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WHAT ARE THE MAIN FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING IN MALTA?

I hereby declare that I am the legitimate author of this Long Essay/Dissertation/Thesis and that it is my original work.

No portion of this work has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institution of learning.

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What are the Main Factors That Contribute to Early School Leaving In Malta?

Jessica Spiteri

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Degree of Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) in Economics at the
University of Malta

May 2014



DECLARATION

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Abstract

According to the National Statistics Office (NSO), Early School Leavers are those individuals “between 18 and 24 years of age whose highest level of education or training is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short, and who are not in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey as a percentage of the total population of those aged 18 to 24” (NSO, 2013, pg3). This study aims to examine the causes of this phenomenon.

Using a qualitative research approach, data was obtained through semi-structured surveys and interviews conducted with Head Teachers, Managers, and the Early School Leavers themselves. This contributed in exploring the perceived experiences of Early School Leavers and their disengagement from the Maltese educational system.

Results showed that Early School Leaving is a process. It is the consequence of a lot of factors particularly related to the education system itself, the labour market, characteristics of individual nature, family factors and other aspects related to gender and spatial distribution.

The study also offers a number of recommendations that Maltese policy makers can address so as to try to engage students in education. This is especially important in the light of Malta experiencing a relatively high Early School Leaving rate when compared with other European Union countries.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Objectives and Background

This study examines the issue of Early School Leaving in Malta. The main objective is to identify some of the key factors that lead young Maltese students to leave school early by considering the educational system, the labour market, family related factors, and individual attributes.

As a phenomenon, Early School Leaving depends very much on the socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics of a country. The Maltese economy is highly dependent on the Tourism sector, generating the need for low-skilled or semi-skilled workers.

Additionally, our economy is highly driven by family run Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), leading to inheritance of businesses irrespective of the level of education. Together with various other factors, the rate of Early School Leaving is highly affected. (NCHE, 2012)

1.2 Importance of the Subject

Early School Leaving is one of the measures which some consider to be an indication of whether the educational system is a success or failure. With a rate of 22.6% in 2013,

Malta registered one of the highest Early School Leaving rates in Europe. Being directly related to unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (European Commission, 2014), Early School Leaving is considered to carry a substantial impact on economic growth. The subject of this dissertation is also of utmost importance because human capital is one of the major resources in Malta and so, as a country, it cannot afford to have such a high percentage of low skilled labourers. In 'An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta' (2012), it is clearly stated that the knowledge about these early school leavers is limited and thus this study is important because it should enhance the literature for Malta in this regard. The study also aspires to yield suggestions related to the results of the study.

1.3 The Research Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of this research is to study whether family related factors, the education system, the labour market and various characteristics of individual nature are all contributory factors to Early School Leaving in Malta.

1.4 Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used in order to test the hypothesis portrayed above. Data was gathered from various sources including managers, educators and most importantly from the Early School Leavers themselves.

Two semi-structured questionnaires and an interview were prepared so that data could be collected. Secondary data that provided valuable findings was also used in the study. Data was analyzed and represented in the form of graphs and charts to give a clear picture of the findings.

1.5 Layout of Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five main chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two provides an overview of the Maltese Educational System and its relationship with the international perspective.

Chapter Three represents a review of the literature on Early School Leaving covering various areas including the definition and the factors leading to Early School Leaving. Findings related to Malta in relation to this phenomenon are also presented.

Chapter Four explains the methodology adopted for the study. It describes the research approach undertaken, the approach used for data collection and an overview of the method of analysis.

The empirical results of the research study are presented in Chapter Five. The findings are presented and analyzed with reference to ideas and theories outlined in the literature review, while Chapter Six, as a concluding chapter, offers a discussion of these findings.

Policy implications and a number of recommendations based on the findings described in the previous chapter are derived, and the main effects of Early School Leaving are also highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 2: The Maltese Educational System

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overall description of the Maltese educational system and how this correlates with the international perspective.

2.2 Main Laws Regulating National Education

Education in Malta is regulated by Act XXIV of 1988. This act “is built on a set of principles primarily that the students’ holistic well being should be at the centre of each education activity” (Bezzina and Cutajar, 2012, pg 20). As an act it defines the rights and the duties of the state, NGO’s, parents and students. It gives the right to every Maltese citizen to receive education, regardless the belief, sex, age and economic means that the person upholds. As a statute, it explains that Maltese children may receive their education from state or non-state Schools, all of which must follow the national minimum curriculum. This act has been amended various times over the years and major changes in the Maltese educational system include the installation of computers, the implementation of the new curriculum in 2000/2001 and the agreement between teachers’ union and the government for reforming educational law which was signed in 2007 (Vellajo and Dooly, 2008).

In 2006 amendment of the Education Act took place. This time, the major reform included a change in the educational division role, where now the education authority could act as a regulator rather than a provider. To achieve this role, two new directorates were established: the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education which is responsible for the setting and monitoring of standards while ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in both state and non-state schools (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2012), and the Directorate for Educational Services through which a decentralization process was initiated. This Directorate provides and allocates the resources required in the State Colleges and educational institutions while it encourages and facilitates their networking and cooperation.

In this concern, the act established the college networks system where schools were grouped into colleges (ibid, pg 9). Maltese state schools have been gathered into ten colleges, brought together according to regional basis. Each college is however controlled in an autonomous way, giving it its own identity (Education in Malta – The New College System, 2008). All Colleges offer compulsory education. Current secondary school students, though with different abilities, attend the same school. However each student may follow different programmes according to his or her competences. This is because, as clearly stated by the mission statement, colleges form part of a directorate where the primary objective is to make sure that a holistic quality education is provided to all students during their compulsory schooling while aiming to develop ethical, social, emotional and intellectual values. The Maltese educational system helps to provide an efficient and

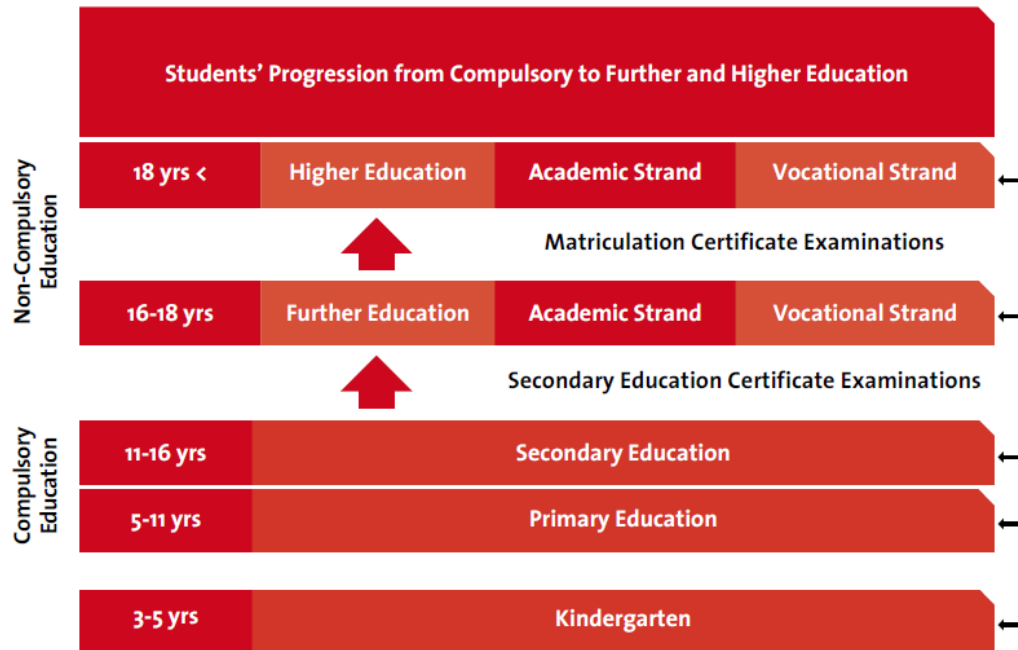
effective system relevant to the Maltese society while it helps to “secure the right of the individual to develop all cognitive potential” (Leadership in Education, 2013).

