the five questionnaires, the lowest was 82 per cent and the highest was 95 per cent.

Prefereene for researcher to do the interviews

The intention of the researcher was to employ two or three teachers in each island group in Tonga to do some of the interviews of early school leavers and their parents. This was considered as a quicker way of covering the hundreds of parents and early school leavers within a short time. However, the researcher's primary concern was to get the valid and reliable information even if it took more time, money and energy. To test this out, slips of paper were given out by trusted people in the community to a sample of 20 parents and 20 early school leavers alike to put down in their order of preference as to whom they would prefer to be interviewed by. They had already learned about the research through the request and encouragement from the parish priests from the pulpit on Sundays for the people to support the work of the researcher primarily so that his study would be successfully carried out and secondarily because this study would help the Church to address this problem in its education system.
The options in each slip of paper were as follows: a former teacher, a current teacher, a fellow student, a community leader, and Makafalani Tatafu, (the researcher). It was discovered that almost hundred per cent opted for Makafalani Tatafu to interview them. Such a result called for a change in procedure because the researcher had intended to employ some teachers to do some of the interviews but the options of a former teacher and a current teacher were the least popular of the preferences. Thus, the researcher had no choice but to do all the interviews by himself. It became obvious from the interviews that parents and early school leavers were open and honest in their responses because quite a number of them especially parents were so moved when they related their stories that they broke down and cried their hearts out.

Many of the solo parents and parents experiencing family dislocations admitted that the interviews were golden opportunities for them to share their problems with someone in whom they could confide. The primary reason for this openness and honesty of responses was the fact that they knew that their stories would be confidentially kept within the confines of the researcher's conscience. Keeping confidential matters is one of the qualities in the Catholic priest that Catholic people in Tonga from their own personal experiences would have no difficulty in accepting. It is almost natural to expect the Catholic population of Tonga to confide in a Catholic priest but when parents and pupils from other religious denominations were found to be generally of the same opinion, the researcher was most pleased. It facilitated the interviews and more importantly, the information received from them was considered by the researcher to be trustworthy.

Confidentiality and anonymity assured

There were a few steps to be followed in the distribution of the questionnaires. With the questionnaires for the teachers and school administrators, the researcher went out to each school and spoke to the Principal and staff about the research and the necessity for gaining the correct information from the questionnaires. They were assured that the information
from their questionnaires would be confidentially treated, and their anonymity would be guaranteed. After a brief period for questions and clarifications, the questionnaires were given out to each member of the staff, in the researcher's quiet hope that at least 50 per cent of them would respond to the questionnaires. In fact, the response rates of the respondents were consistently high because the percentages of the questionnaires that were completed and returned to the researcher were as follows: 90 per cent of the teachers and school administrators from the sample secondary schools, 78 per cent of the teachers and school administrators from the non-sample secondary schools, 90 per cent of the questionnaires for the unsuccessful completers, 89 per cent of the questionnaires for the community leaders from the village level, 77 per cent of the questionnaires for the community leaders from the Church level, 72 per cent of the questionnaires for the community leaders from the government level. As for the early school leavers and their parents, 66 of each group were personally interviewed by the researcher.

*Questionnaires and interviews in the Tongan language*

The researcher's first hand experience of serious shortcomings of interviews and questionnaires in English of secondary school teachers in Tonga in a particular research project in 1993 made him realise that the most effective medium for gathering research data not only from the teachers but more so from the others was the Tongan language. Thus, all the questionnaires were translated into Tongan by the researcher, and checked for accuracy by another senior student at the university and my wife who is also a Tongan national with some facility in both languages before they were finally printed. All the interviews were conducted as well in the Tongan language by the researcher himself. The translation of the research interviews and the responses to the questionnaires from Tongan into English were again checked for accuracy by the same senior university student and my wife before the analysis of the data.
**Questionnaire trials**

As previously described, each of the questionnaire was trailed in a sample of twenty participants from the Tongan communities in Wollongong and Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. The trials contributed to the trustworthiness of the data because important adjustments were made to some parts of the questionnaires to ensure that they were clear to the respondents. The other important discovery from the trials was that it was necessary for the early school leavers and their parents to complete their questionnaires through interviews.

**Participant rapport**

The teachers and early school leavers from the Catholic schools would have either worked with the researcher in their schools or they would have had occasions to interact with him as the Director of Catholic Schools. The willingness of school administrators in the other Church education systems and in that of the government to cooperate with the researcher arose largely from the fact that they had known one another, and had worked closely together in education for a number of years. The researcher's good rapport with these people had been instrumental in generating the climate of cooperation which enabled the enquiry to be carried out effectively and speedily.

The questionnaires for the unsuccessful completers were given to respondents either personally by the researcher or by one or two reputable people in the local community. The responses from them were also highly satisfactory and 80 per cent of the questionnaires were returned to the researcher. Again a vast majority of these students would have come into contact with the researcher in one of the multiple responsibilities that he shouldered either for the Catholic schooling system or the Catholic Church in general. In fact, a large number of them were former students of the researcher.
The researcher expected cooperation from the Catholic secondary schools but it came as a surprise to him that those from the non-Catholic secondary school asked to be included in the survey. This perhaps arose from the fact the researcher had previously worked with the principal as the deputy to him when the former was the President of the Principals' Association for Secondary Schools in the Tongatapu group. All the teachers and school administrators from their school completed the questionnaires. As for the early school leavers, unsuccessful completers and their parents, the researcher found that they was a general willingness to cooperate.

The questionnaires for the community leaders were distributed personally by the researcher and again the responses were as generous and prompt as the others. Some of the leaders in the village level said that they were even hurt when they found out that they were not given the opportunity to express their views. Again those community leaders had either had some associations with the researcher before or at least had known of him. Tonga is only a small place and it is not hard for a person to be known if he or she had served in some public role.

*Credibility of the research assistants*

A few priests, teachers, respected village leaders and reliable ex-students and seminarians were employed by the researcher especially in the task of locating the homes of early school leavers in their particular village, although the interviews were done solely by the researcher himself. Some of them were asked to help with the distribution of some of the questionnaires to the unsuccessful completers and to a limited number of leaders from the church and village levels. Others especially Makakaufaki Matekitonga volunteered to help with the work of entering the data to the computer at the residence of the researcher so that the researcher could return with the floppy discs to the university, while the research papers were sent over by surface mail.
As an expression of their trust in the basic findings from the research, the Director of Catholic Education, Brother Christopher Popperwell FMS and a group of priests, brothers and sisters requested a session with the researcher before his departure for Australia. They were surprised at the magnitude of the problem. The Editor of the Catholic Monthly newspaper - Taumu'a Lelei - was among them. The Editor requested an article for the June issue on what the researcher spoke about in that evening for it would be, in the words of the Editor, "...an eye-opener for our people". The article was submitted and the feedback from some of the readers showed that they were equally amazed at the enormity of the problem of early school leaving.

Summary

In summary, the research methodology is trying to be true to the holistic perspective that this study pursues. This is clearly illustrated in its main features:

• the extensive coverage of the five research questions
• the choice of the five groups of respondents
• the high response rate to the survey questionnaires and interviews
• the perception that early school leavers could include the unsuccessful completers
• the focus on the nine "agents" which could have influenced students to leave school early
• and the use of the open ended questions.

The trustworthiness of the data is supported by a considerable evidence including the credibility of the researcher, the testimony of the Bishop under whom the researcher has worked for most of his life, and the respondents' preference for him to do the interview rather than any of the other suggested alternatives. The trialing of the questionnaires and the making of them available in the Tongan language are evidence of researcher's serious attempt to ensure that possible misunderstandings are avoided. All together these factors help to enhance the trustworthiness of the research data.
5
Data Analysis

Introduction
This lengthy chapter begins with an introduction which deals with two case studies respectively of an early school leaver and an unsuccessful completer. This provides a link to a summary of the research questions, respondents and data sources which are followed by an overview of the data analysis by research issues and sub-issues. As a preview for the explanation of the data according to each research question, a reflection on the translation saga will be offered.

