ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, ATTENDANCE, AND BEHAVIORAL ISSUES: IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, ATTENDANCE, AND BEHAVIORAL ISSUES:
IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

by

Vickie Jordan Tiblier

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
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ABSTRACT

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, ATTENDANCE, AND BEHAVIORAL ISSUES:
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December 2007

The purpose of this research was to extend the scope of prior research beyond the investigation of the relationship between student-related variables and the event of dropping out of school to include two categories: early elementary education and environment as they are related to the process of dropping out of school. The ultimate goal of this study was to identify factors such as reading and math grades, and adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 as they relate to the process of students’ dropping out of school.

The participants in this study included students enrolled in select GED programs in south Mississippi and English I students enrolled in a select south Mississippi community college. The ages of the participants were 18 years of age or older. The students completed a questionnaire constructed by the researcher to measure their environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3. Transcripts were also collected randomly and anonymously. Each transcript was examined for first through third grade reading and math scores. Fifty non-completers and 68 completers responded to the questionnaire. Two hundred and forty transcripts were collected from three south Mississippi high schools, 120 completers and 120 non-completers.
A t test and logistic regression analysis was used to test for a significant relationship between poor academic performance in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout, and for adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout.

A statistically significant relationship was found between poor academic performance in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout and between adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout. The areas of first grade reading and third grade math were more significant than others, as well as the adverse environmental condition of poor parental involvement.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Despite a long-term, upward trend in school completion in the United States, each year about 5% of all high school students drop out of school (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, & Chapman, 1999). According to Dr. Hank Bounds, Mississippi State Superintendent of Education, “Every hour on the hour, 1.5 students drop out of school in Mississippi. Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days per year” (2006, n.p.). The roots of dropouts extend far and wide. A 15-year-old suspended three times for fighting, retained twice in his school career, reading at a fourth grade level, and coming to school 2 to 3 days out of 5 may seem different from that of an 8-year-old who is disruptive in class, reading one year behind grade level, and is absent 4 to 5 days per month, but is he really? This researcher surmises that the 8-year-old is in the process of becoming that 15-year-old.

Dropping out is not so much an isolated event as it is a process that begins early in a student’s school career. School, home, and community are all factors that influence a developing child. Academic performance, standardized test scores, and behavioral issues are established variables that can be used to measure a student’s performance in first through third grade, as well as 10th through 12th grade. It is students’ cumulative experiences that ultimately influence whether or not students drop out. However, patterns are formed early in most students. Students who have good parental support and have to rise to the level of high expectations set by their parents tend to achieve better than students who have minimal parental support and minimal expectations set by their parents. Some patterns are developed in the home setting and are very difficult for the school to change. Why some children conform to the rules and expectations of school and
some do not is an underlying question that many researchers attempt to answer. In this study, the researcher hopes to identify a correlation between early educational experiences and high school dropout. In other words, might a high school dropout be identified in elementary school?

To understand the effects of educational experiences on children, it is important to acknowledge the transactional nature of the student’s experiences within the classroom, the child’s early developmental history, and contemporaneous experiences outside a formal educational setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Each of the child’s current experiences has an impact on how he or she interprets later experiences, which will similarly impact experiences subsequent to these events and so on (Sameroff, 1992; Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). Behaviors in middle school and high school are a reflection of the student’s earlier experiences. Poor achievement, irregular attendance, low expectations, and behavior problems are all symptoms that manifest themselves in the early years of a child’s school career.

Statement of the Problem

Analyses of all of the specific interactions among intervening variables that mediate the dropout decision are beyond the scope of this study. In addition to the frequently studied variables of the high school dropout, this study investigated factors in early elementary education such as reading and mathematics scores and environmental issues in grades 1 through 3. The researcher attempted to identify a correlation between poor reading and mathematics scores, adverse environmental situations in grades 1 through 3, and dropping out of school. With this goal presented, this study sought to answer the following questions:
1. Is poor academic performance in grades 1 through 3 related to future dropout?

2. Are adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 related to future dropout?

Hypotheses

$H_1$: Poor academic performance in reading and mathematics in grades 1 through 3 are significantly related to future dropout.

$H_2$: Adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 are significantly related to future dropout.

Definition of Terms

*Adverse environmental conditions* - is defined as a child’s family life or living conditions, in a state that is not conducive to promoting education or a responsible lifestyle. These conditions may include but are not limited to divorced or single parent homes, parents who are not involved with their children’s education or extracurricular endeavors, or children living with adults other than their parents in the absence of their parents.

*Completer* - is defined as a person who has received a high school diploma and is attending English I or History I class in a community college.

*Dropout* - is defined by the Mississippi Department of Education, State Dropout Prevention Plan, as an individual who:

- Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year
- Was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year
- Has not graduated from high school
• Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions:

1. Transfer to another public school district, private school, or state/district approved educational program

2. Temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved absence

3. Death (MDE, 2007a)

_Dropout rate_ - is defined as the total number of dropouts in a school divided by that school’s total enrollment, expressed as a percentage.

_Event dropout rate_ - is defined as a number that estimates the percentage of both private and public high school students who left high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or its equivalent (e.g., GED). It can be used to track annual changes in the experiences of students in the United States school system (NCES, 2004).

_Family unit_ - is defined as persons living in the home with the child.

_Low income_ - is defined as the lowest 20% of all family incomes; low income families include those with $16,333 or less in family income.

_Non-completer_ - is defined as a person who did not complete high school, who does not hold a high school diploma, and is attending GED preparatory classes.

_Poor academic performance_ - is defined as scoring a letter grade of a “D” or “F” or a numeric grade of a 74 or below in a major subject area such as Language, Math, or Reading in grades 1 through 3.

_Status dropout rate_ - reports the percentage of individuals in a given age range who are not in school and have not earned a high school diploma or equivalency credential, irrespective of when they dropped out. The rate focuses on an overall age
group as opposed to individuals in the U.S. school system, so it can be used to study
general population issues.

Delimitations

In this study, the following delimitations were established:

1. Transcripts were collected from three south Mississippi high schools.

2. Questionnaires from dropouts were collected from the students in the General Educational Development (GED) classes in a select area of south Mississippi.

3. GED participants were only those enrolled who were 18 years of age or older.

4. Questionnaires from completers were collected from students in English I classes at a south Mississippi community college.

5. Completer participants were only those enrolled who were 18 years of age or older with a high school diploma.

Assumption

Students responded honestly to the questionnaire to reflect a true environmental and educational background.

Justification

A pressing need exists to distinguish between why some students drop out of school and some stay. The earlier the factors that put students at risk can be identified, the more time will be available to mediate. Researchers Alexander, Entwisle, and Kabbani (2001), in the article “The Dropout Process in Life Course Perspective: Early Risk Factors at Home and School,” suggest that from a life course perspective, high school dropout culminates a long-term process of disengagement from school. Early schooling
factors can forecast a dropout almost as well as factors from later in a child’s schooling. Most children, including so called at-risk students, enter school enthusiastic, optimistic, and eager to learn. Unfortunately, for many this frame of mind is short lived. Enjoyment of school, compliance with school routines, and academic self-image tend to spiral downward the longer children attend school (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Stipek & Maclver, 1989).

The implications of this research are far reaching. In understanding the effects of early childhood education, further research can be produced to intervene and redirect these identified behaviors. While schools are offering tutoring programs and smaller class sizes, much more needs to be done in and outside of the classroom. Teachers must recognize the differentiated learning patterns of their students in order to engage all students. At-risk parents should be included in parenting classes to help them better understand the challenges that face their children. If the child is a product of his or her environment, then perhaps this research can assist in positively changing that environment.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on Urie Bonfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems theory, J. D. Finn’s two social-psychological perspectives on the dropout dynamic, and Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance theory. The basis of these theories lay out the correlation between early elementary education and high school dropout. This review of the theoretical framework presents a summary of information in three sections. Section one focuses on Ecological Systems theory, which highlights the developing child. Section two discusses two social-psychological perspectives that intertwine the experiences of the child. Section three examines the theory of Cognitive Dissonance in the transformation from elementary education into secondary education.