The Education Act also provided for the re-establishment of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) to provide studies and training in vocational education as well as the creation of the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) which is responsible for the quality assurance of Further and Higher Education (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2012).

2.3 The Maltese Educational Structure

The educational system in Malta is based on the British model. It is compulsory for everyone between the ages of 5 and 16 years and it is divided into distinct categories. Pre-Primary Education (kindergarten) which is voluntary, is provided for children of ages 3 to 5 years, Primary Education for ages 5 to 11 years, Secondary Education which stretches from age 11 to 16, Further Education from ages 16 to 18 years and Higher Education for students aged 18 years and over (NCHE Malta, 2009).

Figure 2.1: Students' Progression from Compulsory to Further and Higher Education



Source: NCHE Malta, 2009

In Malta, students are provided with two streams of education; the public state-run system and the private and Church-administered system (Dooly and Vallejo, 2008; Legal-Malta n/d). State primary schools are found in every Maltese town and village while secondary schools are more concentrated. Around thirty percent of Maltese students attend a non-state sector school with most of these schools belonging to the Catholic Church. Education in Malta is provided for free in all State schools. Church schools are funded by government and these also provide free education to pupils. However, parents may be requested to provide a donation so as to help in the extra funding required. The government also offers

tax incentives to parents of children attending private schools (Dooly and Vallejo 2008; European Commission 2013). Further and Higher Education is subsidized by the government through the provision of the Students Maintenance Grant (SGM) (NCHE Malta, 2009).

At the end of secondary education, students may sit for the Secondary Education Certificate Examination (SEC). After this, it is the students' choice whether to continue with their studies by undertaking Further Education or to enter the labour market.

As explained by Chapter 327 of the Education Act, Further Education refers to education which occurs after compulsory post-16 secondary education, leading to examinations of Intermediate and Advanced Levels or the Matriculation Certificate.

However, on opting to continue Further Education, students can either follow a vocational path or else a general education academic path. Vocational education in Malta is offered by the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) and the Malta Centre for Restoration. MCAST offers different type of courses leading to post-secondary qualifications such as certificates, diplomas and vocational degrees while the Institute of Tourism Studies trains students for a career in hospitality (NCHE Malta, 2009).

If students opt to follow an academic route, students can attend a two year course at one of the Sixth forms provided by the state, by a private institution or by the Church leading to the MATSEC certificate. The latter grants students' access to higher education (NCHE Malta, 2009).

The highest level of education is mainly provided by the University of Malta. This institution is made up of various faculties which concentrate on particular fields of study (Malta Qualifications Council, 2012, 3rd Updated edition).

2.4 Classification of Qualifications in Malta

Since the structure and curricular content of education varies around the world, it is difficult to compare educational systems between countries.

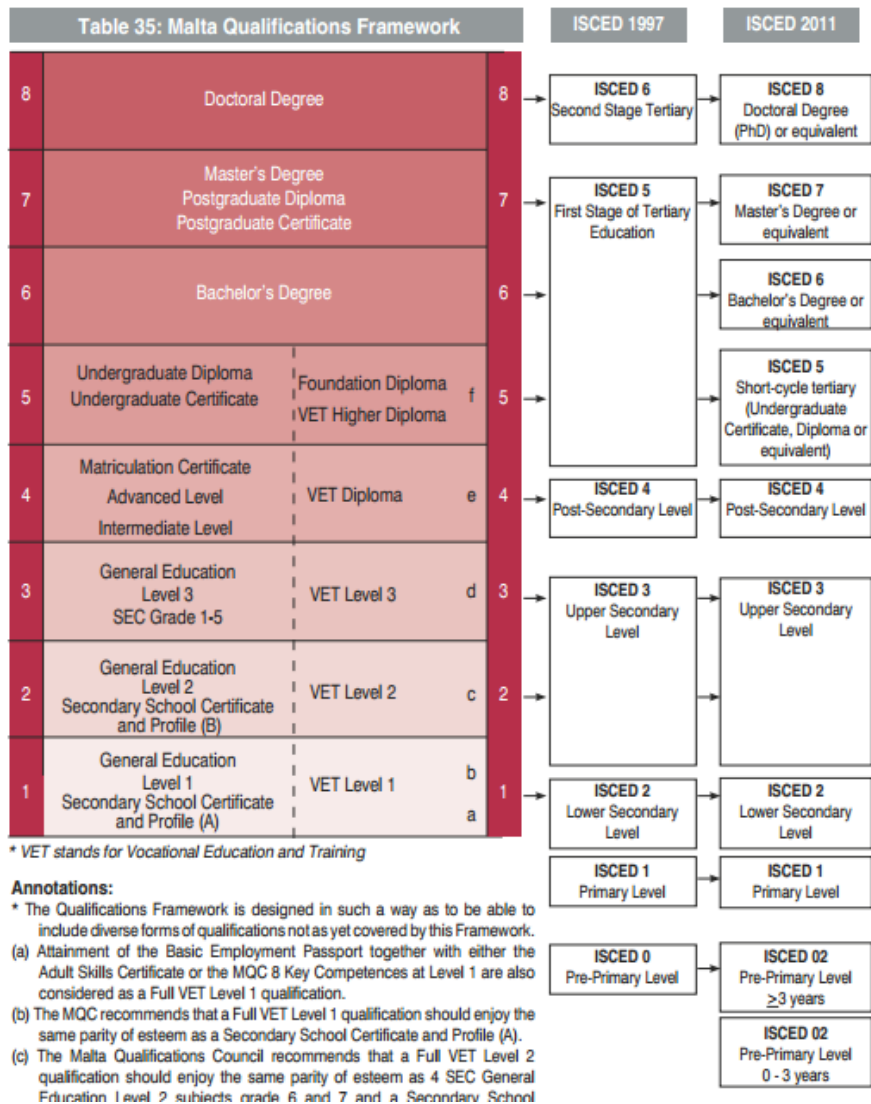
2.4.1 International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF)

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was created by the UNESCO in the 1970's. It developed so that educational statistics across countries could be compared (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2006). This framework was introduced in Malta in late 1990's (NSO, 2013).

At that time, the NSO together with the Department of Education was responsible for the mapping of the national qualifications and courses to ISCED. The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) was then established in 2005 with the aim of taking over the responsibility of classifying the training and the certification to a qualification within a recognized framework (Malta Qualifications Council, 2012, 3rd Updated edition, pg 67). The Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) maps all different qualifications against eight different levels where the descriptions of the levels reflect the different stages of the educational process from compulsory to lifelong learning in which University degrees are generally classified from levels 6 to 8 (Malta Qualifications Council, 2010). As a framework, it is modelled on the European Qualifications Framework whose role is to act as a reference for the varied European qualification system.

