Early school leaving: a crisis in secondary schooling in Tonga

Makafalani Tatafu

University of Wollongong

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:

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

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.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
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
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
The community leaders 144

Parents of early school leavers 146

Documentation search for early school leavers 146

3. Overview of purposes, questionnaires and respondents 146

3.1 Questionnaire for teachers and school administrators 149

Rationale 149

Questionnaire content and development 149

Trial 151

3.2 Questionnaire for early school leavers 153

Rationale 153

Questionnaire content and development 153

Trial 154

3.3 Questionnaire for unsuccessful completers 155

Rationale 155

Questionnaire content and development 156

Trial 156

3.4 Questionnaire for parents of early school leavers 158

Rationale 158

Questionnaire content and development 158

Trial 160

3.5 Questionnaire for community leaders 161

Rationale 161

Questionnaire content and development 162

Trial 163

4. Analysis of data 163

Characteristics of early school leavers and unsuccessful completers 164

Assessment of school attractiveness 164

Causes of early school leaving 165

Policy measures for reducing early school leaving 166
4.1 Limitations of research 167

Restricted to the Catholic Education System 167

Unavailability of respondents 167

Absence of successful completers 167

Inquiry time 168

5. Trustworthiness of the data 168

Credibility of the researcher 169

Preference for researcher to do the interviews 170

Confidentiality and anonymity assured 171

Questionnaires and interviews in the Tongan language 172

Questionnaire trials 173

Participant rapport 173

Credibility of the research assistants 174

Summary 175

5

Data Analysis

Introduction 176

A case study of an early school leaver 177

A case study of an unsuccessful completer 179

Link with the theoretical framework 182

Overview of the data analysis by research issues and sub-issues 184

Reflection on the translation saga 188

1. Extent of early school leaving 191

1.1 The collection of the early school leaving data 191

1.2 Rates of early school leaving 192

1.3 Comparison of the rate of early school leaving and that derived from the government official figures 193

1.4 Gender differences of early school leaving 194
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
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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Returns to investment in education, by country type and level (%)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.2</td>
<td>Public spending on education as a share of the public budget (%)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.3</td>
<td>Primary school gross enrolment ratios and average annual population growth rate</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.4</td>
<td>Estimated total literate and illiterate populations aged 15 and over in developing countries, by region 1990 (%)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.5</td>
<td>Estimated numbers of out-of-school children in developing countries, 1990 and 2000 (millions)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.6</td>
<td>Estimated percentages of the population of primary school entrance age attaining and not attaining Grade 4, and not entering school, 1980 and 1990</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>Estimated early school leavers from primary schools in the South</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2</td>
<td>Estimated percentages of the population of primary school entrance age attaining and not attaining Grade 4, and not entering school, 1980 and 1990</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.3</td>
<td>Rates of early school leaving from primary schools in Bangladesh</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.4</td>
<td>General characteristics of at-risk students</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.5</td>
<td>Characteristics of early school leavers and graduates</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.6</td>
<td>Causes of early school leaving from the 10 studies from Bangladesh</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.7</td>
<td>Causes of early school leaving in Bangladesh according to school leavers and parents</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.8</td>
<td>Causes of early school leaving in Bangladesh according to community leaders</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.9</td>
<td>The major components of an education system with inputs from and outputs to society</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.10</td>
<td>Early school leaving percentages for students from families with varying degrees of functional and structural deficiencies</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.11</td>
<td>Early school leaving rates by sector for students with scholastic or disciplinary problems</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Population by census division and district</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Students enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Tonga</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Recurrent allocation of government grants to secondary schools, 1990</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.4  Primary school subjects and length of teaching hours  ... 107
Table 3.5  Early school leavers among prisoners  ... 120
Table 3.6  Registered marriages and registered divorces in Tonga, 1987-1992  ... 121
Table 3.7  Systems analysis framework for early school leaving in Tonga  ... 125
Table 5.1  Early school leavers from the new entrants of the five sample schools  ... 192
Table 5.2  Gender differences among early school leavers by year, Form and gender  ... 195
Table 5.3  Characteristics of early school leavers of 1988 & 1989 new cohorts and those of the total population  ... 197
Table 5.4  Failure rates in the Tonga School Certificate Examination, 1988-92  ... 201
Table 5.5  Early school leavers and unsuccessful completers of sample schools, 1988 and 1989  ... 202
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  ... 205
Table 5.7  Disadvantages of secondary schooling to early school leavers (ESL) and unsuccessful completers (UC) for the 1989 & 1989 new cohorts  ... 207
Table 5.8  Problems relating to early school leaving according to the parents of early school leavers, teachers school administrators and community leaders  ... 209
Table 5.9  Percentages of respondents using "Nofo noa" for 'unemployment'  ... 211
Table 5.10a  Facilities and resources  ... 214
Table 5.10b  School administration  ... 215
Table 5.10c  Teachers  ... 218
Table 5.10d  Students  ... 219
Table 5.11  School administrator-related causes of early school leaving  ... 225
Table 5.11a  Summary of school administrator-related causes of early school leaving  ... 231
Table 5.12  Teacher-related causes of early school leaving  ... 235
Table 5.12a  Summary of the categories of teacher-related causes of early school leaving  ... 240
Table 5.13  Parent-related causes of early school leaving  ... 243
Table 5.13a  Summary of the parent-related causes of early school leaving  ... 247
Table 5.14  Student-related causes of early school leaving  ... 251
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.14a</td>
<td>Summary of student-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>Village community-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.15a</td>
<td>Summary of the village community-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>Government-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.16a</td>
<td>Summary of the Tongan Government-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.17a</td>
<td>Summary of Church Education Department-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.18a</td>
<td>Summary of the Tongan culture-related causes of early school leaving</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by teachers</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by school administrators</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by parents</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by students</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by the village community</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by the Tongan Government</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>Policy measures to be implemented by the Church Education Department</td>
<td>327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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, Mailefhi-Siu'ilikutapu 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 Makafalani 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".