Ecological Systems Theory

According to Berk (2000), this theory looks at a child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. Bronfenberenner’s theory defines complex “layers” (p. 23) of environment, each having an effect on a child’s development. This theory has recently been renamed “bioecological systems theory” (p. 23) to emphasize that a child’s own biology is a primary environment fueling his or her development. The interaction between factors in the child’s maturing biology, his or her immediate family/community environment, and the societal landscape fuel and steer his or her development. Changes or conflict in any one layer will ripple throughout others layers. To study a child’s development then, one must look not only at
the child and his or her immediate environment, but also at the interaction of the larger environment as well (Berk, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner's layer structure of environment is broken into five systems; the microsystem is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. The mesosystem layer provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem (example: child's parent and teacher). The exosystem layer defines the larger social system in which the child does not function directly. The macrosystem layer may be considered the outermost layer in the child's environment. While not being a specific framework, this layer is comprised of cultural values, customs, and laws. Lastly, the chronosystem encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environments. Elements within this system can be either external, such as the timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the aging of a child (Berk, 2000). Addison (1992) stated,

Bronfenbrenner sees the instability and unpredictability of family life we have let our economy create as the most destructive force to a child's development.

Children do not have the constant mutual interaction with important adults that is necessary for development. (p. 28)

According to the ecological theory, if the relationships in the immediate microsystem break down, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his or her environment.

Children looking for the affirmations that should be present in the child/parent or child/other important adult relationship look for attention in inappropriate places. These
deficiencies show themselves especially in adolescence as antisocial behavior, lack of self-discipline, and inability to provide self-direction (Addison, 1992).

Social-Psychological Perspective

Finn’s (1989) two social-psychological perspectives on the dropout dynamic illustrate how these multiple strands of development intersect over the life course, in this instance the life course of early schooling. Under Finn’s “frustration self-esteem” model, a record of poor performance causes children to question their competence and weakness their attachment to school. Dropping out of school is theorized to be a gradual process of student disengagement and alienation, marked by a chronic cycle of tardiness, absenteeism, failing classes, suspensions, and transitions between schools. Dropout under such circumstances is a means of an escape from an environment that is psychologically punishing. Finn’s second dynamic, his “participation-identification” model, stresses positive experiences that encourage a sense of belonging and so strengthens the attachment to school (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989).

According to Finn (1989), these two perspectives are parallel. Affective detachment from school is the immediate impetus to dropout, but whether the children’s attachment to school is strong or weak, it develops over time as a result of their cumulative experience: Are they fitting in comfortably and realizing success, or are they struggling and not measuring up academically?

Cognitive Dissonance

According to cognitive dissonance theory, a tendency is for individuals to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions). When an inconsistency between attitudes or behaviors (dissonance) occurs, something must change to eliminate
the dissonance. In the case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, it is most likely that the attitude will change to accommodate the behavior (Festinger, 1957). As children enter school they have the willingness to want to please their teachers and to comply with the rules and routines of their class. As they progress in the beginning, some children stand out with misbehaviors. If the non-compliance and misbehavior continues, the child’s attitude of wanting to please the teacher will eventually change to match with his or her misbehaviors. This is one of the most detrimental events that can occur. At this point, discipline becomes behavior reinforcement.

The Dropout Problem

The goal to reach students before they become disconnected or drop out (Riley, 1999) has not been premature. In October 2004, about 5 out of every 100 students enrolled in school left school without completing a high school program. The cumulative effect of hundreds of thousands of young people leaving school each year short of finishing a high school program translates into several million youths who are out of school, yet lack a high school credential. Since 1972, event dropout rates have trended downward, from 6.1% in 1972 to 4.7% in 2004. This decline occurred primarily from 1972 through 1990. Despite year-to-year fluctuations, there has been no overall pattern of increase or decrease in event dropout rates since 1990 (NCES, 2004).

Dropping out of high school is related to a number of negative outcomes. For example, the median income of high school dropouts age 18 and over was $12,184 in 2003 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005a). Dropouts are also less likely to be in the labor force than those with a high school credential or higher, and are more likely to be unemployed if they are in the labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). In terms of health,
dropouts over the age of 24 tend to report being in worse health than adults who are not dropouts, regardless of income (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Dropouts also make up disproportionately higher percentages of the nation’s prison and death row inmates. Estimates indicate that approximately 30% of federal inmates, 40% of state prison inmates, and 50% of persons on death row are high school dropouts (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000, 2002). In 2004, the dropout event rate for students living in low-income families was approximately four times greater than the rate of their peers from high-income families (10.4% compared with 2.5%) (NCES, 2004).

High school dropouts, on average, earn $9,200 less per year than high school graduates, and about $1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates. Students who drop out of high school are often unable to support themselves; high school dropouts were over three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed in 2004. They are twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty from one year to the next (Bridgeland, 2006).

In addition, Bridgeland (2006) reported that the prevalence of high dropout rates not only imperils individual futures but also profoundly impacts communities and the nation due to the loss of productive workers, the earnings and revenues that they would have generated, and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care, and social services. Bridgeland (2006) reported further than 4 out of every 10 young adults (ages 16-24) lacking a high school diploma received some type of government assistance in 2001, and a dropout is more than eight times as likely to be in jail or prison as a person with at least a high school diploma. Studies show that the lifetime cost to the
nation for each youth who drops out of school and later moves into a life of crime and drugs ranges from $1.7 to $2.3 million (Bridgeland, 2006).

As noted by Carson, Huelskamp, and Woodall (1991), the number of dropouts has not been the issue (as cited in Wood, 1995). The point has been that as the world has changed, the system's employment need has not tolerated dropout rates that have not changed over the last 20 years (Wood, 1995). The relative importance of a high school education has changed dramatically over the last half century in the United States. Richard Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, in 1999 made the following comment about the change in his Back-to-School Address in September 1999.

Fifty years ago, one-third of the students were being prepared for college, one-third drifted through high school but eventually got decent jobs, and one-third were tagged as low achievers and expected to drop out. Years ago this assumption could prevail because we lived in an industrial era. Muscle power mattered as much as brain power when it came to making a living. (Riley, 1999, n.p.)

By the early 1970s, when the parents of today's high school students entered the workforce, almost 85% of the population ages 18 through 24 who were not enrolled in high school had completed a high school education (NCES, 1998b). At that time, a high school education still served as an entryway to a number of promising career paths. Now, over a quarter of a century later technological advances in the workplace have increased the demand for a skilled labor force to the point where a high school education represents the minimum requirement for entry into the labor force (NCES, 1998b).

Secondary schools in today's society are faced with the challenge of increasing curricular rigor to strengthen the knowledge base of high school graduates. Since the mid-
1980s, many states have increased their high school course requirements and more states require students to pass what are widely termed “high school exit exams.” Educators are also faced with the challenge of increasing the percentage of all students who successfully complete a high school program. Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states must report graduation rates and demonstrate that schools are making progress on this and other indicators of student achievement. Some are concerned that the increased graduation requirements will lead to higher dropout rates (NCES, 2004).

One of the most confusing issues in addressing the dropout problem is how to calculate the dropout rate specifically, when to count a student as having dropped out. For example, students may report that they are planning to earn a GED, transfer to another school, or be home schooled, and schools cannot always track their progress. Some schools might consider these students to be dropouts and others may not (NCES, 2004).