The first section deals with the extent of early school leaving whereas in the second section the characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are considered together with those of the total population. The third section focuses on the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers. The fourth section determines the causes of early school leaving and it is divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section focuses on the respondents' perception of school attractiveness, and the second sub-section deals with the causes of early school leaving that relate to each of these nine "agents": teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Department of Education (Government and Church), Government and the Tongan culture. The fifth section explores the types of policy measures that can be implemented to reduce the incidence of early school leaving.

As a way of introducing the data analysis and of highlighting some elements of its content, a case study of an early school leaver and of an unsuccessful completer are presented immediately.
A case study of an early school leaver

Tevita is one of the early school leavers of the 1988 new cohort of 'Apifo'ou College. He is the eldest in a family of five children which has since increased to eight. His parents - Sione and 'Ofa - have moved from the second largest island group of Vava'u to Tongatapu, the biggest island group. It was a decision that was largely motivated by greater access to opportunities which were not readily available in Vava'u. Quality of schooling and paid job opportunities were among the attractions. Arrangement with relatives in Tongatapu for accommodation and a piece of land for cropping fell through and they ended up in a shack with no lights, running water or toilet. The only consolation was that they were living in the vicinity of the capital town of Nuku'alofa where they had hoped to get some kind of employment. They dug a well in the ground for water; they also dug another hole on which they placed some makeshift platform for a toilet. As for lighting, they brought a kerosene lamp with them from Vava'u.

The father found a job which involved manually loading truck with the rubbish that people put out into the streets and again manually dumping them. He brought home an average weekly pay of $25. The mother did babysitting for some people but it was not a regular job. At best she would bring $30 a week. Three or four nights a week she would be making handicrafts to be sold in the local market. On Saturdays Sione, as they say in Tonga, "went to the bush" ('alu ki vao) to plant some root crops for the family in his neighbour's land. Together with some help from the local church and other people, this family was able to look after themselves, send Tevita to high school and the other three children to primary school.

Throughout his primary schooling, Tevita was an average student because his places in a class of 30 were between 12 and 20. When he came to Class 6, the year they were prepared to sit the secondary school entrance examination, he was not chosen by their teacher to be in the group that received special classes before and after formal schooling. It was a clear indication that he was not among those judged by the teacher to gain the pass mark of 50 per cent in the
secondary school entrance examination. Tevita managed in spite of that exculsion to gain 42 per cent in that examination which was a sufficient qualification for 'Apifo'ou College to enrol him in Form 1 in 1988.

In spite of his Protestant upbringing, Tevita settled down fairly quickly to the routine of schooling at the Catholic high school of 'Apifo'ou. He found the study hard but through his serious efforts, his overall placing in a class of 44 pupils in 1988 was satisfactory because he was thirteenth. When he came to Form 2 the form teacher who looked after them in Form 1 was replaced by one who was strict with class discipline and less tolerant of students who came late to school. He would regularly punish them with a big stick which he carried in his school bag. The discipline master was also replaced by a priest who was equally harsh. He beat students for almost every breach of the school rules. Apparently, the students cynically called him among themselves, *Pātele Tā-vale* (literally, Fr. Stupid-hitting) which suggested that the punishment that the priest inflicted on students was much greater than what the breach of the rule deserved.

Tevita began to feel alienated at school because of the beating relating to coming late to school. He had to do some household chores before coming to school every day. Unless he rose before five o’clock to do them, he would be late to school every day. However, that would adversely affect his study because he regularly went to sleep late in the evening after completing the domestic work for the day. His study began to suffer because in the first term of 1989 his class placing slipped to 26th. Another turn in his fortune came when his father fell sick. He had to leave his job with the garbage truck because the doctor thought that his sickness was related to the unhygienic environment in which he worked. Furthermore, the plantation work on Saturdays became the responsibility of Tevita. Tevita said: "All sorts of chaotic things happened in the home. My parents were more short tempered and they beat up the children more frequently. They also quarrelled among themselves and swore at each other". (*Ne kamata ke ha’u ‘a e ta’e maau kehekehe ki homau ‘api*. Ne lahi ange ‘a e ‘ite’ita ‘a e ongo mātu’a*,

178
The perceived hostile environment at school together with the problems that Tevita experienced in the home dealt a severe blow to his study. In the last term examination of 1989 Tevita was placed 34th in a class of 42. The form teacher occasionally commented unkindly on the appearance of his school uniform and on his general appearance. Such comments were often relayed to him by his fellow students. In the beginning of the 1990 school year he was told to go home until he paid the rest of the school fees of 1989 and the first term of 1990. Tevita went home and after a few more months of failing to pay the school fees, he left school altogether.

He found a job where his father worked but he only lasted six months basically because of coming late to work three to four times a week. The land that his father used for planting root crops for the family was no longer available. Tevita's family has returned to Vava'u and none of the children has gone beyond primary school education. His father is still sickly but at least in Vava'u there is a piece of land that the children use for planting some root crops. His mother is still making handicrafts which bring an average of $25 a week for the family. Tevita and the other four children who have left primary schooling have not been sufficiently productive for the family because they tend to join their peers who are reluctant to be engaged in cropping and other "dirty" work. The family, school, social and economic factors involved in Tevita's story is frequently found not only among early school leavers but also among unsuccessful completers.

A case study of an unsuccessful completer

Malia is one of the unsuccessful completers of the 1989 new cohort of Chanel College in the Vava'u island group. She was the fourth child in a family of seven children. Two of the older children left before completing the primary school cycle because the mother suffered from
severe asthmatic attacks. The third went to high school but only managed to complete Form 3. Malia, after gaining a pass mark of 52 per cent in the secondary school entrance examination, was hopeful that she could successfully complete her secondary school education. Her father was a primary school teacher, a policeman and finally a planter of various crops for home consumption and for sale in the local market. Her mother's job was the minding of the home and the children with the help of the three older children. Both parents were very supportive of Malia's schooling because until then she was the only one who passed the secondary school entrance examination. Time and space were made available for her to study at home, and her father helped her with her homework.

Malia did well at school for she was fifth in a class of 37 students in 1989. She was also good at sports especially netball. In 1990 she began to be interested in one of the boys in her class. Sometimes she came home late after school. Her parents were not really concerned about it because her placing in class was still among the top six in her class. Moreover, they thought that it was only a passing phase in her growth and development. In the first term examination of 1991, the parents were shocked to find that Malia was sixteenth in class. They found from one of her fellow students in the neighbourhood that in some days she did not go to school and on other days she did but left before the end of school.

Malia offered her parents alternative explanations. She told her parents that her study had been badly affected by occasional headaches at school, and she was not happy at school because she was disliked by two of her teachers. She said that she sometimes ran away from school to escape the wrath of these two teachers who threatened to beat her up. After consulting the principal, the parents found that there was some truth in what she said. What they did not realise was that there was a lot of truth in what the girl in their neighbourhood said about their daughter. Furthermore, Malia and her boy friend have also formed a peer group with other students who were in the same boat. In Malia's final school report, her parents were told to seriously look into the situation because Malia was 28th in her class. The number of days in
which she was late to school or leaving school before the end of school or absent from school was, as it was reported, "alarmingly high" (fu'u tō atu ia).

At the beginning of the 1992 school year Malia promised her parents that she would give up her boyfriend and the peer group and she would be serious about her studies. She began well because in the first term examination of 1992, she was twelfth in her class. She stayed home at night and studied hard. Her father helped out in what he could understand. The boy friend and her peers tried to get her back but without success. In the second term she was in the fifth grade to represent the school in the netball competition. They won their grade. Thus, 1992 was a successful school year. In 1993 Malia was ready to improve on her performance in the previous year and to sit the Tonga School Certificate Examination at the end of the year.

In January 1993 Malia's father went to New Zealand in the hope of getting some money to build an "European type of house" (fale pālangi) for the family. Two months later her mother developed severe asthma attacks which were responsible for her death on April 3, 1993. Her father did not come to the funeral and that really upset the children. Although he sent some money but that was not good enough. The two eldest boys have been an "utter waste of time" (ko e fakapiko 'ata'ata pe). The elder girl was having a baby in September that year and she was having a hard time with her pregnancy. Malia became, as it were, the mother of the children. She did the household chores in the morning before going to school and when she came after school, she had to cook for the family. Her aunt and other relatives helped at times with the work in the home.