Prior to the setting up of the Malta Qualifications Council, the National Statistics Office mapped the national qualifications and courses to ISCED 1997 (NSO, 2013, pg. 2). In 2011 the UNESCO general conference adopted ISCED 2011 (revised ISCED) and so in this regard, the NSO together with the Malta Qualifications Council, initiated discussions regard the mapping of nationally available qualifications to the ISCED 2011 classifications. In 2013, NSO documented that data collection based on this new classification will begin in the following year. Figure 2.2 below shows the mapping between MQF, ISCED 1997 and ISCED 2011. It explains how each ISCED level has a number of qualifications associated to it.

Figure 2.2 Referencing of the Maltese Qualifications Framework to ISCED 1997 and ISCED 2011



Source: Malta Qualifications Council, 3rd revised edition, 2012; National Commission for Further and Higher Education, (NCFHE) 2013)

According to the Malta Qualifications Council document, 3rd revised edition (2012), ISCED level 0 covers the initial stages of organized instruction for children in order to serve as a link between home and school. The next level, ISCED 1, incorporates programmes which cover the beginning of systematic studies offered in primary education. Entry into ISCED level 2 is attained after about six years of Primary Schooling. At this stage, the student is supposed to get the basis for lifelong learning. ISCED 2 also refers to the Lower Secondary Level of education and it usually takes a further three years of full-time education. MQF levels 2 and 3 are both mapped to ISCED level 3. MQF level 2 suggests that one should obtain up to four ordinary level qualifications or some other MQF level 2 credentials, together with a Secondary School Certificate and Profile (B). After this, one is enrolled into Upper Secondary Education. To have parity with completion of ISCED 3, MQC level 3 entails six level 3 qualifications or SEC passes with grades from 1 to 5. In general, the completion of this level gives the required qualifications for entry into post-secondary education. The next ISCED levels classify the sectors of educational credentials obtained at post-secondary level and tertiary level, that is, the qualifications acquired after eleven years of schooling. Thus, ISCED levels 4 or higher go beyond compulsory education in Malta (Malta Qualifications Council, 3rd revised edition, 2012).

2.5 Conclusion

The explanation given above provides a background of the Maltese educational system, which is essential as a good introduction for the following chapters. It is important to note

that the Maltese educational system went through changes over the years with the main aim of meeting the demands of a modern globalised economy.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the literature related to Early School Leaving including different definitions and the factors leading to such phenomenon. Literature related to our country is also dealt with.

3.2 Definition of Early School Leavers

In 2005, GHK¹ reported that since education and training pathways differ across countries, therefore so does the Early School Leaving definition. In a report presented by the European Commission by NESSE (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training), it was stated that “the USA, Canada and The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) define Early School Leaving in similar ways, all different from the EU definition” (GHK, 2005, pg 13).

¹ ICF (Inner City Fund) GHK is the brand name of GHK Consulting Ltd and the other subsidiaries of GHK Holdings Ltd. GHK Holdings and its subsidiaries were acquired by ICF International in 2012. GHK is an incorporative consultancy serving government and commercial clients on employment, health, environment, education and training, social policy, transportation, business and economic development, and international development issues. (Reuters, 2012)

In the USA the concept of Early School Leaving is known as 'dropouts'. These dropouts are said to be those students who have not graduated from high school and so they do not have the qualifications needed to access supplementary education, training or enter the labour workforce. Canada focuses on the completion of Upper Secondary Education while OECD considers Early School Leavers to be those individuals of 20-24 years of age with below upper secondary education (NESSE, 2010).

Focusing on the European Union, one can say that on a national level, each member state has its own definition of what Early School Leaving is. Spain is the only member state that has a legal definition. It considers those "young people who have not achieved the objectives of compulsory secondary education" and so "failed to obtain a qualification providing them with access to a job or a chance to continue their studies in one of the various educational options" (GHK, 2005, pg 136).

According to GHK (2005), The Netherlands, France and Finland also have their official definitions, all differing from one another. In The Netherlands an Early School Leaver is considered to be someone between 12 to 23 years "who has left education without a basic qualification and has not re-enrolled in education within a month of leaving school" (ibid, pg 136).

The definition of Early School Leaving in the rest of the member state countries is "implicit and more reflective of the perceptions of citizens, decision makers and employers" (GHK,

2005, pg 136). The various definitions of Early School Leaving represent the differences in those aspects that each country considers necessary for its educational system, such as the labour market conditions and concepts of the social integration. Additionally it also depends on the qualification threshold of the country. In Italy and Austria an individual is required to achieve compulsory education, while additional conditions like completing compulsory education with a certificate is required in Denmark, Spain and Norway. Countries like Germany do not consider the certificate of Upper Secondary Education as adequate and thus it is compulsory for students to complete Higher or Vocational Education. So,

- Unsuccessful in completing compulsory education
- Failure to achieve qualifications or school leaving certificates
- Failure to complete Upper Secondary Education and thus unable to take Further and Higher Education and other qualifications required to gain various market opportunities and
- Failure to get equivalent qualifications of an upper secondary level when following a pre-vocational or vocational course,

are all criteria relating to the definition of Early School Leaving (GHK, 2005; Communication department of the European Commission, 2011; Commission staff working paper, 2010, pg 5).

In order to balance different national discrepancies, the European Union focuses on completion of Lower Secondary Education. The European Union defines Early School

Leaving rate as “the proportion of the population aged 18-24 with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training”. Therefore it refers to those pupils who only managed to get through “Pre-Primary, Primary, Lower Secondary or a Short Upper Secondary Education of less than 2 years (ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short)”. This definition includes those who have only a Pre-Vocational or Vocational Education which did not lead to an upper secondary certification while it excludes people that are in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey as well as those who, originally left school and returned to finish Upper Secondary Education before 25 years of age (Communication Department of the European Commission, 2011; Commission staff working paper, 2010).

3.3 Early School Leavers: The Case of Malta

In a report released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2013, it was stated that, until then, the “persons between the ages of 18 and 24 who are no longer in education or training, but who had completed Secondary Education, were being classified as Early School Leavers irrespective of the qualifications they had attained” (NSO, pg 2) . Here NSO remarks that Malta was not using qualifications at upper secondary level to measure the highest education level of respondents whereas countries with a similar educational systems did considered this factor for such measurement (ibid, pg 2).

NSO was aware that in other countries such as the United Kingdom, those students in possession of five ordinary level qualifications were classified into ISCED 3. On the other hand, the Maltese students in possession of the same amount of qualifications were categorised in ISCED 2 and therefore regarded as Early School Leavers. Thus, for Malta to be on the same levels, a person that has obtained at least five ordinary level qualifications has to be classified as ISCED 3. In reaction to this, for Malta to come in line with other EU Member States, NSO started discussions on classification issues, which resulted into a revised mapping of the MQF and ISCED. A more detailed explanation of this mapping was discussed at the end of the previous chapter. Based on this mapping, the following definition of Early School Leavers was stated:

“Persons between 18 and 24 years of age whose highest level of education or training is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c² short, and who are not in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey as a percentage of the total population of those ages 18 to 24”

(NSO 2013; pg. 3).

Following the revised classification and the amended definition of Early School Leavers, NSO produced revised estimates of the Early School Leaving rate. The figure below shows the outcome of this exercise and how the percentage of Early School Leavers was affected.

² Since ISCED level 3c short consists of courses that are MQF level 2 or less, nowadays 3c short is amalgamated with ISCED 2. (As discussed in a personal meeting with a member of NSO in March 2014.)