The federal government uses three sources of data to estimate high school dropouts: the October supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) collected by the Bureau of the Census; the Common Core of Data compiled by NCES; and data from NCES’s Longitudinal Studies Program. Unfortunately, each of these studies is based on different populations and methods. Also, survey methods tend to have large sampling errors, and minority students and schools often are underrepresented (NCES, 2004). The NCES goes on to report that these discrepancies suggest that current assessments of the dropout population may be underestimated. As the minority population grows, and as more schools initiate new methods of accountability such as exit exams, the basis for error may become even greater (NCES, 2004).
The Mississippi Department of Education, Office of Research and Statistics, completed its first cohort in tracking 4-year dropouts in May 2005. This analysis represents a first attempt at using the Mississippi Student Information System (MSIS) to track individual students over a period of time in order to calculate dropout and graduation information (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). It examined a cohort of students over 4 school years. Since MSIS was implemented statewide at the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year, the end of month 9 data transmission (for May 2005) completed the data required for tracking the first 4-year cohort of students. The cohort used in this analysis comprises all students who were coded as ninth graders in the end of month one data transmission representing mid-August through the end of September 2001. Comparing those students' MSIS records to the student records transmitted at the end of May 2005 identified students in the 2001-2002 ninth grade cohort who were still enrolled somewhere in Mississippi 4 years later and those who were not (Mississippi Department of Education, 2005). While MSIS tracking is still undergoing changes, it places Mississippi in the forefront in accurately tracking dropouts.

Another dropout problem, while small in number, is enormous in scheme—pre-high school dropouts. Mississippi Compulsory School Attendance Law 37-13-91 states that school attendance requires a parent, legal guardian, or custodian who has legal control or charge of a child age 6 to 17 to send the child to school during the entire school year, except under the limited circumstances specified in subsection three of Section 37-13-91. The exceptions include, but are not limited to, sending the child to a state approved, nonpublic school, or educating the child at home in an organized educational program. Although in the past the compulsory school attendance law did not apply to
children under the age of 6, effective July 1, 2003, a child who enrolls in public kindergarten will follow the same guidelines of the compulsory attendance law (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007a).

Duffrin (2003) stated that while the exact number of elementary school dropouts remains in question, educators and attorneys say such children are out there and most likely headed for trouble. They have been silent dropouts that no one really talks about; they stopped showing up at their elementary schools or disappeared between eighth and ninth grades. Sixteen-year-olds who quit school have productive alternatives to high school, such as full-time employment, job training programs, and GED programs. For the younger, illegal dropouts, these options are closed. No structured program exists for them. What do they do—sit around until they are 16, get involved in criminal activity, get involved in drugs (Duffrin, 2003)?

Researchers now generally agree that dropping out is the culmination of a process of progressive disengagement with the academic and/or social dimensions of schooling (Finn, 1989; Garnier, Stein & Jacobs, 1997; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Rumberger, 1987, 2000). For some students, the seeds of dropout appear to be planted quite early. Using longitudinal data, researchers have been able to predict high school dropouts from experiences in school extending as far back as the elementary years (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Barrington & Hendricks, 1989; Ensminger & Slucarcick, 1992; Roderick, 1993). But while early experiences may predispose certain individuals to dropping out of school, general agreement is noted among scholars that the reasons for school-leaving are not found solely in attributes of the individual, but rather results from the interaction of individuals and the educational, family, and community
contexts in which they are located. For example, students whose parents use an "authoritative parenting style" and are more involved in their schooling are less likely to drop out of school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Rumberger, 1995).

Life Course

The fundamental tenet of a "life course model" is that early experiences and events have an on-going and cumulative effect on outcomes. The process of becoming a young adult who strives to succeed at school and makes a successful transition to the labor market begins early in life. Most longitudinal studies of dropping out are unable to examine early effects in any meaningful way, yet from the perspective of designing effective interventions, this is an area in crucial need of further understanding. Given the importance of early effects, findings from studies that are able to include early school and childhood effects are the focus of this research.

More recently, dropping out has been seen as a process that occurs over time and is the result of a combination of individual, family, and school experiences, rather than a single risk event (Dryfoos, 1990; Franklin, 1992). Current research has related school performance to early influences of parents and teachers. The social context within the family and classroom is critical to establishing and maintaining patterns of academic performance (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1988). Experiences throughout childhood and early adolescence within their homes and schools influence the decisions that teens make about their social and academic lives. Specific family antecedents of dropping out include single parent homes, divorce, unstable family environments, chronically troubled families, lower family socioeconomic status and income, and patterns of social ability within the family context (Brooks-Gunn, Guo, & Furstenberg, 1993; Rumberger, 1983).
Ensminger and Slusarcick (1992) argued that collecting information at a young age is crucial because many early childhood experiences have a significant impact on whether a child will leave school before graduation. They also noted, as has Rumberger (1995), that a substantial portion of dropouts leave school prior to even entering secondary school.

When children begin school, they must construct an image of themselves as students, discover the norms of the school, learn how to get along with peers and authority figures, and formulate strategies for mastering the necessary skills. In accomplishing these tasks, children develop strategies, including styles of relating to significant others (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1988). Entwisle and Hayduk (1982) indicated that some children who did well in the early grades responded strongly to their parents’ beliefs and expectations. Other children who did well paid less attention to their parents and depended more on feedback from their teachers. These styles of depending on significant others may become entrenched as part of the child’s adaptation to the student role in the early years of school and be one cause of long-term continuities in performance. In other words, achievement in the upper grades may depend on the student’s processes of social adaptation, which are established in the early years.

Developmental consequences occur for students who are identified as being less academically successful in school than their peers. Deficits in both self-esteem and skill development often result from the stigma associated with being a member of an underachieving group (Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995). This is because praise, empathic understanding, and positive attention, necessary for self-esteem and self-
development, are less often provided by teachers, parents, and peers to underachievers than to their more academically and socially successful peers.

Students' past experiences of social and contextual support within social institutions, especially within the family, appear to influence the type of response they make to school rules and consequences. Typically, those students who enter school having previously experienced other institutions (e.g., family, neighborhood) as chaotic, inconsistent, and punishing will interpret most consequences as barriers to their immediate needs and signs of external threat (Dodge & Price, 1994). Such youth often lack the fundamental building blocks of self-development such as self-esteem, confidence in their skills, identity development, and faith in conventional institutions or the future (Jessar, 1993). These elements of self-development typically develop within homes and families where life is organized and predictable, and where relationships are characterized by consistency, emotional support, and interpersonal trust (Winnicott, 1965). Students from neighborhoods, homes, and families where such experiences are less common often seek out these experiences in the school and other institutions. Because of the primacy of these basic needs for warmth, esteem, competence, and structure underachieving students often become more concerned about gratifying these immediate needs than about preparing for their future.

Urie Bronfenbrenner, co-founder of Head Start, uses his bioecological model to provide a startlingly clear view of the problems that have been seen in students and in families. He says that technology has changed today's society, and while great pains are being taken to safeguard the physical environment from the damage done by a technology, no resources are spent to provide similar safeguards to the damage done to
the societal environment (Henderson, 1995). Henderson (1995) went on to explain that the U.S. economy has shifted from an industrial model to a technological model, yet the patterns of the workplace have continued to rely on the factory work ethic. Parents are expected to work a schedule that revolves around the factory whistle, even though they may work in a high tech office. The technology that enables workers to be free of manual labor should also free them from the time and place boundary. However, the work ethic demands more face time, not less. As women entered the workforce, they, too, were subject to the same demands. Family life in this country has taken a back seat to the needs of the workplace.

Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, and Carlson (2000) provided the best conceptualization of the dropping out phenomena. According to Jimerson et al. (2000), dropping out is better conceptualized as an evolving process rather than an event. It is a process that starts prior to the child entering school. Along the way the process manifests itself in a variety of forms. Truancy, disciplinary problems, and failing grades in high school are late manifestations of the process and immediate markers of dropping out behavior, while behavior problems and low school achievement are midcourse markers that provide additional time for prevention and intervention strategies to work. This conceptualization suggests the need for communities and schools to have strategies to respond to the dropping out process at each stage of development, rather than waiting until late manifestations of the process are evident (Jimerson et al., 2000).