Malia did not return to her earlier life but the demand of the domestic chores competed with her studies which were already slightly behind at the beginning of the 1993 school year. She progressively showed signs of fatigue on which teachers often cynically commented because they thought that they were related to her friendship and peer group influences. Malia struggled in her studies and she wrote to her father about it. Her father gave her some words of encouragement but Malia needed more than words. She needed parental support at home and
moral support from school. She saw the principal about the treatment she got from those two teachers. The principal told her that he would do something about it but nothing came out of it. Malia sat the Tonga School Certificate Examination and failed. She tried again in 1994 but with increasing problems in the home, she also failed.

The home was virtually "falling apart" (movete) because the father was still in New Zealand. The two older boys had gone to the main island of Tongatapu. The elder girl was nursing her baby and Malia was doing the household chores. The three younger children left before completing primary schooling. Malia is making use of the skills she derived from Domestic classes at school to weave some handicrafts to be sold in the local market. With money occasionally sent from the father, the help of their local church and some of their relatives, the children have accepted the fact that they now have to manage for themselves. The influences of friendship, peer group, sickness of one parent, death of one parent, one parent going overseas, the demand of the domestic chores - have been responsible for the failure of Malia in her schooling. Sadly, these factors have played havoc in the schooling of many unsuccessful completers and early school leavers alike as the data analysis which follows shows.

*Link with the theoretical framework*

It is clear from the preceding case studies there is a complex interaction of the push/pull factors in the 'decision space' of each young student. Each person in the decision space is being pushed and pulled simultaneously by factors both in the 'schooling' and the 'community' systems. At the macro level of the community systems, for example, poverty has pulled strongly against the students' desire to be successful in their schooling. At school at the micro level of the schooling systems, for example, the harshness of the discipline masters illustrates a force within the school that pushes students away from school.

Figure 5.1 highlights the five research questions, the five groups who responded to the questionnaires and the interviews, and the content of the questionnaires which were described
in detail in section three of chapter four. The five research questions are vertically arranged on the left hand side. The five groups of respondents - early school leavers, unsuccessful completers, parents of early school leavers, teachers and school administrators and community leaders - are outlined horizontally across the top.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Early school leavers (ESL) N = 365</th>
<th>Unsuccessful completers (UC) N = 180</th>
<th>Teachers and administrators N = 163</th>
<th>Community leaders N = 120</th>
<th>Parents of early school leavers N = 365</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the extent of early school leaving?</td>
<td>- The extent of early school leaving is the percentage of the 1988 and 1989 new cohorts of the sample secondary schools in Tonga which left secondary schooling before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination. The True Cohort Method was used for the calculation of it. The sources for the data were the school rolls, school examination results, interviews of early school leavers and their parents or guardians.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What were the personal, and social characteristics of the respondents?</td>
<td>- Years at school</td>
<td>- Gender</td>
<td>- Age</td>
<td>- Teaching qualifications</td>
<td>- Are you a parent or guardian?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Did you live with parents?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Age in 1994</td>
<td>- Occupation</td>
<td>- Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Occupation of parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Other important jobs you did in the past?</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Education level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Education of parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Monthly Income in 1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Monthly family income?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Family size</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Friends while at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Did you pass the secondary school entrance exam before entering high school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What have been the consequences of schooling for early school leavers?</td>
<td>Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers were asked to respond to these two opened questions:</td>
<td>School teachers, school administrators, community leaders and parents of early school leavers were asked to respond to these two open ended questions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What have been the three major advantages of your secondary schooling in order of importance?</td>
<td>- Do you think that leaving school early is a problem?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What have been the three major disadvantages of your secondary schooling in order of importance?</td>
<td>- If so, what have been the three major problems associated with early school leaving in order of importance?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What have been the causes of early school leaving?</td>
<td>School teachers, school administrators, early school leavers and unsuccessful completers were asked to assess school attractiveness by responding to 35 multiple choice statements. All the five groups of respondents were asked to respond to this open ended question:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What were the three major causes of early school leaving in order of importance which were related individually to each of these eight &quot;agents&quot;: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Education Department (government and non-government), Tongan government and Tongan culture?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What would be the most appropriate policy measures for reducing early school leaving?</td>
<td>All the five groups of respondents were asked to respond to this open ended question:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What are the three &quot;things&quot; in order of importance which each of these eight &quot;agents&quot; can individually do to reduce early school leaving: teachers, school administrators, students, parents, village community, Department of Education (government or church), Tongan government and Tongan culture?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1: Summary of the research questions, respondents and content of the questionnaires.
The content of the questionnaires is arranged in such a way that the sections of the questionnaire relating to each group of respondents are correspondingly placed under them except for the first research question which of its nature cannot be arranged as the others. The main focus questions that respondents answered in the questionnaires are provided under each group of respondents alongside the third, fourth and the fifth question. With regards to the second question the particular items for determining the characteristics of the respondents are simply listed.

The first question deals with the definition of early school leaving for this study, the method of determining the extent of early school leaving and the sources of the early school leaving data. The second question seeks out the personal characteristics of the respondents whereas the third deals with the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers and for unsuccessful completers. The responses from questions two and three were open ended. The fourth question which focuses on the causes of early school is divided into two parts. The first part includes an assessment of the educational attractiveness of the sample schools which were sought through 35 multiple choice statements with which teachers, school administrators, early school leavers and unsuccessful completers either agree or disagree on a Likert five-point scale. The second part uses open ended question for gauging the causes of early school leaving that were related to each of the eight "agents" highlighted both in questions four and five in Figure 5.1. Finally, the fifth open ended question explored the types of policy measures that can be implemented to reduce the incidence of early school leaving.

Overview of the data analysis by research issues and sub-issues

The structure of the data analysis outlined in Figure 5.2 focuses on the research issues and the specific headings under which each research issue will be analysed. The five research questions shown in Figure 5.1 have been rephrased in Figure 5.2 as the research issues in order to highlight them for the data analysis. The five research issues determine the structure of the data analysis. Thus, the first part of the data analysis deals with the extent of early school
leaving in the sample schools. There are four sub-headings under the extent of early school leaving. In 1.1 a brief explanation of how the data of early school leaving was collected is presented but in 1.2 the focus is on the calculation of the rate of early school leaving. In 1.3 a comparison of that rate with that calculated from the official government records from the Tonga Ministry of Education will be offered. Finally, in 1.4 the gender differences of early school leavers are outlined.

### Structure of the data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Issues</th>
<th>Sub-Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Extent of early school leaving | 1.1 Collection of early school leaving data  
1.2 Rates of early school leaving  
1.3 Comparison of early school leaving rates  
1.4 Gender differences of early school leavers |
| 2. Characteristics of early school leavers | 2.1 Characteristics of early school leavers  
2.2 Comparison of characteristics of early school leavers and those of unsuccessful completers |
| 3. Consequences of schooling for early school leavers | 3.1 Advantages of schooling  
3.2 Disadvantages of schooling  
3.3 Problems related to early school leaving  
3.4 Comparison of problems of early school leavers and disadvantages of schooling |
| 4. Causes of early school leaving | 4.1 Perceptions of school attractiveness  
4.2 Causes of early school leaving that were related to: teachers, school administrators, parents, students, village people, Education Department, Tongan government and Tongan culture |
| 5. Policy measures for the reduction of early school leaving | 5.1 Most appropriate policy measures for reduction of early school leaving to be implemented by: teachers, school administrators, parents, students, village people, Education Department, Tongan government and Tongan culture |

Figure 5.2: Overview of the data analysis by research issues and sub-issues

The second part of the analysis deals with the characteristics of early school leavers which include gender, length of stay at school, socioeconomic status, academic level, friends while at school, family backgrounds, parents' occupation and educational levels. The major reason for doing this is that some researchers have seen those characteristics as predictors of early school leaving (Combs and Cooley, 1986). To that extent they are regarded as the first step in the search for the causes of early school leaving. There are two sub-divisions of the characteristics of early school leavers. In 2.1 the characteristics of early school leavers are compared with those of the national population to determine if they were higher or lower than the national average. In 2.2 the characteristics of early school leavers and those of unsuccessful
completers are compared to test whether they are similar. As stated in chapter three, if the similarities are found to be significantly close, then Tonga is facing educational problems of monumental proportions.