Figure 3.1: Early School Leaving Rate Before and After the Re-Mapping

Period	ESL before re-mapping (%)	ESL after re-mapping (%)
January-March: 2010	36.2	24.3
April-June: 2010	38.3	25.5
July-September: 2010	37.4	24.6
October-December: 2010	35.7	25.1
January-December: 2010	36.9	24.8
January-March: 2011	34.5	23.8
April-June: 2011	32.7	22.3
July-September: 2011	34.3	24.4
October-December: 2011	32.3	23.9
January-December: 2011	33.4	23.6

Source: NSO, 2013, pg. 4

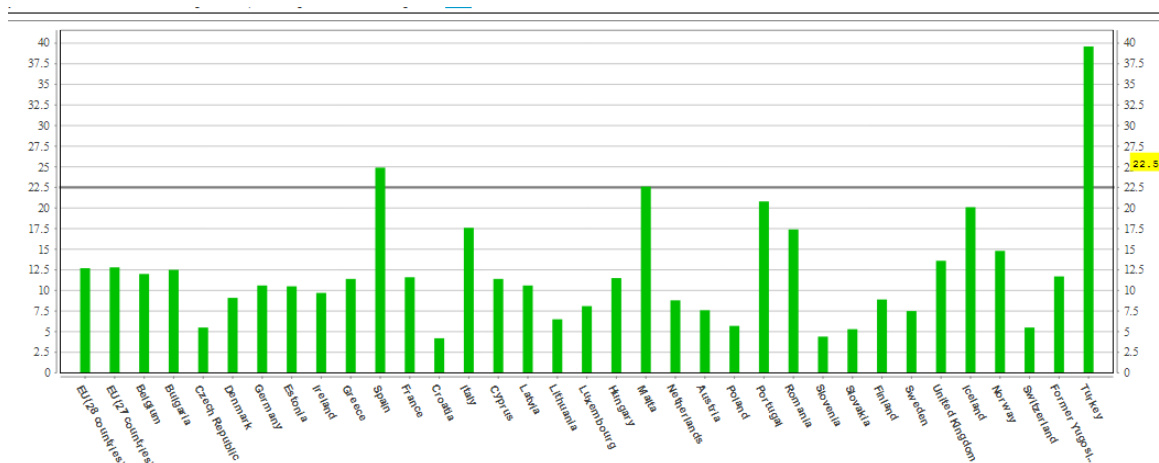
3.4 Comparing the Case of Malta with the European Union

The European Council decided that Member State countries should achieve an Early School Leaving rate of no more than 10% by 2010. Insufficient progress has been made and thus, the council set this target to be reached by 2020 instead of by 2010. Although in 2009, some countries in Central and Eastern Europe like Finland, Austria, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic achieved this target, Malta together with Spain and Portugal, being coastal peripheral countries, experienced the highest rate of Early School Leavers (A European Commission Staff Working Paper, 2010).

Countries like Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and Poland had achieved on further lowering their Early School Leaving rate even though their rate was already low. Significant reductions were also achieved by Romania, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal and Malta. According to the Eurostat, Malta recorded the largest decrease in its rate of Early School Leavers between the year 2000 and 2010. From 54.2% in 2000 to 36.9% (25.9% revised) in 2010 and reducing it to 20.9% in 2013. In this way, Malta managed to achieve the 29% target that it had to reach under the 2020 strategy (Eurostat Data, A European Commission Staff Working Paper, 2010).

In 2012, Malta still placed the third from bottom when it comes to Early School Leaving rate among member state countries.

Figure 3.2: Comparison of the Early School Leaving rate among member state countries in 2012



Source: Eurostat

3.5 Factors Leading to Early School Leavers

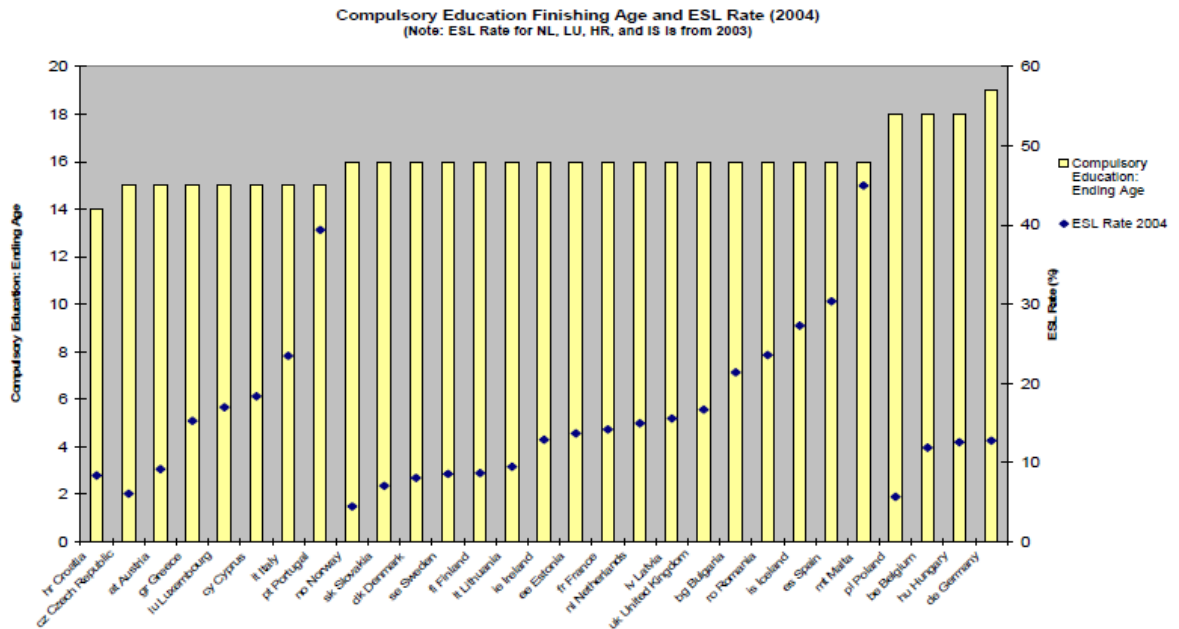
“Literature suggests that Early School Leaving is a long term multidimensional process that is influenced by a wide variety of school and out-of-school experiences with broad social and cultural implications” (Foster et al., 1993 as cited by Community Health Systems Resources Group, 2005). It is “the result of a mix of **individual, educational and socio-economic factors**” which differs from one country to another (Europa, 2011) and so, it is not possible to authorize a single ‘profile’ of Early School Leavers (Commission Staff Working paper, 2010). Since education is a “powerful predictor of adult life chances.” (Barnarbos, 2009, pg 1) policy instruments and research have been undertaken to find out the main factors that cause such a problem. An “All Factors Framework” was also generated to locate the range of factors which increases the possibility of Early School Leaving. This framework attempts to locate the factors within five levels, these being: family and community, schooling, pupils and peers, the education system and employment and training (NESSE, 2010). For the purpose of this literature, I am going to group these factors under three main categories as listed by the ‘An Early School Leaving strategy for Malta’ report (2012), being;

1. The education system and the labour market
2. Individual characteristics and
3. Family related issues.

3.5.1 The Education System and the Labour Market

This category includes various education policy aspects which influence Early School Leaving. One of the main factors is the **compulsory age of education**. Angrist and Krueger (1991) established the fact that in the USA, compulsory schooling law itself constrains students that are born earlier during the year to stay in school for longer. This is because individuals born at the beginning of the year, start school at an older age than those born later on during the year, and can therefore drop out after completing less schooling. Through the study it was also clear that a greater decline in the enrolment rate was present amongst sixteen year old students in those states that allowed sixteen year olds to leave schools rather than in those states that obliged sixteen year olds to go to school. Equivalently, in another research study by GHK (2005), it was also evident that only countries that had a higher compulsory age of education (18-19 years old) like Germany, Belgium, Hungary and Poland, showed a low Early School Leaving Rate. This study is presented in Figure 3.3 below, representing the rate of Early School Leaving and the compulsory education finish age by using the EUROSTAT indicator for the year 2004.