Gleason and Dynarski (2002) pointed out that risk factors are often not enough to accurately predict who will drop out. Dropping out results from a complex combination
of individual, family, and school experiences (Dryfoos, 1990; Franklin, 1992). Multiplicity of risk factors is often more predictive than individual risks.

**Curriculum: Grades 1 Through 3**

According to the Mississippi Department of Education, the curriculum for grade 1 describes in general terms what students are expected to know and do throughout the year to become more adept language users. In first grade, language arts is designed to allow flexibility in integrating across subject areas. Reading and writing are no longer viewed as isolated tasks to be taught and tested, but should be taught in a context which is meaningful and purposeful for students. Invented spelling is used to allow students to experiment with writing and reading in a risk-free environment. Students learn by doing, just as their vocabulary grows through speaking, writing, listening, viewing, and reading. Before mastery can be expected, students must be given ample time to practice with teacher modeling and feedback. Reading instruction focuses on the five critical elements of effective reading instruction including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006).

According to the Mississippi language arts frameworks (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006), each competency and objective assumes the student has mastered the competencies and objectives in the previous grades. While competencies for grades K-3 remain identical, objectives require an extension of knowledge and broader, deeper application of skills. A critical component at each grade level is text complexity. Text complexity is indicated by such elements as sophistication of language, content, and syntax. As students move from kindergarten to grade 3, texts should require a greater
cognitive involvement by the student in order for the student to appreciate and comprehend the meaning and beauty inherent in language.

In second grade, students are presented with a wide, rich variety of texts, which are read to, listened to, read by, or viewed by students and then discussed. Second grade students are expected to engage actively in language activities involving text as they continue to grow as developing readers and writers (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006).

In the third grade language arts frameworks (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006), the curriculum describes in general terms what students are expected to know and do throughout the year to become more adept language users. The third grade language arts is designed to allow the flexibility of integrating across the curriculum. Reading instruction focuses on the five critical elements of effective reading instruction including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension with a growing emphasis on vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Students will read a variety of literature, use effective communication skills, gather and use information from print and nonprint sources, and use reading comprehension strategies that will be applied in all subjects. Each student will plan, draft, revise, and edit personal writing. The student will begin to use cursive handwriting (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006).

The Mississippi first grade math frameworks as presented by the Mississippi Department of Education (2007b) extends concepts from kindergarten. Students explore number relationships through place value concepts (units, tens, and hundreds) as they develop addition and subtraction models. These models are related to the actions of the computations (joining for addition and take-away, comparison, and missing addend for
subtraction). Students describe patterns in number, computational, and geometric contexts. Data analysis continues the generalizations of patterns in pictographs and bar graphs as interpretations are made. The instructional emphases are on mathematical language development with writing and talking mathematics, multiple representations, and critical thinking. Mathematics instruction at this level should include manipulatives, cooperative and collaborative learning experiences, and problem solving (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007b).

The framework is comprised of five content strands: number and operations, algebra, geometry, measurement, and data analysis and probability. The five process strands are problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, connections, and representation (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007b).

The Mississippi Department of Education (2007b) goes on to state that third grade competencies and objectives continue to develop number concepts with four-digit whole numbers and with fractions. These concepts include the properties of the four operations and multiple representations of the numerical quantities. Multiplication and division are formally introduced with their appropriate models. Students begin to use multiple approaches to find unknown quantities in word problems and equations that may include variables. Perimeter concepts are developed, leading to generalizations about the topic. Students apply the techniques of composition and decomposition to geometric contexts in addition to numerical ones (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007b).

Data analysis now adds line plots as students interpret and use data. The instructional emphases are on mathematical language development with writing and talking mathematics, multiple representations, and critical thinking. Mathematics
instruction at this level should include manipulatives, cooperative and collaborative learning experiences, and problem solving (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007b).

The framework (Mississippi Department of Education, 2007b) is comprised of five content strands: number and operations, algebra, geometry, measurement, and data analysis and probability. Its five process strands are problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, connections, and representation. The five interrelated content strands in first through third grade along with the five process strands combine to provide continuity to the teaching of K-12 mathematics.

Summary and Assumptions

With the recent focus on implementation of the new Mississippi frameworks and the new MCT 2, the dropout problem is a high profile for the Mississippi public schools and has provided the motivation for this research. From this research the following assumptions were gathered: (a) The dropout problem is not a problem for the moment. It is a process that begins early in a child’s life and reaches its pinnacle with dropping out; (b) While the technology era has been welcomed, individuals have not adjusted their lifestyle to adapt to the freedom and flexibility it can provide for family lives; (c) The dropout problem is not just a problem created by students; it involves their entire environment. If the dropout rate is to be significantly reduced, assistance from a variety of agencies, not just the school, must be provided; and (d) First through third grade curriculum is essentially the same with building blocks each year. If a student has poor academic performance in the first 3 years, he or she has no foundation on which to build an education.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This causal comparative study focused on identifying whether a relationship exists between grades 1 through 3 reading/mathematics scores, environment, and dropout. Data were obtained from the high school transcripts and questionnaires of GED students and high school completers.

Research Design

The researcher constructed the instrument (Appendix A) used in this study. The instrument in the form of a questionnaire was distributed to dropouts via the GED testing program and the GED prep courses. It was also distributed to high school completers at a select south Mississippi community college, as these students consist mostly of students from the three select high schools in the area. The questionnaire attempted to gain insight into the perceptions of the dropouts and completers in regards to their experiences and life situations as a first through third grader. The design of the study is a causal-comparative design. Data were also collected from transcripts of dropouts and completers from three select south Mississippi high schools. These are the three high schools primarily served by the selected GED programs.

Participants

The participants in this research study were students enrolled in select south Mississippi GED programs and English I students enrolled in a select south Mississippi community college. The ages of the participants were 18 years of age or older. The GED and community college students who participated in this study were a representative
According to the Mississippi Department of Education’s dropout statistics, one select high school’s 4-year dropout count was 60 students while the other two select high schools were reported together averaging 194 students combined. Therefore, 30 dropout and 30 completer transcripts were collected from the high school with a dropout count of 60, and 45 dropout and 45 completer transcripts were collected from the high schools with a dropout count of 194.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher constructed an instrument (Appendix A) that consisted of 19 items for use in this study. The input from a panel of three experts was sought to determine the content and face validity of the instrument (Appendix B). The researcher used the comments and suggestions of the panel of experts to make adjustments for clarity and appropriateness as necessary. The panel of experts consisted of an elementary teacher, an elementary principal, and the director of a GED program. The elementary teacher suggested that the wording in question 3 using “sibling” may be too difficult for some participants to understand. The elementary principal suggested that the time frame in questions 1 and 2 was ambiguous, suggested considering asking if the students were in special education, and also suggested aligning the questions flush with the margin and indenting the responses. The director of the GED program had the following suggestions: Question 1 was not clear on parents being married to each other or to a stepparent, the word “sibling” was too difficult, including something about whether or not the parents worked, and to be consistent on stating grades 1 through 3, as in question 12 when the
words “early elementary education” were used instead of grades 1 through 3. The researcher reworded question 1 to read, “While you were in grades 1 through 3, were your birth parents married to each other?”, question 3 was reworded to state “brothers and sisters”, question 4 was added to measure parents’ work, all questions consistently stated grades 1 through 3, and the layout of the questionnaire was corrected. To determine reliability, the questionnaire was piloted on 30 History I students at the community college. The History I class was taught at the same time as the English I classes to ensure that the pilot questionnaire and the questionnaire for the study were not given to the same students. The pilot questionnaires were reviewed by the researcher to help determine the reliability of the instrument. No problems were encountered by the respondents. No problems were noted.