The third part of the analysis deals with the consequences of schooling for early school leavers which are presented under four sub-divisions. The advantages of secondary schooling according to early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are presented in 3.1, and in 3.2 the disadvantages of secondary schooling according to early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are dealt with. The problems associated with early school leaving according to parents of early school leavers, teachers and school administrators, and community leaders are outlined in section 3.3. In 3.4 there is a comparison of the data from 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3. If there are similarities in the views of early school leavers, unsuccessful completers, teachers and school administrators, parents of early school leavers and community leaders regarding the problems relating to early school leavers and unsuccessful completers then it is a further confirmation that the problems associated with early school leaving are much greater than those related to early school leavers themselves.

The fourth part of the analysis deals with the causes of early school leaving which examines the eight "agents" which may influence students to leave school early. They were the school administrators, teachers, parents, students and the people in the local community, the Department of Education (government or non-government), Tongan government and the Tongan culture. Thus, all the questions related to the causes of early school leaving were asked not only of each of these eight "agents".

In 4.1 the focus is on the perceptions of early school leavers, teachers, school administrators and unsuccessful completers of the attractiveness of their respective schools. These perceptions were gauged through 35 multiple choice statements which were scored using a five point Likert scale. All the five groups of respondents to the survey - early school leavers, parents of early school leavers, unsuccessful completers, teachers and school administrators, and community
leaders - were then asked this open ended question: *What were the three "things" in order of importance that (for example, school administrators) did which could have caused students to leave school before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination?* This question was asked eight times because each of the eight "agents" was inserted in the bracket indicated in the question above. Thus, under 4.2 there are eight sections relating to the causes of early school leaving as follows:

- school administrators-related causes of early school leaving (4.2.1)
- teachers-related causes of early school leaving (4.2.2)
- parents-related causes of early school leavers (4.2.3)
- students-related causes of early school leaving (4.2.4)
- village people-related causes of early school leaving (4.2.5)
- Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving (4.2.6)
- Tongan government-related causes of early school leaving (4.2.7)
- Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving (4.2.8)

The *fifth part* of the analysis focuses on the policy measures for the reduction of early school leaving which the five group of respondents proposed. The format of the open ended question in this part is similar to that in the section on causes because each respondent was asked to answer this question: *What are the three "things" in order of importance that (for example, school administrators) should do to improve our schools so that students will not leave before sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination?* This question was asked of each respondent eight times as in part four above. Thus, again there are eight sub-headings in this section because there are eight types of policy measures that each of the following people and institutions should implement to improve secondary schooling in Tonga as follows:

- policy measures for school administrators (5.1)
- policy measures for teachers (5.2)
- policy measures for parents (5.3)
- policy measures for students (5.4)
- policy measures for village people (5.5)
Reflection on the translation saga

As a preface to the analysis of data, the problems involved in the translation of the responses to the open ended questions is reflected on here in view of its relevance to the trustworthiness of the data. A poor translation of responses is tantamount to a radical change in the quality of the data.

The first step in the analysis of the data was the translation from the Tongan into the English language of the responses to the open ended questions. I undertook all the translation work not only because I translated the questionnaires from English into Tongan for the trial and the research fieldwork but I was the sole interviewer of the early school leavers and their parents. However, often in my search for accuracy or a confirmation of it, I consulted my wife who is also a Tongan with a facility in both languages and/or some of my Tongan colleagues at the university. As a rule, they would read every section and offer suggestions for change where necessary. This type of help was important because at times I did overlook certain nuances which the others picked up, and suitable adjustments were subsequently made in the questions and the analysis of the responses.

The challenge of the translation work is not so much that it is time consuming but it demands immense focus and concentration so that the translation conveys accurately the meanings and nuances which can be expressed in a variety of ways. Translation work may not be as "fatiguing as breaking stones" (Muir and Muir, 1966: 94) but in agreement with Thaman (1988: 87) the "difficulty of translating from one language to another cannot be overemphasised". An example of such a variety is the word, 'unemployment'. Apart from its direct Tongan equivalent, 'ta'e ma' u ngaue', (literally 'not having work') the 24 expressions shown in Figure
5.3 are different wordings of 'unemployment' found in the survey responses. Not only do they all express the reality of unemployment somewhat differently, but some of them associate it with other factors. For example, unemployment is related to the failure of schooling system in number 15 and of the job market in number 23 of Figure 5.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tongan Words</th>
<th>English Translations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ta'e ma'u ha ngaue</td>
<td>• not getting any work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 nofo noa'ia pe</td>
<td>• just sitting around doing nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ueisi taimi pe!</td>
<td>• bloody waste of time!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ngaue pe he taimi 'e ni'ihi</td>
<td>• work sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 ko e me'a fakapiko ko e nofo noa</td>
<td>• it's boring doing nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 'ikai ha ngaue ia ki he &quot;kau te'efohi'i&quot; pohon'i</td>
<td>• there is no job for &quot;bastards&quot; like us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 ko e me'a pe 'oku fai' ko e nofo noa'ia</td>
<td>• all I can do is just sitting around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 hala 'a 'api ia mo ha ngaue tu'uma'u</td>
<td>• there is no permanent job at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 'oku 'ikai fiemu'a 'a e &quot;veve&quot; ia 'i ha ngaue</td>
<td>• &quot;garbage&quot; is not wanted in any job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 'oku 'ikai ha ngaue ia ki he &quot;kau kaikoa&quot;</td>
<td>• there is no job for the &quot;scum of the earth&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 ko e ngaue he 'aho 'e tahai 'oku 'ikai lau ia</td>
<td>• a job for a day is no job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 'ikai lau e ngaue ia 'a e &quot;kau vale&quot;' ko e ngaue</td>
<td>• work of the &quot;stupid&quot; people isn't counted as work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 takataki noa holo pe 'i homau kolo</td>
<td>• just hanging around our village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 'ikai lau e tu'o tahai pe ua he uike 'i 'api ko e ngaue</td>
<td>• to work once or twice a week at home is no work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 'ikai lava 'e he ako' ia o 'omai ha'amau ngaue</td>
<td>• schooling has failed to give us a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 &quot;hala ha me'a sia'a ia&quot; ke fai 'e he &quot;sikulu mutu&quot;</td>
<td>• early school leavers are &quot;good for nothing&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 'ikai fiemu'a kimautolu ia ke ngaue ko e kei si'i'</td>
<td>• too young to be wanted for a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 ko e fakatokolahi ai pe 'a e kau ta'e ngaue'</td>
<td>• they simply increase the unemployment number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 'a e ngaue pe pea nau haau ai pe he kolo'</td>
<td>• with no job they join the loafers in the village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 'ikai ko ha ako ena ia ke ma'u ai ha ngaue</td>
<td>• that kind of schooling can't get you any job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 &quot;psulu&quot; he sivi' 'oku tupu ai 'a e ta'e ma'u ngaue&quot;</td>
<td>• &quot;failing&quot; the exam leads to failure to find a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 'e 'ikai ke nau ma'u 'e kinautolu ia ha ngaue</td>
<td>• they simply can not get any work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 'ikai ke 'i ai ha ngaue ia ke ma'u ai ha'anau ngaue</td>
<td>• the job market is so limited to give them any job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 nofo noa pe 'i 'api pe ko e hopo ki hala o haau</td>
<td>• either doing nothing at home or out in the streets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.3: Tongan phrases for 'unemployment' with their English equivalents
Often the different words used in Tongan do not have exact equivalents in the English language. Furthermore, at times there is a tone of misgivings, anger, frustration or insult contained in some of the Tongan words which cannot be adequately captured in the English language without some additional explanations. For example, most often whenever the Tongan phrase - "ueisi taimi" - (a Tonganisation of "waste time") in number three in Figure 5.3 is used, there is some degree of reservation, anger and/or frustration associated with it. Therefore, if it is simply translated into English as "wasting time" then a lot of the Tongan nuances are lost in the process of translation. It seems that a phrase like "bloody waste of time" or words to that effect would capture the sentiments much more accurately than "wasting time". Similar sentiments of varying degrees can be associated with the responses in numbers 6, 9, 10, 12, 16 and 21.