Figure 3.3: Early School Leaving and the Compulsory Education Finish Age



Source: GHK, 2005

It was found out that in general the “higher the compulsory age the lower the rate of ESL” (GHK 2005, pg 39) but since the correlation was weak it was finally concluded that it is a **variety of aspects together with compulsory education** that contribute to Early School Leaving (ibid, pg 39).

“Each young person’s educational career is framed by schooling opportunities and choices that differ cross-nationally as the result of educational policy decisions made at the national level” (NESSE, 2010, pg 25). Lack of **school resources** may also cause Early School Leaving. In fact, literature states that schools that have restricted opportunities for

academic success tend to have higher dropout rates. Among the resources offered by schools, one can consider the **student-teacher ratio** which is an evaluation method of the quality of learning environment and **class sizes**. According to Rumberger and Thomas (2000) as cited by the education encyclopedia, the higher the student-teacher ratio, the higher the dropout rate. A US report also emphasize the significance of small class sizes for those students that are poor achievers and in her Tennessee study project STAR, Jayne Boyd Zaharias (1999) found out that students in small class sizes, were less likely to drop out of high school. However, Mischel and Rothstein (2002) concluded that disadvantaged students benefit most from reduced class sizes. Even though literature suggests that pupil-teacher ratio and class size might impact Early School Leaving, conversely, the GHK (2002) report cites that there was no statistical significance between these variables. In the Class Size Debate report, as a contributor, Anushek (2002) stated that he had never been able to draw a consistent relationship regarding this aspect either. In considering schooling aspects, **teacher support and guidance** is another important factor to take into consideration as literature cites that those students who are guided well throughout their studies, are less likely to drop out of school, especially when it comes to students who enter high school with low education qualifications (Croniger & Lee, 2001 as cited in Sanna Järvelä, n.d.).

The **lack in the number of spaces** available in some courses and the approach towards some courses might also cause students to lack in the motivation to further continue their studies. Research showed that **repeating class** is another factor that does not motivate

students to continue schooling as this might also effect children's self-esteem. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2003), results suggested that "countries with high proportions of students who have repeated a grade at the upper secondary level at least once tend to perform less" (GHK, 2005, pg 56). Furthermore, GHK (2005) also reported that students find it difficult when placed with students younger than them when repeating a year and so such students are more likely to become Early School Leavers. Apart from this, the **supply of low skilled** labour that requires no qualifications for work, the good quality of training and the amount of labour market opportunities available, are all disincentives for students to continue with their education (NESSE, 2010).

3.5.2 Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics include various micro variables. One can start by dealing with **demography**. Young people coming from a travelling community, a migrant background or are of an ethnic minority are also at a greater risk of leaving school early (Barnardos, 2006). The European Commission (2009) stated that in the EU non-national Early School Leavers added up to 30.1% while the rate of the nationals was 13%. Migrants have to adapt to a different school system and to a different language when moving to another country and this may increase the risk of Early School Leaving among these people. Research on ethnic minority groups also proposed that cultural factors like arranged marriages and the tolerance of not attending school might also pull young persons out of

school (Britton et al., 2002). **Discrimination, racism attitudes and bullying** towards these people does not help either (Nesse, 2010; Community Health Systems Resource Group, 2005).

Intellectual abilities are another important factor contributing to Early School Leaving. Achievement in knowledge and numeracy has the strongest influence on school non-completion (Marks and McMillan, 2001). A greater percentage of those students that had poor literacy performance left school earlier than those whose performance was very high. This strong link between these two factors was also cited in other literatures by Beekhoven and Dekkers (2005), Marks (2007) (as cited in McGarr, 2010) and Byrne and Smyth (2010). Also, students having low maths scores and poor reading abilities when entering secondary school are more likely to drop out. Again the achievement of poor academic results affects the self-esteem of the person and at the end of the day this will lead students to lose interest in learning (Byrne and Smyth, 2010, pg 49). However, even high achievers could drop out of school early. The latter are known as positive leavers and they may choose to take up alternative career paths or seek employment (GHK, 2005).

People coming from **vulnerable groups** like students with mental and physical health problems, those with special education needs (SEN), the disabled and the “looked after” are more likely be Early School Leavers or be withdrawn from school by parents. Certain people are considered vulnerable due to a mixture of mental health issues like anxiety, isolation, depression, harassment and family problems. Students having parents suffering

from mental illness are also at higher risk of being withdrawn from school because when parents don't support children in attending school, it can cause **poor attendance** which may eventually lead them to drop out (Community Health Systems Resource Group, 2005). **Substance abuse and alcoholism** may also emerge into risk factor problems and early pregnancy is also considered to be another variable according to literature. Young mothers might find it difficult to keep up with the demands for their children and school and so these are at higher risk of being disengaged from school (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012).

3.5.3 Family Related Factors

Families also play a very important role in the development and the long-term outcomes of children. There are various factors in a family context that lead young people to exit the education system at an early age (Meredith and Robinson, 2013). Researchers James Heckman and Stephen Cameron stated that parental background and family environment matter the most when it comes to schooling achievement.

- Socio-economic status of the family like parental income
- Parental separation and divorce
- Parental education
- Parental practices / occupation and
- Family structure

all effect the decision of whether to leave school early or not (Meredith and Robinson, 2013).

Children of non-employed parents lack financial resources and therefore have a higher tendency to become Early School Leavers (Lamb, 1994 as cited in Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, pg 5). The poor households (**low income families**) that encounter financial pressures may demand their children to leave education at an early stage so that they can join the labour market to offer financial help to the family (Gyonos, 2011). Financial pressures in the family might also occur due to the fact of having a **big family**. In such families, children would be expected to help in housework and this leads students to leave education prematurely (Gyonos, 2011). This is also true for children that come from **single parent families** since they have less social relationships and so they might find it difficult to interact in class. According to Dale (2010), Curtis & McMillan (2008) and Ferguson et al. (2005) (as cited in the Australian institute of Family studies 2013), the dimensions of family structures are most of the time used to see the effect of educational outcomes of young people, and those not coming from a non-nuclear family were reported to be in higher risk of Early School Leaving. McMillan and Curtis (2008) reported that “22% of young people from single parent and other non-intact family backgrounds do not complete year 12, compared to 13% of young people from intact families” (Meredith and Robinson, 2013, pg 4).

Although there are exceptions, “more often than not children who drop out of school before completing their studies come from families where parents do not have more than eight years of study completed” (Gyonos, 2011, pg 48) . **The education model within** the family has a great impact on children. Literature indicates that if the parents are graduated, it is more likely that children continue their studies. It was also established that if an elder sibling dropped out of school, the chances would be that the younger siblings do the same (ibid, pg 48). Also educated parents are better in helping their children with their homework since they have a greater knowledge of the school system. Apart from this, educated parents also understand that higher education is the best choice for their children’s future and so they will encourage their children to continue with their studies (Traag and Van der Velden, 2008). This strong interaction between school completion and parental education is also indicated by Beekhoven and Dekkers (2005) and Hango (2007) in McGarr’s paper where they state that parents of high economic status are more likely to have good levels of education and so are more likely to be involved in their children’s education. GHK (2005) reports that the mother’s level of education affected mostly girls rather than boys.