Measurement of Variables

The input measures examined in this study were divided into three categories: family background, school background, and personal background. The family background was subdivided into family unit information, family unit education, and parental involvement. School background was subdivided into retention, behavior, and attendance. Personal background was subdivided into social involvement, connectedness, and attitude in home toward school. The stems and responses are categorical. Each subtopic was related to the environmental conditions of the respondents in grades 1 through 3. To obtain information on family background, questions 1, 2, and 4 measured family unit information, question 3 measured family unit education, and questions 5 and 6 measured parental involvement. To obtain information on school background, question 7 measured retention, questions 8 through 11 measured behavior, and question 12 measured
attendance. To obtain information on personal background, question 13 measured social involvement, questions 14 through 16 measured connectedness, and question 17 measured the attitude in the home toward school.

The questions were scored individually to determine if the respondent’s environmental conditions were adverse or not. Scoring for each question is as follows: Question 1 through 4, 14 and 17 had yes/no responses. The response of yes was given 1 point while the response of no was given 0 points. Questions 8 through 12 had yes/no responses and the responses of no were given 1 point while the responses of yes were 0. Questions 5 through 7, 13, 15, and 16 have multiple yes/no responses and, again, each response of yes was given 1 point while each response of no received 0. Overall, the lower a respondent’s score the more adverse the environmental conditions were in grades 1 through 3. The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher in the GED programs and the researcher’s designee in the English I classes.

The transcript data were coded on a four point scale: “A” equaled 4, “B” equaled 3, “C” equaled 2, “D” equaled 1, and “F” equaled 0. Coded scores were entered for first grade reading and math, second grade reading and math, and third grade reading and math.

**Data Collection**

Upon the successful completion of the proposal defense by the researcher, IRB approval by The University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix C), input from the three experts on the face validity of the questionnaire instrument (Appendix B), and the pilot study, distribution of questionnaires and collection of the data began. Letters of permission (Appendix D) from the superintendents of the select south Mississippi high
schools for collection of transcripts and a letter of permission from the vice president of academic and general affairs at the select south Mississippi community college to administer the questionnaires were obtained for IRB documentation and are included in Appendix D.

The transcripts were collected randomly and anonymously. The counselors from each high school were instructed to randomly select the transcripts and remove any identifying information such as name and social security number. The transcripts contained first through third grade reading and math grades. Each transcript was examined for first through third grade reading and math scores.

The researcher collected 50 questionnaires from dropouts via the GED programs and 68 from completers via English I classes. An informational cover letter was attached to each questionnaire as it was handed out by the researcher in the GED classes and the researcher's designee in the English I classes. The cover letter explained that the respondents' answers would be kept in the strictest of confidence, their questionnaires would be completely anonymous, that the information ascertained by the researcher would only be used for research purposes, and that their questionnaires would be destroyed upon completion of the research study. Only students 18 years of age or older received a questionnaire. For the English I classes, there was a GED or high school diploma question at the end of the questionnaire for the participant to indicate whether he or she holds a high school diploma or completed the GED. Only students holding a high school diploma were counted in the study. Upon reading the letter, the students chose to either answer the questionnaire or return it to the person administering the questionnaire. Once the students completed the questionnaires, they returned them to the questionnaire.
administrator and they were immediately placed in a large manila envelope. The envelope was sealed and returned to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data collected from transcripts were analyzed using SPSS, statistical software conducting a logistic regression test. The researcher compiled the results and presented an analysis of the data collected to determine if a significant relationship exists between dropouts and grade 1 through 3 academic performance. The responses to the questionnaires were entered into SPSS and a logistic regression test was used to analyze the data collected to determine if a significant relationship exists between dropouts and grade 1 through 3 adverse environmental conditions. An alpha of .05 was used.

Hypothesis 1 stated: Poor academic performance in reading and mathematics in grades 1 through 3 can predict a future dropout.

Hypothesis 1 was tested using logistic regression.

Hypothesis 2 stated: There is statistically significant evidence of adverse environmental conditions in grade 1 through 3 predicting a future dropout.

Hypothesis 2 was tested using logistic regression.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

In Chapter IV, the researcher compiled the results and presented an analysis of the data to determine if a significant relationship exists between poor academic performances in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout and if a significant relationship exists between adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout. The results of the tests of the hypotheses are presented in this chapter in narrative and tabular form.

Descriptive Data

The data presented and analyzed in this study were reported through questionnaires completed by 68 high school completers and 50 non-completers. The completer participants were students enrolled in freshman English classes at a south Mississippi community college. The non-completers were students in GED courses. The completers and non-completers were selected because they were enrolled in courses that most represented the public high schools in the study. Data were also collected from 240 high school transcripts—120 completers, and 120 non-completers—all presenting scores for first through third grade reading and math. The transcripts were collected from three public high schools in south Mississippi. The number of transcripts that were collected was based on the Mississippi Department of Education’s dropout statistics, 4-year dropout count. These three schools were selected to represent students from various backgrounds. They were selected because even though they were similar in size of enrollment they were very different in the areas of mean income and racial make up. This
allowed the researcher to gather data from a wide variety of subjects, yielding a good cross section of the population.

Hypotheses

$H_1$: Poor academic performance in reading and mathematics in grades 1 through 3 are significantly related to future dropout.

$H_2$: Adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 are significantly related to future dropout.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the questionnaire, it as noted that there were 61.8% females with completer status versus 44% males with completer status. This statistic is consistent with the national status completion rates in 2005. Females ages 18-24 who were not enrolled in high school in 2005 were more likely than males to have completed high school, 89.8% versus 85.4%.

The questionnaire measured adverse environmental conditions of the respondents in grades 1 through 3. The range of possible points on the questionnaire was 0-34. The lower the score the more adverse the environmental conditions as well as the higher the score the less adverse the environmental conditions Questions 1 through 4 and 14-17 were yes/no questions with yes scoring one point and no scoring zero. There were eight possible points for these questions. Questions 8 through 12 were also yes/no questions with no scoring one point and yes scoring zero. The number of possible points for these questions was five. Questions 5 through 7, 13, 15, and 16 had multiple yes/no responses, with yes scoring one point and no scoring zero. The number of possible points for these questions was 21.
One hundred and eighteen participants answered the questionnaire. Sixty-eight were completers and 50 are non-completers. There were no missing data from the questionnaire; all questions were answered. A $t$ test was conducted to evaluate mean (24.71) and standard deviation (3.57) of completers and the mean (20.24) and standard deviation (4.88) of non-completer responses on the questionnaire as noted in Table 1. There was a significant difference between completers and non-completers, $t(116) = 5.746, p = .001$, indicating that there were areas of significant differences in their responses, allowing for identifiable markers between completers and non-completers.

**Family Background**

The variables of interest under the category of family background were questions 5 and 6, parental involvement. Question 5 addressed if parents were involved in a parent/teacher organization (PTO), attended a PTO meeting, took part in school activities, or acted as a school volunteer. As shown in Table 2, 41.2% of the completers answered yes to three or more responses, whereas 14% of the no-completers answered yes to three or more responses. Question 6 addressed if parents attended parent/teacher conferences, the respondents’ activities outside of school, or attended school plays or performances. Table 2 illustrates that 92.7% of the completers answered yes to two or more of the responses versus 56% of the non-completers answering yes to two or more of the responses.