Some of the Tongan words used in Figure 5.3 suggest that the respondents were insulted. For example, the use of the words - "sikulu mutu" - "for early school leavers" in number 16 implied that the respondents were insulted because "sikulu mutu" literally means "school chopped off" which suggests that the conditions of their schooling were similar to a dog whose tail was chopped off. If that dog runs along and takes a sharp turn, it would roll over because the steering tail is missing. Not only does it look silly and is out of balance but it bears the consequences of both. Another example of insult is the use of the phrase "kau vale" in number twelve. It encompasses much more than the literal translation of "stupid people". It encompasses feelings like "losing face", "worthy to be looked down on", "your views are not worth listening to" and "your problems are your fault". Such are some of the feelings associated with unemployment.

The list in Figure 5.3 is extensive and it serves the purpose of illustrating the variety of responses and more importantly of unveiling the different components and nuances of the word 'unemployment' which figured prominently in the survey. It is impossible to find one English word to embody all the responses. The best approach is to use 'unemployment' as a translation with appropriate explanation in the analysis when it is called for. From the above list one can
have a glimpse of the richness contained in the word 'unemployment' and of the difficulty of trying to capture those ideas in a translation. The same laborious but rewarding processes were followed in the translation of the responses from the questionnaires and interviews.

1. Extent of early school leaving

1.1 The collection of early school leaving data

In this study early school leavers were those of the 1988 and 1989 cohorts from five secondary schools who failed to sit the Tonga School Certificate Examination. The transfers out who sat that examination from other schools were not counted as early school leavers. Table 5.1 shows that the total number of new students in the 1988 and 1989 cohorts of the sample schools was 1,042. To identify the 1,042 students, the researcher searched the roll books of each sample school and wrote down the name and address of each student from the Form 1 roll books of 1988 and 1989. The exit point which was specified as the benchmark for determining the incidence of early school leaving was the sitting of the Tonga School Certificate Examination between 1992 and 1994 because the 1988 and 1989 cohorts should have sat that examination at the earliest in 1992 and the latest in 1994.

A thorough and meticulous search for early school leavers using the results of the Tonga School Certificate Examination for the years 1992 to 1994 was undertaken. The name of each of the 1988 and 1989 cohorts which was taken from the school rolls was traced through the examination results from 1992 to 1994 for that school to determine if they sat the examination. The names that were not found in the examination results were noted as early school leavers. However, it was possible that some of those may have left and continued their studies overseas or completed their general school education without sitting the examination. To find out definitively the researcher took those names to their villages during the fieldwork and asked their whereabouts from them, their parents or their peers. Even then the number of early school leavers was not determined until it was found whether the transfers-out from the sample
schools actually sat the examination. The transfers-in to the sample schools who did sit the examination were not counted as early school leavers. Again to determine whether the transfers-out to non-sample schools sat the examination, the researcher had to ask them, their parents or their peers in the village during the survey. It was only after completing those long and arduous processes that the total number of early school leavers was finally determined as 513 (see Table 5.1). This method of data collection is known as the True Cohort Method.

1.2 Rates of early school leaving

Since the rate of early school leaving is the percentage of the new entrants of 1988 and 1989 who left high school altogether without sitting the Tonga School Certificate Examination, the rate was calculated using the True Cohort Method as 48.6 per cent for the five sample schools. There were variations in the rates shown in Table 5.1 between schools and within each school for the years 1988 and 1989. Generally, the rates of early school leaving for 1988 were similar to those of 1989 except for those of Chanel College in which a difference of 8 per cent is observed between those two years.

Table 5.1: Early school leavers from the new entrants to the five sample schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Nos of new entrants</th>
<th>Nos of early school leavers</th>
<th>Rates of early leaving(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chanel</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takuilau</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Catholic</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Apifo'ou</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>558</strong></td>
<td><strong>484</strong></td>
<td><strong>279</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

192
The big exit of students in 1988 was related mainly to a sudden rise in school expenses which were not found in the school that they opted for. The change of school brought other difficulties which led to premature departure of a number of them. Overall, only 51.4 per cent of the 1988 and 1989 new entrants of the five schools actually completed what is termed 'general secondary education' and sat the Tonga School Certificate Examination.

1.3 Comparison of the rate of early school leaving and that derived from the government official figures

The early school leaving rate of 48.6 per cent from the five sample schools is considerably higher than the national rates of 35 per cent in 1991 and 39 per cent in 1992 which were calculated using the Age Cohort Method from the reports provided by the Tonga Ministry of Education (Report of the Ministry of Education, 1991 and 1992). It is quite possible that the difference between the figures from the Ministry of Education and that from this research may have arisen from the fact that the government's annual grants to high schools have been allocated according to the number of enrolled students (Tonga Five Year Plan, 1990-1995). It would, therefore, be in the financial interest of the high schools to record as few early school leavers as possible. This problem was identified in 1987, and in view of the fact that a shortage of finance had become a chronic problem for most schools, it is likely that such practice would still be in vogue. Moreover, the auditing procedures have not been overtly strict and the Tonga Ministry of Education had no alternative but to rely entirely on the figures provided by each high school for its payment record.

Another possible interpretation is that the early school leaving rates of 35 and 39 per cent from the Ministry of Education and 48.6 per cent from this study truly represent the entire secondary school population and the sample schools respectively. This would mean that the problem of early school leaving has been much greater in the sample schools than in the other schools. Such an assumption would be difficult to substantiate because the general perception of people in Tonga has been that those five schools would be among the "good schools" (ngaahi ako 'oku
(kau he lau) in Tonga. For example, the examination results from those sample schools have fluctuated over the years but they are definitely far from "being at the bottom of the pile" (fusi e iku e pulu). For example, failure rates of two of the three sample schools in Figure 5.4 were below the national average (without Tonga High School) while the others were above it.

Finally, it should be noted that the rates from the Ministry of Education were derived from the Age Cohort Method which is fairly well known to be unreliable due to variations arising from a number of factors identified in the literature while the True Cohort Method is considered to provide more reliable data (Morrow, 1987). For this reason the researcher decided to opt for the more meticulous and thorough demand of the True Cohort Method by which he carefully documented the number of early school leavers from the new cohorts of 1988 and 1989. Indeed as noted above the process involved the individual tracing of each of the students in the cohorts, and to that extent the data that it yielded for this study are considered to be reliable.

1.4 Gender differences of early school leavers

Table 5.2 shows the pattern of school leaving by gender and school year (Forms). There is a substantial gender difference among the early school leavers. The percentage balance of boys and girls in the sample schools was 55 to 45, and the absolute numbers of male and female early school leavers were respectively 345 and 168.

Using the total number of 513 early school leavers for the calculation of the rate of early school leaving, it was found that extent of early school leaving of 67.3 per cent for boys was much greater than 32.7 per cent for girls. While the secondary school population in Tonga for 1991 and 1992 consisted of 53 per cent boys and 47 per cent girls, the extent of early school leaving was much greater for male students with 64.4 per cent of leavers being boys, as compared to only 35.6 per cent being girls (Report of the Ministry of Education, 1991 and 1992). The Tonga Ministry of Education percentages of each gender among early school leavers were similar to those obtained from the study.
The figures from the Ministry of Education (1991-92) indicated that the incidence of early school leaving occurred mostly between Form 3 and Form 5, whereas the figures from this study revealed a prominence in Form 3, followed respectively by Forms 1, 2, 4 and 5. In fact, 360 of the 513 early school leavers or 70 per cent of them left school between Form 1 and Form 3. It appears that figures from the Ministry under estimated the number of students leaving in the early years. However, there are similarities in the percentages of boys and girls leaving from all the Forms.

Table 5.2  Gender differences among early school leavers by year, Form and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanel</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takuilau</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Apifo'ou</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>112</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boys: 345 (67%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girls: 168 (33%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures for Forms 1, 2 and 3 (Table 5.2) indicate that the first three years of high school are crucial for retaining students who are likely to leave school prematurely. It seems that students are vulnerable in their first year in high school and if they survive the second, they face the most formidable test of their education in Form 3 where the majority leave high school. Those
who were victorious in that combat could probably consider the fact that the Tonga School Certificate Examination was due in one to two years as an incentive to continue schooling.

2. Characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

2.1 A comparison of the characteristics of early school leavers and those of the national population

Personal and social characteristics of early school leavers have been identified in the literature as one of the causes of early school leaving (Wehlage et al., 1990). Virtually every study of early school leaving associated low socioeconomic status with higher rates of early school leaving (Combs and Cooley, 1986; Bachman, Green and WirtMalian, 1971; Rumberger, 1983; Peng, 1983). Similarly, children from homes in which parents had a low educational achievement were more likely to leave school early. Coming from a single parent family (Neill, 1979) and coming from a large family (Rumberger, 1983) were other background characteristics closely associated with high incidence of early school leaving. Low level of academic achievement had also been associated with early school leaving (Ekstrom et al., 1986).

There were three sources of data for this section: early school leavers, unsuccessful completers and official government documents. Each early school leaver and unsuccessful completer was asked to provide the following information: gender, number of children at home while they were at school, whether he or she gained the pass mark of 50 per cent in the secondary school entrance examination, whether the friends he or she had while he or she was at school were early school leavers, whether he or she lived with both parents, one of them or relatives while he or she was at school. Parents were asked in the interview for the following information: family monthly income, educational attainment of the father, educational attainment of the mother, occupation of the father, and occupation of the mother. With the early school leavers their questionnaires were completed through the interviews with the researcher but the unsuccessful completers filled the questionnaires on their own. Comparable information for the national population was obtained from the following official government documents: Reports of

Table 5.3 Characteristics of early school leavers from 1988 & 1989 new cohorts and those of the total population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal &amp; social background characteristics</th>
<th>Early school leavers</th>
<th>National population#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Male</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>57%®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Female</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>43%®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Socioeconomic status+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>71%§</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>2.43%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Father’s educational achievement*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low and middle</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>21.8%μ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mother’s educational achievement*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low and middle</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>23.0%μ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Average number of children per household</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.3f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass rate in the secondary school entrance exam</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>13.9%@</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of father/guardian</td>
<td>63.8 % agricultural†</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of mother/guardian</td>
<td>65.6 % domestic</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends they had while they were at high school</td>
<td>58.9 % ESL</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with both parents while at school</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with one of the parents or relatives</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# = Most of the figures were derived from the Tonga Statistical Abstract (1993), the most recent census data.


§ = Calculated from the Tonga Statistical Abstract (1987)

+ = The socioeconomic status is determined according to this scale of yearly family income:
  low = 0 - $1499; middle = $1500 - 2999; high = $3000 or more.

* = The educational achievement of the father and mother is determined according to this scale:
  low = leaving early from primary and/or secondary school; middle = unsuccessfully completing high school;
  high = qualified for Form 6 or better.

μ = This is the average of those who passed the Tonga School Certificate Examination between 1988 and 1992 (see Table 5.5). This group is used because those who proceeded for further education are contained in it.

f = The two parents and another one to represent a grand parent were subtracted from the national figure of 6.3 persons per household in 1986, and the result is 3.3 children per household. Thus, it is a rough estimate.

@ = This was the average pass rate for 1990, 1991, 1992 which were respectively 4.2, 24.5 and 12.9.

† = The category of agriculture includes only those who were engaged in agriculture, forestry and fisheries as their principal means of earning their living.
There are 12 items of student characteristics outlined in Table 5.3. Comparable figures for eight of them were also available for the national population. These figures clearly showed that boys (67%) were more likely to leave school early than girls (33%). The national average for 1991 and 1992 indicated a similar pattern because 57 per cent of early school leavers were boys compared to 43 per cent were girls.

More than 84 per cent of early school leavers came from low socioeconomic background. This is higher than the national figure of 71 per cent. As for students coming from the middle socioeconomic status, the national figure of 20 per cent is higher than the 13.3 per cent for the early school leavers. Again the national figure of 9 per cent of students coming from the high socioeconomic status is more than three times the figure of 2.43 per cent for early school leavers. Low socio-economic status is a characteristics which made them more likely than the other students to leave school prematurely.

The average of 4.8 children per household is higher than the rough estimate of the national figure of 3.3 children per household (Tonga Statistical Abstract, 1993). The homes of early school leavers had more children than the national average, and that suggested that they would have found it more difficult to cope financially than the others. A third background characteristic associated with early school leaving was the low educational attainment of both parents (Rumberger, 1983; Combs and Cooley, 1986). More than 86 per cent of the parents shown in Table 5.3 had low educational attainment because they either left school early or failed to qualify for Form 6. This is higher than the national figure of 77 per cent. This meant that 23 per cent of the parents from the national population have at least gained some post secondary certificates or higher qualifications, compared with only 12 per cent of the parents of early school leavers.

Low level of student academic achievement has also been associated in the literature with early school leaving (Ekstrom et al., 1986). As measured by the pass mark of 50 or more per cent in the secondary school entrance examination, which every primary school student in Tonga must
sit, the academic achievement of early school leavers indicated by the pass rate of 4.2 per cent was poor because it was much lower than the national average of 13.9 per cent. Thus, most of the future early school leavers began their secondary school education with a low level of academic achievement from the primary school.

On average 63.8 per cent of the fathers of early school leavers earned their living from agricultural activities. This figure is considerably higher than the national average of 47.7 per cent (Tonga Statistical Abstract, 1993). This suggests that the fathers of early school leavers would be more likely to struggle to meet the educational costs of their children's schooling than the fathers of other students. Furthermore, 65.6 per cent of mothers working in domestic activities would suggest similar outcomes. However, there is no national figure available with which to compare it.

The agricultural and domestic activities are closely aligned with low socioeconomic status which is characteristic of early school leavers' families. Agricultural activities entail mainly plantation work for the provision of root crops for consumption purposes and products for commercial gain. Domestic activities consist of the making of tapa, weaving of baskets and other household items, besides the usual daily household chores. Fishing can be part of the domestic work of some women, and a supplement to men's agricultural activities. It is not unusual for some women to be engaged in agricultural activities as well.

There is a clear indication in Table 5.3 that the influence of peer group network on early school leavers has been substantial because 58.9 per cent of the friends of early school leavers have been early school leavers. The fact that about 60 per cent of their friends were school leavers and about 50 per cent of the school population (their peers) were early school leavers, suggested that early school leavers would tend to align themselves with other early school leavers to a greater extent than with those who were successful in their schooling. In asking the early school leavers in the interviews if the influence of their early school leaving friends has contributed to their early departure from school, 78.4 per cent of them answered in the
affirmative. Perhaps the Tongan saying "kaungāme’a faingame’a" applies here in that "they are friends because of what they conspire to do".

Finally, more than 40 per cent of early school leavers lived either with one of their parents or with relatives. Forty eight per cent of those who reported that they lived with both parents during their school years found one of the parents, mainly their fathers, spending one or more years overseas in a quest for more money for the family. Interviews with parents and early school leavers about the effects of those departures from the families showed that 82 per cent of parents and early school leavers in these homes admitted that the expressed purpose of such absence was often fulfilled but the resulting difficulties had adverse effects on their families and the secondary school education of their children.

In summary, the characteristics of early school leavers were more closely aligned with those the literature associated with early school leaving than those of the national population. They included the following indicators: socioeconomic status, father's educational achievement, mother's educational achievement, number of children in a family, father's and mother's occupation and the pass rate in the secondary school entrance examination. Those characteristics made them more likely than the rest of the national population to leave school early.

2.2 A comparison of characteristics of early school leavers and those of unsuccessful completers

Most of the research on early school leaving typically sets out to determine the characteristics which differentiate early school leavers from those who successfully complete their educational cycle (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack and Rock in Natriello, 1987). This research seeks to determine whether there were differences between the characteristics of early school leavers and those of the unsuccessful completers. This group is important because on average as indicated in Table 5.5 more than 77 per cent of all the students in Tonga who sat the Tonga School Certificate Examination between 1988 and 1992 were unsuccessful. If Tonga High School
which takes only the top of the academically bright students of Tonga with the failure rate of only 8.72 per cent and Queen Salote College which screened its examinees were excluded from the calculation, the failure rate was even higher with 89 per cent, as compared to 84.6 per cent from the sample schools (Report of the Tonga Ministry of Education, 1988-1992). When such high rates of failure are added to the considerably high rate of early school leaving, then one realises that, if the unsuccessful completers have similar characteristics and problems to those of early school leavers, then the magnitude and the complexity of the problem cannot be ignored.