A wide range of research also suggested that the positive relationship **between children and parents** themselves, enhance the development of children (Moore et al., 2004). In his studies, Dale (2010), constantly found that those young people that decide to leave school lack supervision and are often left on their own when doing their homework or in taking any decisions (Hango 2007, Hanafin and Lynch 2002, as cited in McGarr, 2010). Less

interest in school and negative reactions from parents when getting low grades unmotivated students to continue their studies as well.

Literature also considers the **socioeconomic background** as another important factor in determining school leaving. Students coming from a low socioeconomic background tend to drop out of school early although nowadays this factor is leaving less impact on school non-completion (Marks and McMillan, 2001). Those young people growing up in an environment of family conflict, separation, domestic violence and **weak family ties** are at increased risk of leaving school early (GHK, 2005; NESSE, 2010). It was also evidenced that the possibility of young persons leaving school increased when parents divorced or separated. All these situations may lead to other problems in the family such as depression and more, which, as already suggested before, does not help students to concentrate on their schooling. Tied to this, one can also consider the fact of residential mobility. Literature indicates that this factor could possibly have an important effect when coming to consider educational outcomes especially when considering moving residence after separation or divorce. However the outcomes of such mobility will differ according to the circumstances as in some cases this factor may also have a positive effect (GHK, 2005).

Finally it can be concluded that, “the clustering together of young people from poor families, in communities with particular patterns of occupation, employment and unemployment, of migrant and minority populations, with low community levels of

educational achievement, produces a form of class and ethnic "ghettoisation" with increased risks of and consequences for Early School Leaving (EGREES, 2005)" (NESSE, 2010, pg 15).

3.5.4 Other Factors

Peers also play a significant part in this issue. In a paper by Tanja Traag et al. (2012), results show that being friends with early school leavers increases the risk of students to be early school leavers themselves (Lubbers, Traag and Van Der Velden, 2012). The feeling of being an outsider and being bullied by own friends also motivates pupils to disengage early from school (NESSE, 2010, pg 26).

Early school leaving also has a **gender aspect**. As evidenced by the European Commission 2013, boys are more likely to leave school earlier than girls. The rate of early school leaver for boys is 24% higher than that for girls. The gap is particularly greater in countries like Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg and Poland where the school drop-out rate for boys is more than double that of girls. Women are also more likely to complete higher education. This is because boys tend to struggle in familiarizing themselves with the school environment and will generally achieve poorer grades (A European Commission Staff Working Paper, 2010).

3.5.5 Findings in Malta

A report by Jacqueline Gatt (2012) features important aspects surrounding this issue in Malta. A strong relationship between districts with high socio-economic inequalities and Early School Leavers was identified in this study. It was found out that the highest rates of Early School Leavers in Malta were being produced by localities like Valletta, Marsa, Bormla and Isla (Southern Harbour district) while the lowest rates of early school leavers were found to be in localities like Attard, Balzan, Swieqi and Iklin.

Results also show that lower rates of Early School Leavers are present in districts that have higher rates of professionals and educated persons. Since Malta reports a high percentage of employed Early School Leavers, one can say that labour opportunities in our country can also be an incentive for such a high rate.

Being a coastal peripheral country, Malta depends highly on the tourism sector causing the need for low or semi-skilled workers. Apart from this, as a country, Malta is driven by family-run businesses which in turn lead to direct inheritance of the business regardless of the level of education (Malta Qualifications Council, 3rd revised edition, 2012).

In a report written by Dooly and Vallejo (2008), Gatt (2004) evidenced, that Maltese students attending Church Schools, Independent Schools and Junior Lyceums are in less risk of dropping out of school. It was also identified that students with a high level of

absenteeism are more likely to become Early School Leavers (Clark et al., 2005). To improve this situation, it was suggested that a percentage target of attendance by schools should be obtained. In fact Education statistics 2006-2008 showed that absenteeism did fall within schools.

As discussed earlier, even social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have impact on a person's attitude towards schooling. In two studies carried out in Malta by Massa.S. (2002), and Bartolo,P. and Tabone,J. (2002), (as cited in An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta (2012)) students facing these difficulties identified reasons like negative attitudes by teachers, such as unfairness and unresponsive teachers, peers and failure in addressing students' needs, as the main factors which result in their poor behaviour at school.

3.6 Conclusion

The above illustrated what Early School Leaving is. An insight of the factors contributing to this concept was reviewed in which educational factors, labour market factors, socio-economic conditions and individual circumstances were all identified as important in contributing to such issue. Finally, an insight of the findings in Malta was also considered, showing that different countries are exposed to different factors.

Chapter 4 : Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology used to explore the factors that might lead to Early School Leaving in Malta. It provides details on the methods of data collection, details regarding the participants of the study, the sample size and a discussion of the method used for the analysis.

4.2 A Qualitative Research Approach as a Method of Data Collection

The research question considered for the purpose of this study is finding out which are the main factors which contribute to Early School Leaving in Malta. In order to get an insight of what these factors might be, a qualitative approach was chosen since qualitative research is “designed to reveal a target audience’s range of behaviour and the perceptions that drive it with reference to specific topics or issues (Qualitative Research Consultants Association, n.d). Adopting such a qualitative approach would perceive the personal experiences of the participants in such detail and so, one can identify the reasons why students might have been ‘pulled’ out of the education system.

In An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta, Dr. James Calleja (2012) stated that the high rate of Early School Leavers carries a significant impact on the country’s economic

growth. Even though “real work on decreasing Early School Leavers has just started” (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p.vi), studies of the experience of Early School Leaving in Malta is quite limited. In fact one of the limitations in the strategy itself is that the research was carried out in absence of detailed information on the background of Early School Leaving and as Andersen and Fagerhaug (2006) clearly stated, beneath every problem lies a cause which is important to be identified so to eliminate the problem from reoccurring. Even though qualitative research may be time consuming and demanding when it comes to collection of data and interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009 as in Mifsud Giulia; Opening the doors: Early School Leavers and their perceived lived experiences in the Maltese educational system), it is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Dezin & Lincoln 2005 as in Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation by Sharon B. Merriam pg 13).

In order to establish the main factors that lead to Early School Leaving in Malta, I was determined to undertake this qualitative approach to interpret the reasons that lead to such an economic problem. In fact this subject is attracting more research and policy attention in our islands with the aim to reduce the rate.

4.3 Review of Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, different methods were used. Both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data is information that has already been collected by an

institution or someone else, but since this available information was limited with regards to my research question, I had to collect primary data: data collected specifically to address the problem in question (Kynda R.Curtis, 2008).

I made use of secondary data available by the National Statistics Office. This gave a general idea of the rates of Early School Leavers according to gender and spatial distribution. The dissertation question was further analysed by collecting primary data through three different surveys or interviews aimed at different groups.

A semi-structured survey was prepared for the Head Teachers (Appendix 1) of Secondary schools with the purpose to try to capture valuable findings of the characteristics of Early School Leaving from the perspective of Head Teachers. The questions prepared were based on the findings of the literature review and applied to the Maltese context. These questions were related to home and family background, individual characteristics, the education system and the labour market. The survey included a mixture of closed ended questions in which the participant was required to choose from a list of possible answers (Anon., n.d.) together with some open ended questions. The latter give the respondent the freedom to write thoughts and opinions about the subject and thus, additional comments related to research questions can be obtained (Badger & Thomas 1992).