**School Background**

The variables of interest under the category of school background were questions 7, 8, 9, and 10, retention and behavior. Question 7 asked if the respondents were promoted in each grade, kindergarten through 3. The percentage of completers responding
Table 1

*Questionnaire Response Statistics for Mean and Standard Deviation Completers and Non-completers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24.71</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completer</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20.24</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Parental Involvement with Student Responses by Count and Percentage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Involvement Score</th>
<th>Completer</th>
<th>Non-completer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Involvement with Student Score</th>
<th>Completer</th>
<th>Non-completer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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that they had been promoted in each grade was 97.1% as opposed to 76% of the non-completers, as noted in Table 3. Question 8 asked if the respondents were ever considered a behavior problem in grades 1 through 3. Table 4 shows that 92.6% of the completers responded no and 80% of the non-completers responded no. Questions 9 and 10 addressed out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension. Table 4 indicates that 98.5% of the completers responded no, meaning that they had never been suspended out of school, while 80% of the non-completers responded no. In Table 4, 100% of the completers responded that they had never been placed in in-school suspension, while 88% of the non-completers responded no.

**Personal Background**

The variables of interest under the category of personal background were questions 14, 16, and 17, connectedness and attitude in home towards school. Question 14 asked if respondents had a good relationship with their peers. As shown in Table 5, 97.1% of the completers responded yes, and 84% of the non-completers responded yes. Question 16 had multiple responses asking if the respondent felt part of the class, felt connected with the teacher, and felt smart. Completers responding yes to one or more of the responses totaled 98.5%, while 84% of the non-completers responded yes to one or more of the responses. As shown in Table 6, the percentage differs even more when the responses are yes to two or more responses; 91.1% of the completers responded yes as opposed to only 68% of the non-completers. Question 17 addresses the importance of school in the home. One hundred percent of the completers responded yes, meaning that school was regarded as important in their home, while 86% of the non-completers responded yes (see Table 7).
Table 3

Successful Promotion Responses by Count and Percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Involvement Score</th>
<th>Completer</th>
<th>Non-completer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Behavior, Out-of-School and In-School Suspension Responses by Count and Percentage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completer</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-completer</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior Score</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 No</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Out-of-School Suspension Score</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 No</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-School Suspension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 No</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>88.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 5

*Relationship with Peers' Responses by Count and Percentage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship with Peers Score</th>
<th>Completer</th>
<th>Non-completer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Connectedness Responses by Count and Percentage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connectedness Score</th>
<th>Completer</th>
<th>Non-completer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of School Score</td>
<td>Completer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As previously stated, the point range on the questionnaire was 0-34. The higher the score, the more positive the environmental conditions and the lower the score, the more adverse the conditions. As shown in Table 8, 58.8% of the completers scored 25 points or higher, while only 18% of the non-completers scored 25 points or higher.

Transcript data were examined for first through third grade reading and math scores. The scores were coded on a four-point scale. "A" equaled 4, B" equaled 3, "C" equaled 2, D" equaled 1, and "F" equaled 0. An independent samples t test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the mean scores of completers and the mean score of non-completers in first through third grade reading and math scores. Table 9 shows a significant difference between each of the mean scores of completers and non-completers in reading and math. Completers’ scores were significantly higher than non-completers’ scores.

There was a significant difference in first grade reading scores with the completers’ mean at 3.38 and the non-completers’ mean at 2.09, $t(238) = 9.915, p < .001$. In first grade math, there was a significant difference with the completers’ mean at 3.53 and the non-completers’ mean at 2.38, $t(238) = 9.110, p < .001$. There was a significant difference in second grade reading scores, with the completers’ mean at 3.33 and the non-completers’ mean at 2.38, $t(238) = 8.002, p < .001$. In second grade math, there was a significant difference with the completers’ mean at 3.41 and the non-completers’ mean at 2.42, $t(238) = 8.214, p < .001$. There was a significant difference in third grade reading scores with the completers’ mean at 3.26 and the non-completers’ mean at 2.30, $t(238) = 8.393, p < .001$. In third grade math, there was a significant difference with the completers’ mean at 3.22 and the non-completers’ mean at 2.19, $t(238) = 9.055, p < .001$. 

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Table 8

*Total Score for Environmental Conditions by Count and Percentage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental Conditions Score</th>
<th>Completer</th>
<th></th>
<th>Non-completer</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Reading and Math Scores by Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-completer</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Test of Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using logistic regression. The .05 level of significance was used to determine whether or not each hypothesis should be accepted. Based on the findings and within the limitations of this study, the results of testing the stated hypotheses were as follows.

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated: Poor academic performance in reading and mathematics in grades 1 through 3 are significantly related to future dropout.

The logistic regression analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between poor academic performance in reading and math scores in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout, $\chi^2(N = 240, df = 6) = 110.79, p < .001$. $R^2_{Nagelkerke} = .493$; therefore, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. The $R^2$ value predicting at 49% indicates that the variables of completer and non-completer accounted for 78.3% of the variability, as shown in Table 10. The research indicated that the areas that were most significant to predict dropout were first grade reading ($p < .05$) and third grade math ($p < .05$) (see Table 11).

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated: Adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 are significantly related to future dropout.

The logistic regression analysis revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout, $\chi^2(N = 118, df = 1) = 28.37, p < .001$. $R^2_{Nagelkerke} = .287$; therefore, Hypothesis 2 was accepted. The $R^2$ value predicting at 29% indicates that the variables of completer
### Table 10

**Hypothesis 1 Completers and Non-completers Predicted**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Predicted</th>
<th>Percentage Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Completer</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 11

**Beta Values of First Through Third Grade Reading and Math Scores as Predictors of Drop Out**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Reading</td>
<td>-.619</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Math</td>
<td>-.352</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 Reading</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 Math</td>
<td>-.163</td>
<td>.272</td>
<td>.542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Reading</td>
<td>-.153</td>
<td>.311</td>
<td>.577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Math</td>
<td>-.653</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and non-completer accounted for 68.6% of the variability, as shown in Table 12. The research indicated that predicting completers was more accurate than predicting non-completers.

Summary

The purpose of Chapter IV was to determine if the data indicated that dropping out of school was statistically significantly related to reading and math scores in grades 1 through 3 and/or adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3. Using logistic regression, a statistically significant relationship was found between dropping out of school and first grade reading and third grade math scores. Logistic regression also revealed a statistically significant relationship between the adverse environmental condition of poor parental involvement and dropping out of school. No statistically significant relationship was found between reading scores in grades 2 and 3, and math scores in grades 1 and 2 and dropping out of school. While some adverse environmental conditions were statistically interesting in predicting dropout, none were statistically significant other than poor parental involvement.
Table 12

_Hypothesis 2 Completers and Non-completers Predicted_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Predicted</th>
<th>Percentage Correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>Non-Completer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completer</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Completer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between poor academic performance in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout and adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout. The focus of the study was reading and math final yearly scores in grades 1 through 3 and the family background, school background, and personal background of high school completers and non-completers.

Renewed interest in dropout rate arose from concerns associated with the school accountability model initiated by the Mississippi Department of Education and the Mississippi legislature and most recently the Mississippi Department of Education State Dropout Prevention Initiative. In the growing interest in the dropout rate it is becoming evident that dropout extends much further than high school. A review of literature suggests links between dropout and the early education experience and, consequently, the study was begun. The review of literature led to the following assumptions: (a) The instability and unpredictability of family life that today’s economy has been allowed to create is the most destructive force to a child’s development. If children do not have the constant mutual interaction with important adults that is necessary for development, the child will not have the tools to explore other parts of his or her environment. (b) Whether the children’s attachment to school is strong or weak, that attachment develops over time as a result of their cumulative experience. Are they fitting in comfortably and realizing success, or are they struggling and not measuring up academically? and (c) Dropping out
is better conceptualized as an evolving process rather than an event. It is a process that starts prior to the child entering school.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, the researcher selected two variables found in prior research to have the most significant relationship to early elementary education and future dropout for this study. The two variables were reading and math scores in grades 1 through 3 and early elementary environmental conditions. Three categories of environmental conditions—family, school, and personal background—emerged from the literature review. Variables within those three categories suggested by the literature to be most closely associated with the early elementary education experience were selected for this investigation, including family background variables related to family unit information, family unit education, and parental involvement. School background variables were related to retention, behavior, and attendance. Personal background variables were related to social involvement, connectedness, and the attitude in the home toward school.