Table 5.4: Failure rates in the Tonga School Certificate Examination 1988-92

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All high schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanel</td>
<td></td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>91.9</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>94.2</td>
<td>91.0</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takuilau</td>
<td></td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>92.7</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td></td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Apifo'ou</td>
<td></td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>79.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Failure rates were calculated from the Report of the Ministry of Education, 1988-92

* Tonga High School's average failure rate between 1988 and 1992 was 8.72 per cent.

The reason for conducting this comparison is that unsuccessful completers may be a component of the "secondary schooling underclass" to which early school leavers also belong. Solomon in Natriello (1987) points out that it is important to focus on these two components of the secondary schooling underclass because "(for both of them) the end results are the same: they fail to acquire the competencies and credentials necessary for social and economic advancement in adult life" (p. 79).
The comparison is conducted on the following 13 items: the length of stay at high school, gender, socioeconomic status, living with both parents, living with one of the parents, living with relatives, father's educational achievement, mother's educational achievement, average number of children at home, percentage who gained the pass mark for the secondary school entrance examination, friends they had when they were at school, occupation of father and occupation of mother.

Table 5.5  Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers of sample schools, 1988 & 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and family background characteristics</th>
<th>Early school leavers</th>
<th>Unsuccessful completers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 365</td>
<td></td>
<td>N = 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average length of stay at high school</td>
<td>2.7 years</td>
<td>5.4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with both parents while at school</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with one of the parents or relatives</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's educational achievement*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's educational achievement*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>middle</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of children at home</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained the pass mark of 50 or more per cent in the secondary school entrance exam</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends they had while they were at high school</td>
<td>58.9% were early school leavers</td>
<td>51.8% were early school leavers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of father/guardian</td>
<td>63.8% agricultural</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of mother/guardian</td>
<td>65.6% domestic</td>
<td>64.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+= the socioeconomic status is determined according to this scale:
in a year, low = < $3000; middle = $3001 - 5500; high = > $5500.
* = the educational achievement of the father and mother is determined according to this scale:
low = leaving early from primary and/or secondary school; middle = unsuccessfully completing high school;
high = successfully completing high school or better.

The most obvious difference between these two groups of students is the number of years that they spent at high school. Table 5.5 reports that the unsuccessful completers far outstripped the
early school leavers in the length of their stay at high school because they completed their secondary school education and secondly many of them repeat the Tonga School Certificate Examination. Given the fact that unsuccessful completers remain longer at high school than the early school leavers, and presumably they have acquired more knowledge and skills and developed more positive attitudes to life, the advantages accruing to their education are expected to be substantially greater. These advantages will be examined later in sub-division 3.1.

The two groups are similar in most of their background characteristics. An important general observation is that, although there are minor differences between the two groups, the background characteristics of early school leavers, seen as early indicators of the final outcome of early school leaving, suggest that they are more likely to leave school early than the unsuccessful completers. For example, except for two categories - the number of children in the home and the father's occupation - the early school leavers in all the other eleven categories could be regarded as being more likely to leave school early than the unsuccessful completers.

As a summary, one can see great similarities between the background characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers and those which were correlated with early school leaving in the literature. However, there is a danger in associating some of these characteristics with early school leaving. The danger is that of associating early school leaving with those characteristics which blame school failure on their social and family backgrounds, rather than recognizing that the school also must be held accountable for the educational progress of all its students.

Taking that caution into account, it is clear from Tables 5.3 and 5.5 that the characteristics associated with early school leaving in the literature are found to be greater among early school leavers than unsuccessful completers. They are also found to be greater among unsuccessful completers than the national population. However, overall the differences between those three groups are only marginal. The early school leavers and the unsuccessful completers together make up about 90 per cent of the population. So it is not surprising that the differences are
small. The data here indicates that if the figures for the 10 per cent who are successful completers were available, this would indeed be very different from all other groups. They represent a small elite. What is significant is that 90 per cent of the population have characteristics very similar to those of early school leavers and very different from those of the small elite.

3. Consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

The consequences of secondary school education for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are divided into three major sections. The advantages of schooling for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are presented first. Secondly, the disadvantages of their schooling are dealt with, before they are compared with the problems that teachers, parents and community leaders associate with early school leaving in the third section. The underlying hypothesis that there are close similarities between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers is further tested here. The respondents to the advantages and disadvantages of secondary schooling were restricted only to these two groups.

3.1 Advantages of secondary school education according to early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

To obtain the information on the advantages of education for early school leavers and unsuccessful completers, both groups were asked to respond to this open-ended question: "In order of importance what have been the three major advantages of your secondary school education?" The responses were placed in categories shown in Table 5.6: seven of which were common to both groups of respondents. The responses were scored by giving three points for the first response in order of importance, two for the second and one for the third. After scoring the responses according to the order of importance given, a sum total of the scores was obtained to determine the rank orders of the identified advantages of secondary school education.
Table 5.6  Advantages of schooling in the experiences of the early school leavers (ESL) and unsuccessful completers (UC) from the 1988 & 1989 new cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages of education</th>
<th>ESL N = 365</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>UC N = 180</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to read, write and speak English</td>
<td>666</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Competence in literacy and numeracy</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know more about God and the Bible</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pride in going to high school</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pride in sitting the School Certificate Exam</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know more the history and geography of Tonga</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know more the history and geography of others</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Know more about myself and other people</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I can help my parents</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I can become one of the Church workers</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I might get some job somewhere</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I might get into the police force</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I might get into the defense force</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The advantages that stand out clearly in Table 5.6 are: the ability to read, write and speak English; competence in literacy and numeracy; and gaining more knowledge about God and the Bible which were respectively ranked first, second and third both by early school leavers and unsuccessful completers. The individual score for each of those three is much greater than any of the others. While the early school leavers took pride in going to high school which they ranked fourth, the unsuccessful completers rejoiced in the fact that they sat the Tonga School Certificate Examination which they also ranked fourth. The increase in their general knowledge level about Tonga and other countries were ranked fifth and sixth by early school leavers, and sixth and seventh by unsuccessful completers.

It is interesting to note that early school leavers looked upon the ability to help their parents and a chance to become Church workers as being important which they ranked eighth and ninth whilst the unsuccessful completers apparently did not consider them to be important because
they did not include them among their responses. A possible explanation for this difference may be found in the fact that early school leavers tend to work with their parents (see Table 5.7) while the unsuccessful completers hope to find employment which they ranked eighth, ninth and tenth in Table 5.6. A greater knowledge of oneself and other people was important for both groups because they ranked them fifth and seventh. On the whole one can conclude that the advantages that each group has derived from their secondary schooling have been very similar, and to a large extent marginal in so far as they are more aligned with primary than secondary schooling outcomes.

3.2 Disadvantages of secondary schooling according to early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

The disadvantages of secondary school education was gauged by asking early school leavers and unsuccessful completers to respond to this open ended question: "In order of importance what have been the three major disadvantages of your secondary school education?" The responses from early school leavers and unsuccessful completers were respectively placed in ten coherent categories which were common to both groups. The responses were scored by giving three points for the first response in order of importance, two for the second and one for the third. After scoring the responses according to the order of importance given, a sum total of the scores was obtained to determine their rank orders. The figures under numbers 1, 2 and 3 indicate the percentages of respondents in each rank.

The disadvantages that both groups have ranked highest in the list in Table 5.7 are "unemployment" (ranked 1st by both), "feeling of uselessness" (ranked 2nd by both), and "feeling I am a failure" (ranked 4th and 3rd). The total scores for "unemployment" and "feeling of uselessness" from both groups far surpassed the others. As indicated in some of the responses found in Figure 5.2 there were feelings of anger, frustration and of being insulted associated with unemployment. Interviews with early school leavers and parents, and responses from unsuccessful completers to survey questionnaires indicated that some of those two groups have from time to time done some work at home but as long as they are not
employed for wages, they regard themselves as being unemployed. Unemployment and feeling of uselessness are certainly closely related because some of the feelings associated with unemployment could easily have arisen from a sense of being useless and vice versa. It is not difficult to see how easy it is for such a situation to lead to the "frustration from doing nothing" (ranked 6th and 8th) which together with those high ranking factors can become the fertile breeding ground for "drinking" (ranked 7th by both), "loss of dignity" (ranked 8th and 9th) and "committing crime" (ranked 9th and 6th).