Another semi-structured survey was constructed in which the target audience were the Early School Leavers themselves (Appendix.1). This survey consisted of close ended

questions related to home and family background, individual characteristics, the education system, the labour market and other questions related to what might have led them to leave and what might have encouraged them to continue to further their education. This survey was again designed in a way to include the main issues that were brought into light from the literature review and it contributed to a better understanding of the life experience of the Early School Leavers themselves.

Apart from all this, another short interview was also aimed out to the managers of Early School Leavers. This survey consisted of open ended questions, covering aspects related to Early School Leaving in general, the attitude of these people towards work and what their companies were doing in order to engage these people back into education. Discussion with managers lasted approximately 20 minutes each. All interviews and surveys were prepared in Maltese and English so that the participants could answer in whichever language they were comfortable with.

4.4 Sample Selection and the Administering of Questionnaires

4.4.1 Head Teachers Sampling and the Administration of Questionnaires

In Malta there are 10 colleges in all. Each college consists of a number of Primary and Secondary schools. One Secondary school from each college was selected.

The selection of schools was planned in such a way to have five girls' Secondary schools and another five boys' Secondary schools from different districts of Malta (even though the colleges do not seem to be made of schools from same districts) so as to try to capture as much aspects as possible. Some selected schools could not participate due to different reasons and the list of schools had to be altered. Each selected school was contacted beforehand and an explanation of the research study was provided to the person in charge of the research in each school. Only eight schools participated in the study.

Table 4.1: List of Secondary Schools that Participated in the Study

	Boys' Secondary Schools	Girls' Secondary Schools
Southern Harbour		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Thomas Moore: St. Lucija • St Benedict College: Tarxien
Northern Harbour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Theresa College: B'Kara • St. Claire College: Gzira 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Gorg Preca: Hamrun • Maria Regina College: Mosta
South Eastern		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Margaret College: Zejtun
Western		
Northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Nicholas College: Naxxar 	

A meeting with the Head Teachers was organized where the surveys were filled in and the research topic was discussed in further detail. Each meeting lasted around 20 minutes. In cases where it was difficult to fix a date for the meeting, the surveys were sent and received back via email.

4.4.2 Early School Leavers and Managers' Sampling and the Administration of Questionnaires

Since the research question is addressed towards Early School Leavers it was important to interview individuals “ **between 18 and 24 years of age whose highest level of education or training is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short, and who are not in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey** ” (NSO, 2013, pg 3).

Data was collected by using different methods. First of all, different workplaces from various manufacturing and retail industries were contacted in order to carry out the surveys with Early School Leavers. Eight out of thirty seven accepted the offer (Appendix 2: Total number of places contacted). Three companies were located in the Southern Harbour District, two were located in the South Eastern district, one located in the Western District and another located in the Northern Harbour district.

The research subject was first explained to the individuals in charge. A proportion of the companies accepted that interviews with Early School Leavers are carried out. Tough time consuming, this task offered me the opportunity to have a more detailed conversation with the Early School Leavers themselves. This permitted me to go into a more in depth insight of the experience of these Early Leavers.

The other companies asked me to distribute the surveys to the employees. Answers to such surveys were confidential. During company visits, a discussion was also held with the persons in charge of the employees. Different important aspects were discussed.

Secondly, data was also collected through the Youth.Inc, a programme, aimed to motivate youths “to become more active participants in their own learning” (Anon., 2012). I was given the opportunity by Youth.Inc to survey a group of students who have just finished their programme and satisfied the criteria of Early School Leavers.

Apart from this, data was also collected through the distribution of surveys to Job Centres and to the Youth Advisory section of the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). Again explanation of the research study and the characteristics of the people that could fill in the survey were given to the people in charge and thanks to their help I managed to collect more valuable information.

In this way a sample of 70 Early School Leavers with different backgrounds was collected.

4.5 Method of Analysis

Being qualitative, the data consisted of observations and words and so analysis and interpretations require discipline and a systematic approach in order to bring the data into

understanding. No single or best way is identified as it depends on the questions to be answered (Renner & Taylor- Powell, 2003).

Important points discussed with managers and Head Teachers were jotted down during the meetings and all this facilitated the work during the analysis process. Understanding the data, focusing the analysis, categorizing information, and the identification of patterns and connections between questions and interviews, were all taken into consideration during the analysis (ibid, pgs 2-5).

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were given utmost importance throughout the entire study. All participants were provided with a consent letter (Appendix 3) in which explanation of the study and the survey was given. Assurance that the identities were to remain anonymous was provided and participants were also advised that they could choose to stop the interview at anytime as well as that they could refuse to answer any question.

4.7 Limitations

A researcher must always clarify the limitations and any impacts they may have on a study. To start with, one can mention the fact that the definition was 'restrictive' in a sense that it was not easy to identify the target group. No database of these people is available

by the National Statistics Office and as a consequence, low counts of questionnaires were collected. Also, apart from the fact that I had limited time in which I had to conduct the surveys, only few companies were willing or able to help and unfortunately I had no control over this situation.

Since most of the Early School Leavers were identified through workplaces, it could be the case that the study might have been a bit biased when it comes to the reason why they have left schooling. The help provided by the Youth.Inc and by the Employment and Training Corporation helped to reduce this biasness because through these sources, different characteristics of why these people are Early School Leavers could have been captured.

When it comes to the interviews conducted with the Headteachers, again not all schools were able to help. Apart from this at the moment, various changes in the educational system are taking place and thus certain aspects could not be clearly identified.

4.8 Conclusion

The explanation given above highlighted the main approach undertaken so as to identify the factors that contribute to Early School Leaving in Malta. The data collected, the participants, the limitations identified and the analytical method established pave the way to the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Empirical Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the research study. The findings have been analysed and the results presented and discussed with reference to the theories outlined in the literature review. Primary and Secondary data from different sources were collected and each set of findings will be presented separately.

5.2 Secondary Data

5.2.1 National Statistics Office Data

Table 5.1: Early School Leavers by District and Gender

	2006		2007		2008	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Southern Harbour	49.3	40.3	49.4	41.3	42.3	37.7
Northern Harbour	36.5	27.5	34.9	28.0	27.0	29.0
South Eastern	37.5	29.1	43.5	27.3	41.0	28.8
Western	32.4	19.8	31.2	26.1	26.2	19.8
Northern	24.5	27.7	21.5	14.9	24.5	10.9
Gozo and Comino	35.7	15.5	35.5	17.9	38.7	12.9

	2009		2010		2011		2012	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Southern Harbour	37.5	32.0	41.5	21.9	39.2	22.5	34.4	25.2
Northern Harbour	32.1	25.4	31.3	22.8	29.6	21.9	27.8	17.3
South Eastern	34.7	24.9	37.6	18.7	33.2	15.2	28.7	16.7
Western	24.5	17.9	20.4	14.5	22.7	14.0	23.7	13.6
Northern	30.2	15.7	32.4	10.7	23.3	8.1	21.5	13.8
Gozo and Comino	29.9	15.3	30.7	11.7	21.9	7.6	23.0	16.0

Source: NSO³

The above table represents secondary data obtained from the National Statistics Office (NSO). Data is represented as a percentage of male and female population aged between 18 to 24 years of age, both years included according to district. The Males percentage is calculated by considering the males aged 18 to 24 of the respective district, having successfully completed ISCED 2 level of education or less and not in education or training as a percentage of total males of 18 - 24 year olds of that district. On the other hand, the Female percentage is calculated in the same way but instead, by taking into account females. This data indicates that the highest rate of Early School Leavers in Malta is produced by the Southern Harbour District. Males are more likely to leave school earlier than females in Malta and another important observation is that even though in 2010, a higher rate of female Early School Leavers were recorded in the Northern Harbour (22.8%

³ Figures highlighted in yellow are under representative due to small sample size.