The ultimate goal of this study was to provide school administrators and teachers with information that would assist them in identifying students in grades 1 through 3 who are potential dropouts so that they may take some courses of action to keep these children in school through graduation.

Summary of Procedures

The study sample for this research was 50 students enrolled in select south Mississippi GED programs and 68 English I students enrolled in a select south Mississippi community college. The ages of the participants were 18 years of age or older. The GED and community college students who participated in this study were a
representative group of the population of dropouts and completers from the three high schools in the study. Two hundred and forty transcripts were collected from three south Mississippi high schools. These three schools were selected to represent students from various backgrounds. They were selected because even though they are similar in size of enrollment they are very different in the areas of mean income and racial make up. This allowed the researcher to gather data from a wide variety of subjects yielding a good cross section of the population.

Prior to the collection of data, a Human Subjects Review Form was submitted to the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee for approval. The request for permission to conduct this study was submitted to the superintendents of schools for the three high schools and to the Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs for the community college. Permission was granted.

The transcripts for each student were located in the vault of permanent records in each respective high school. The counselors from each high school collected the transcripts ensuring that each contained reading and math scores from first through third grades. The counselors also blacked out any identifying information on the transcripts in order to provide anonymity of the participants. A total of 240 transcripts were collected from the high schools. The questionnaires were completed by English I students from a local community college and GED students from local area programs. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the GED students, collecting 50, and a designee of the researcher administered the questionnaire to the English I students, collecting 68. The 240 transcripts and the 118 questionnaires constituted the sample data used for the hypothesis testing. \( t \) tests and logistic regression techniques were utilized for data analysis.
Summary and Discussion of Major Findings

Hypothesis 1 suggested that poor academic performance in reading and mathematics in grades 1 through 3 is significantly related to future dropout. Analysis of the data using logistic regression to test Hypothesis 1 revealed a significant relationship between poor academics in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout. Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 was accepted. Areas that had the most significant relationship were first grade reading and third grade math. As stated in the literature, in first grade, reading instruction focuses on the five critical elements of effective reading instruction including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (Mississippi Department of Education, 2006). First grade is the first year that students are individually exposed and held accountable for an expanding vocabulary, fluency, and, most importantly, comprehension. This is the year when most students learn to read; therefore, it is the time that learning disabilities surface and difficulties with the critical area of comprehension begin to manifest. According to Finn’s (1989) "frustration self-esteem" model, a record of poor performance causes children to question their competence and weakens their attachment to school. Dropping out of school is theorized to be a gradual process of student disengagement and alienation, marked by a chronic cycle of failing classes and other issues. This cycle can begin with a life-long struggle in reading comprehension. Third grade math is also a significantly related area. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (2007b), multiplication and division are formally introduced with their appropriate models in third grade. Students begin to use multiple approaches to find unknown quantities in word problems and equations that may include variables. Perimeter concepts are developed, leading to generalizations about the topic.
(Mississippi Department of Education, 2007b). Math in third grade becomes higher order thinking. Many students have difficulty with multiplication and, consequently, cannot grasp the concept of division. This, again, begins the cycle of chronic failing and struggling to measure up to the expectations. Developmental consequences occur for students who are identified as being less academically successful in school than their peers. Deficits in both self-esteem and skill development often result from the stigma associated with being a member of an underachieving group (Aronson et al., 1995).

Hypothesis 2 suggested that adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 is significantly related to future dropout. Analysis of the data using logistic regression to test Hypothesis 2 revealed a significant relationship between adverse environmental conditions and future dropout. Accordingly, Hypothesis 2 was accepted. The area of most significance in the questionnaire was parental involvement. As stated in the literature, students whose parents use an "authoritative parenting style" and are more involved in their schooling are less likely to drop out of school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Rumberger, 1995). Non-completer participants responded more often than completers that their parents were not involved in their school as PTO members or volunteers, nor did they attend parent/teacher conferences or activities outside of school.

When parental involvement is low in elementary school, many of these students become self-parented as they enter secondary education, meaning that the parents with poor parenting skills cease to act in a responsible parent mode once the children are old enough to take care of their everyday needs such as getting up for school, homework, feeding themselves, etc. Children are then left to make adult decisions for themselves at an age when they are not yet prepared. This leads to adult-like behaviors that they are also
not ready to engage in. Some students begin working to help support the family and assist in caring for younger siblings. Once these behaviors take over, school becomes less important and more of a burden which leads to dropout. As Addison (1992) stated, children looking for the affirmations that should be present in the child/parent or child/other important adult relationship look for attention in inappropriate places. These deficiencies show themselves especially in adolescence as antisocial behavior, lack of self-discipline, and inability to provide self-direction.

Conclusions

This study substantiated the relationships between poor academic performance in grades 1 through 3, adverse environmental conditions in grades 1 through 3 and future dropout. The significance of the dropout problem in Mississippi schools today justifies further study of this problem to provide additional information to educators involved in policy decisions that may impact this critical element related to school accountability.

Limitations

Sample size is always a concern but does not appear to be a significant limitation of this study. In the current study, the sample size was 240 transcripts and 118 questionnaires. The generalized linear regression model used was logistic regression and the dependent variable was dichotomous.

However, geographic location would be a limitation due to the small area in the study. The study was confined to three area high schools and a community college in south Mississippi.
Recommendations for Further Study

This study concentrated on identifying specific academics and environmental conditions. Further examination of classroom behaviors, parental background, and academic tracking is justified. Research might identify different predictors that would help narrow the target to predicting future dropout.

It is a very popular belief in education that reduced classroom size helps increase student achievement and improves the overall school experience. A possible avenue for future study in this area would be to probe the following two questions: (a) Would reduced classroom size have an effect on reducing the dropout rate? and (b) Would reduced classroom size have an effect on the achievement of children who have academic difficulties and/or low parental support?

Ability grouping is a philosophy in education that gets much attention whether it is positive or negative. An area of future study could look at grouping at-risk students. An interesting side note to this would be to determine if this would be inadvertently ability grouping if, in fact, the students are at different levels in academics but have little to no parental support, therefore making them less equipped to handle the challenges of school.

Resilience is a phenomenon that could lend itself to further research. What makes some students who have little to no parental support, who are basically self-parented by middle school, graduate from high school, while other students with the same background, if not the same parents, fall victim to dropout out? Is it attitude or an innate survival skill to make the right choices and become a successful high school graduate?
Finally, if educators become proficient at predicting future dropout, further research needs to investigate effective interventions. According to the current study, these interventions would need to address parental support as well as academic deficiencies.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Theoretical studies and current research have expressed the connection between early elementary education and drop out. This study identified specific areas as indicators of future drop out—first graded reading, third grade math, and parental involvement. The leadership teams in elementary schools and school districts need to use these data to impress upon principals and teachers the impact of these indicators.

Teachers need to differentiate instruction in first grade reading and third grade math to ensure that students are experiencing success. First grade reading includes application and comprehension. It is the first time that students are held accountable for reading. Vertical planning is essential between kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Kindergarten needs to ensure that students obtain an adequate base on which to build reading skills. Second grade should have procedures in place to identify weak readers for remediation to recapture their very important comprehension skills.

Third grade math is the time when students begin to learn multiplication. Multiplication is a skill that is carried from year to year and is the basis for fourth grade division. Without the appropriate multiplication skills, students will struggle in the more complicated area of division. Again, teachers should differentiate instruction and provide the extra help when needed to help students accomplish the difficulty of third grade math.