Table 5.7 Disadvantages of secondary schooling to early school leavers (ESL) and unsuccessful completers (UC) from the 1988 & 1989 new cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages of education</th>
<th>ESL N = 365</th>
<th>UC N = 180</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of uselessness</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having no money</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling I am a failure</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A burden on the family</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrated in doing nothing</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of dignity</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing crime (stealing)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike for manual work</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begging</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences in the rank orders shown in Table 5.7 are indicative of some of the differences in the perceptions and the life styles of the two groups. The first omission in the rank order under the unsuccessful completers is "having no money" which suggests that they have access to money, perhaps from work although they ranked "dislike for manual work" as their fifth, and probably from "begging" which they ranked fourth. Perhaps as a result most of them did not think that they have been "a burden on their family" which they ranked last on the list.
"Committing crime" (ranked sixth) which mainly involved stealing may have some relation to their not mentioning "having no money".

The early school leavers, on the other hand, ranked "having no money" as their third, and the fact that they ranked "dislike for manual work" and "begging" as 10th and 11th suggests that they have done more work than the unsuccessful completers and they have been much less inclined to beg. In spite of the work that they have done and the little that they may have gained from begging, they still felt that they were "a burden on their family" (ranked fifth) because their work has not been sufficiently productive for them and the family. Not only that they were unemployed but the work that they did, contributed very little to their own and family's welfare.

Although some differences between the two groups have been observed, the sum total of all these disadvantages is that both groups believed that secondary schooling has failed them and the consequences of their education for them and for society at large should be a cause for concern.

### 3.3 Problems associated with early school leaving

Parents of early school leavers, teachers, school administrators and community leaders were asked - "What are in the order of importance the three major problems relating to early school leaving?". The purpose was to gauge the perception of these important groups of some of the consequences of secondary schooling for early school leavers and for the society in Tonga. The open ended responses were categorised, scored and rank ordered. The aggregate scores ($\Sigma$) for each category of responses and their rank orders are given in Table 5.8. The first 10 categories for the three groups of respondents have been selected for the analysis because they were common to the three groups and they represent the great majority of the responses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Parents of ESL N = 365</th>
<th>Teachers &amp; administrators N = 163</th>
<th>Community leaders N = 120</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Σ</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burden on their families</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble making</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stealing</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislike for manual work</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming bad peer groups</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committing other crimes</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loafing in the village</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begging</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the first ten categories were the same for all three groups of respondents - parents of early school leavers, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders. As far as the differences in rank orders among the three groups are concerned, the problems of 'unemployment' and 'burden on their parents' were respectively ranked first and second by all three groups. In the other categories, there are noticeable differences in the rank orders given by community leaders and parents of early school leavers on the one hand, and teachers and school administrators on the other. For example, 'trouble making' and 'stealing' were ranked third and fourth by community leaders and parents of early school leavers whereas 'forming bad peer groups' and 'dislike for manual work' were ranked third and fourth by teachers and school administrators. There are also marked differences in the scores given to each category. For instance, there is a difference of 184 points between the second and the third category under the parents of early school leavers, as compared to a difference of only 28 and 23 points under the other two groups. In spite of all these differences in the rank orders and the scores...
given to them, it is important to note that all those respondents agreed that the 10 problems listed in Table 5.8 were the most important.

3.4 Comparison of the perceptions of other respondents and those of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers

What is striking about the list of problems that the parents of early school leavers, teachers, school administrators and community leaders have associated with early school leaving in Table 5.8 is its close similarity to those already indicated by early school leavers and unsuccessful completers in Table 5.7. What is clearly suggested in this similarity is that teachers, school administrators, parents and community leaders are definitely aware of similar problems of early school leavers. The significant, though understandable, differences between Tables 5.7 and 5.8 are observed in the problems which are, as it were, internal to early school leavers, about which outside observers like teachers, school administrators, community leaders and parents can only speculate. These differences are only apparent because these internal feelings have expressed themselves in the external factors listed in Table 5.8. For example, in Table 5.7 the internal feelings of uselessness, feeling that I am a failure, frustration from doing nothing and loss of dignity are not found among the categories in Table 5.8. However, the external manifestations of those latently explosive feelings are found in the following factors which are missing from Table 5.7 but are prominent in Table 5.8: stealing, trouble making at home and in the village, loafing in the villages or urban areas, forming bad peer groups and committing crimes.

In order to focus on the relationships between these two factors, the early school leavers and their parents were asked: Do you think that the negative actions that you associate with education have arisen largely from the negative feelings that you have derived from secondary schooling? In their responses both school leavers and their parents reflected a close relation between the negative feelings shown in Table 5.7 and the negative actions stipulated by teachers, school administrators, parents and community leaders in Table 5.8. In fact, 79 per cent of the parents agreed that there was a close relation between them, compared to 82 per cent.
of early school leavers. In the follow-up discussion it was found that the influence of peer group network at the local level was also associated with these negative actions. One of the parents voiced the difference between early school leavers and unsuccessful completers, and their successful counterparts which many other parents have also said in their own way: "Look at those who did well at school. They do not form these troublesome peer groups and they rarely involve in stealing, trouble making and other crimes" - "Sio kia kinuotolu ne lava lelei 'enau ako'. Oku 'ikai ke nau fakakulupu fakakina holo kinuotolu, pea 'oku tataaitaha pe ha'anau kau he kaiha'a, fakakina mo e ngaahi fai hia kehe"."

It is clear from Tables 5.7 and 5.8 that unemployment poses the most serious problem because its score is highest in the views of all the respondents and in some cases it almost doubles the next most important factor. The significance of the expression 'nofo noa'ia pe' as a rendering of the word, unemployment, is that it has a much deeper and more encompassing meaning than the English word 'unemployment'.

Table 5.9: Percentages of respondents using 'Nofo noa'ia pe' for 'unemployment'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>% using 'Nofo noa'ia pe'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early school leavers</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful completers</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community leaders</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is somewhat graphically suggested by the Tongan word itself - nofo noa'ia pe - which is literally rendered as 'just sitting around nothing'. Not only is the unemployed 'just sitting' at home or in the village or in the streets of the main urban centres, but he or she in some ways is and has 'nothing'. The importance of the word, nofo noa'ia pe, is highlighted by the fact it was used by 42 to 58 per cent of the five groups of respondents as indicated in Table 5.9. The 'unemployed' in the Western usage of the term does not suggest that the person has 'nothing'.

211
In fact, the unemployed in Western countries still have a number of unemployment benefits from their governments which the unemployed in Tonga can only dream about.

In asking parents and early school leavers if there was a connection between unemployment and the negative feelings about education, 75 per cent of the early school leavers and 83 per cent of parents admitted that unemployment or 'nofo-noa'ia-pe' has given rise to a list of negative feelings which is very similar to that listed in Table 5.7: the feelings of uselessness, failure, frustration, and loss of dignity. Furthermore, both parents and school leavers agreed that the other factors in Table 5.7 - having no money and becoming a burden of their families - are part and parcel of being unemployed.

In summing up this part of the data analysis it is concluded that the characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers were similar and the literature has shown that such characteristics have been closely associated with early school leaving. The identified advantages of secondary schooling for both groups were similar: ability to read, write and speak English, competence in literacy and numeracy, greater knowledge of God and the Bible, more knowledge of the history and geography of Tonga and other countries, helping their parents, opportunities for paid employment and becoming one of the Church workers. As for the disadvantages of secondary schooling, teachers, school administrators, the parents and the community leaders have also great similarities in their views. Both the internal and external components of these disadvantages were also similar to the problems that those same respondents have associated with early school leaving. Thus, the consensus among teachers, school administrators, community leaders, early school leavers, their parents, and unsuccessful completers is that early school leavers and unsuccessful completers are similar and together they constitute a serious problem in Tonga.