While school cannot control the home environment, every effort should be made to have the parents involved in the school. Everyone should own this issue.
Superintendents, principals, teachers, PTA, and community need to provide opportunities for parents to get involved with the school and their child. Parent contact is essential; if a principal or teacher can make frequent contact with parents, the parents are more likely to feel that they are welcome in the school and that their opinion is valued. Schools need procedures to help parents take ownership in the schools. When a person has ownership, he or she is more responsible for the outcome.

Policy makers need to be aware of the early indicators in order to create policy and procedure from the state level down. Appropriate intervention can be created to remediate in early reading and math, and outside agencies can be utilized in parent involvement. Schools cannot solve this problem alone; it will have to include the efforts of the community and state.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

I am Vickie J. Tiblier, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Leadership and Research at the University of Southern Mississippi in Gulfport. The purpose of my questionnaire is to gather information about grades one through three.

I am interested in learning academic and social issues that maybe associated with leaving high school. As someone who has attended a Mississippi public school, you have been selected to participate in my study. Your perception of your academic and social encounters are of paramount importance to my study. Therefore, I am asking you to complete the attached questionnaire that I have prepared. The questionnaire is very brief and will take approximately 15 minutes to read and mark the appropriate responses. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may discontinue at any time. The completion and submission of the questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this research project.

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity are of utmost importance and your responses will be kept secure. You should not place any identifying marks on your questionnaire. The information obtained in this study will only be used for research purposes, reported only in aggregate form so no individual responses can be identified. Once the research is complete, all questionnaire instruments will be destroyed. Your time and effort to assist me in completing my research will be greatly appreciated. Please complete the questionnaire, and return it to the facilitator.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

Also, please contact me if you have any questions or would like a copy of the summary results of my study (after January 15, 2008) at (228) 424-2708 or by email at vtiblier@cableone.net. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Vickie J. Tiblier
Purpose of Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information to determine what environmental issues have been experienced in grades one through three.

Information/Directions

1. This questionnaire is completely anonymous. Your responses will be merged with those of others and will never be identified as yours.
2. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
3. You may use pen or pencil to mark responses.
4. Above each set of responses are marking directions in parenthesis.
   Example (Mark one), (Mark one for each question)

Thank you for participating.
1. While you were in grades 1 - 3, were your birth parents married to each other?  
(Mark one)
   a. Yes  
   b. No  

2. In grades 1 - 3, were you an only child?  
(Mark one)
   a. Yes  
   b. No  

3. If there were brothers and sisters living in your home, did they drop out of school?  
(Mark One)
   a. Yes  
   b. No  

4. To the best of your knowledge, when you were in grades 1 - 3 did either of your parents or guardian work consistently?  
(Mark one)
   a. Yes  
   b. No  

5. To the best of your knowledge, when you were in grades 1 - 3 were either of your parents or guardian involved in any of the following?  
(Mark one for each question)
   a. Belong to a parent teacher organization  
   b. Attend parent/teacher organization meetings  
   c. Take part in school activities  
   d. Act as a volunteer at school  

6. When you were in grades 1 - 3, did your parent or guardian attend any of the following?  
(Mark one for each question)
   a. Parent/teacher conferences  
   b. Your activities outside of school  
   c. Your school plays or performances
7. Did you pass each of the following grades? (Mark one for each question)
   a. Kindergarten  
   b. 1st  
   c. 2nd  
   d. 3rd

8. In grades 1 – 3 were you considered to have a behavior problem? (Mark one)
   a. Yes  
   b. No

9. In grades 1 – 3 were you suspended from school? (Mark one)
   a. Yes  
   b. No

10. In grades 1 – 3 were you placed in in-school suspension? (Mark one)
    a. Yes  
    b. No

11. In grades 1 – 3 were you placed in an alternative school? (Mark one)
    a. Yes  
    b. No

12. In grades 1 – 3, did you miss school often? (Mark one)
    a. Yes  
    b. No

13. In grades 1 – 3, were you involved in any of the following? (Mark one for each question)
    a. Scouts or Brownies  
    b. YMCA or Boys and Girls club  
    c. Sports team (outside of school)  
    d. Community or church based group  
    e. Dance  
    f. Theatre
14. Did you have a good relationship with your peers in grades 1-3?
   (Mark one)
   a. Yes
   b. No

15. Did you have a good relationship with your teachers in grades 1-3?
   (Mark one for each question)
   c. 1st
   d. 2nd
   e. 3rd

16. In grades 1-3, when sitting in class which of the following applied to you?
   (Mark one for each)
   a. I felt part of the class
   b. I felt connected with my teacher
   c. I felt smart

17. Was school regarded as very important in your home?
   (Mark one)
   a. Yes
   b. No

18. Circle your gender  Male  Female

19. Circle which applies to you  I have obtained a high school diploma
    I have obtained a GED
    I have not obtained a GED or a high school diploma
APPENDIX B

EXPERT VALIDITY QUESTIONNAIRE

Early Environment (Grades one – three) Questionnaire

Validity Questionnaire

Thank you for volunteering your time to assist me in the development of this questionnaire. Your input is very important with respect to the survey itself and the development of my dissertation overall. Your willingness and consideration to participate in this study is greatly appreciated.

Please rate the included questionnaire based on the following information.

1. Does the questionnaire contain language that can be understood by first year Community College and GED students?

2. Does the questionnaire address specific and appropriate issues in the statements, as it relates to obtaining information regarding the respondents' environmental conditions in grades one through three?

3. Do you find any questions offensive or obtrusive?

4. Are there any questions that you would exclude from the questionnaire?

5. Are there any other statements that you would include that are not a part of the questionnaire?

6. Please make any other comments or suggestions about the questionnaire below:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Human Subjects Protection Review Committee in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.

Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 27092001
PROJECT TITLE: Academics and Environmental Issues: Implications of Early Elementary Education
PROPOSED PROJECT DATES: 01/01/07 to 01/01/08
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation or Thesis
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS: Vickie J. Tiblier
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & Research
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
HSPRC COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 09/20/07 to 09/19/08

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
HSPRC Chair

9-21-07 Date
APPENDIX D
LETTERS OF PERMISSION

Ocean Springs School District
2300 Government St.
Post Office Box 7002
Ocean Springs, MS 39566-7002
Phone (228) 873-7706
Fax (228) 873-1775

February 28, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that Vickie J. Tiblier has my consent to obtain anonymous transcripts of drop outs and completers from Ocean Springs High School. The transcripts will be collected and the names and social security numbers blacked out by the high school counselors or their designee. The data obtained from the transcripts will be used for research for the dissertation Academics and Environmental Issues: Implications of Early Elementary Education.

The transcripts will be anonymous and it is my understanding that after the research is complete the transcripts will be shredded.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Hirsch
Superintendent

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July 12, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that Vickie J. Tiblier has my consent to obtain anonymous transcripts of dropouts and completers from Gautier and Pascagoula High School. The transcripts will be collected and the names and social security numbers blacked out by the high school counselors or their designee. Permission is also given to conduct a survey in the Pascagoula GED classes. The data obtained from the transcripts and survey will be used for research for the dissertation entitled: *Academics and Environmental Issues: Implications of Early Elementary Education.*

The transcripts and survey will be anonymous and it is my understanding that after the research is complete the transcripts and survey will be shredded.

Sincerely,

Wayne V. Rodolfich, Superintendent
July 12, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that Vickie J. Tiblier has consent to conduct a survey for research for the dissertation entitled: *Academics and Environmental Issues: Implications of Early Elementary Education*. The survey will be piloted in a freshman History class and conducted in freshman English classes and GED classes on the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College campus in Jackson County. The survey will be anonymous and it is understood that after the research is complete the surveys will be shredded.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Joseph W. Cliburn, Ph.D.
Vice President, Academic & General Instruction
REFERENCES


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