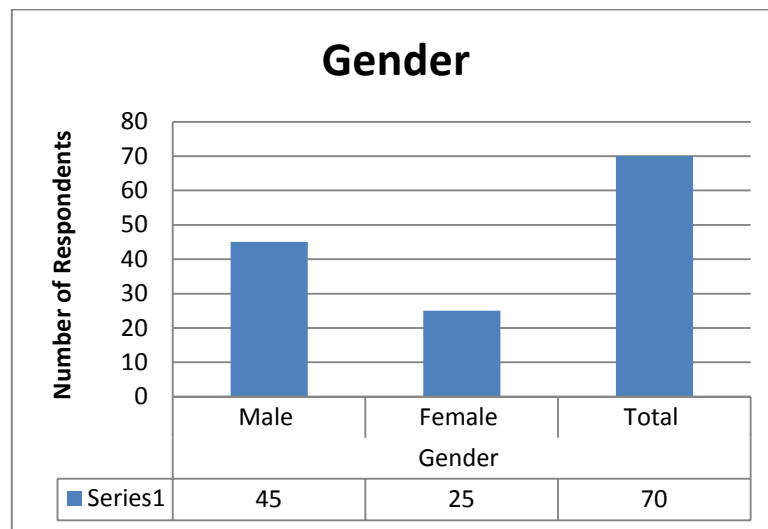
as opposed to the 21.9% of the Southern Harbour) , still, in total, more Early School Leavers were produced by the Southern Harbour.

5.3 Findings from Questionnaires: Early School Leavers

5.3.1 School Leavers Population Profile

Of the seventy school leavers who participated in this study, it resulted that forty-five (64%) participants were males while twenty-five (36%) were females. The average age of the participants was that of twenty years of age.

Figure 5.1: Gender



Illustrated below is a column chart representing the localities of the respondents. These localities were grouped in districts and as shown, the majority of the Early School Leavers

come from the South Eastern Area (31%). Another eighteen participants (26%) come from the South Harbour and another seventeen (24%) came from Northern Harbour. Seven (10%) participants were from the West side of the island and another four were (6%) from the North. Only two (3%) participants were from the island of Gozo.

Figure 5.2: Districts

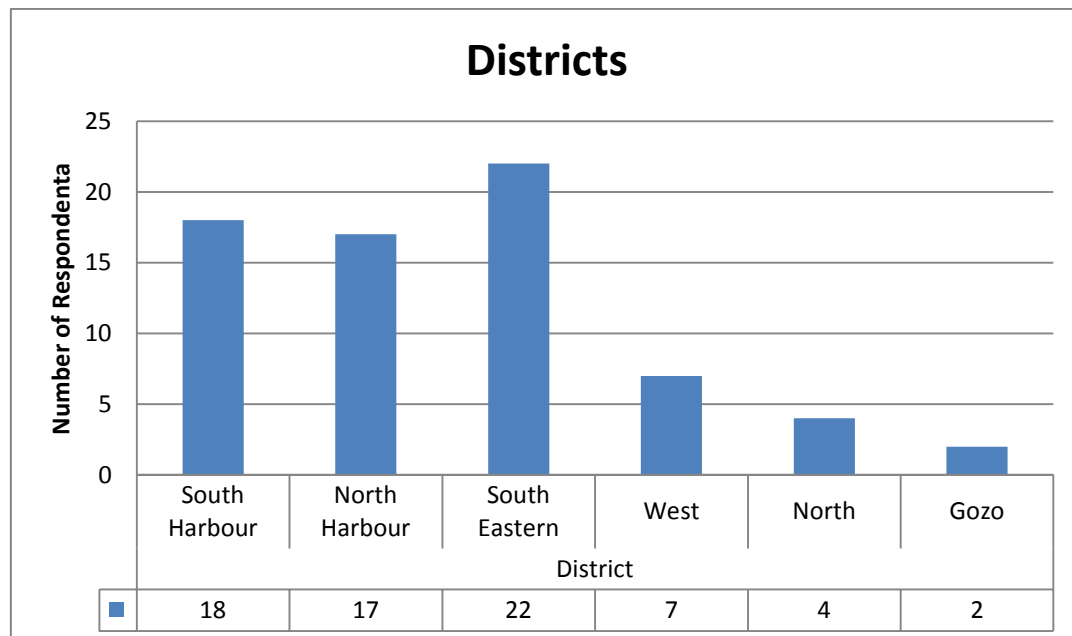
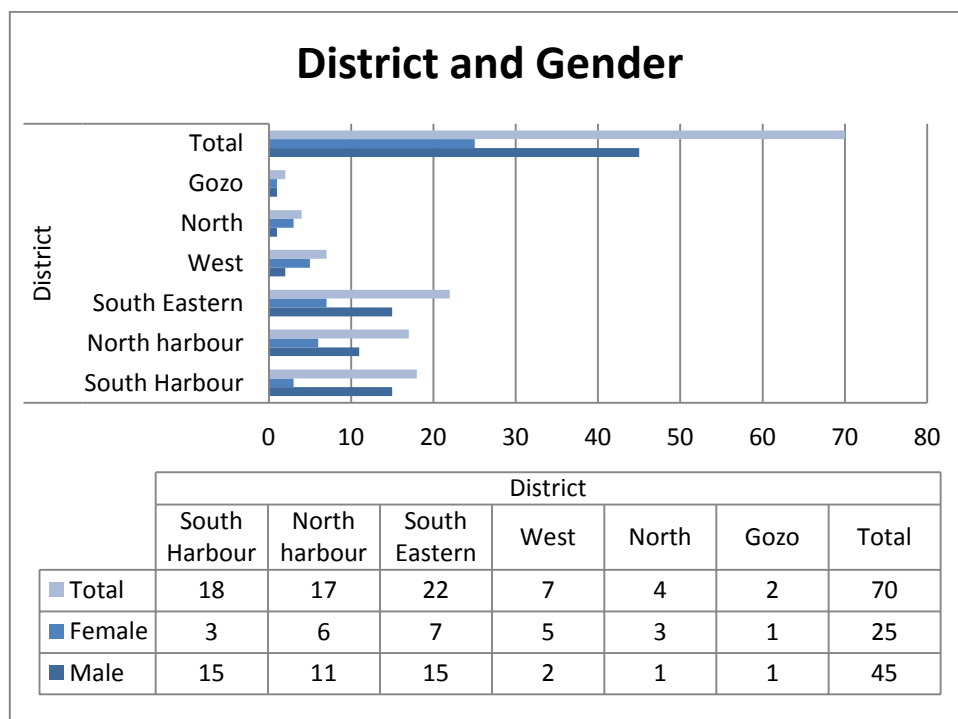


Figure 5.3 below, shows that the majority of the female early school leavers participants (7) were from the South Eastern district while most of the males were from the South Harbour (15) and South Eastern (15). This is partly in line with Gatt (2012) findings which reports that Early School Leavers in Malta are mostly found in the South Harbour Area.

The fact that in the sample there were more male participants than female participants indicated that in Malta males are more likely to be Early School Leavers. This is also in line with data provided by the NSO analyzed in section 5.2 as well as with the research carried out by the European Commission, (2010).

Figure 5.3: District and Gender

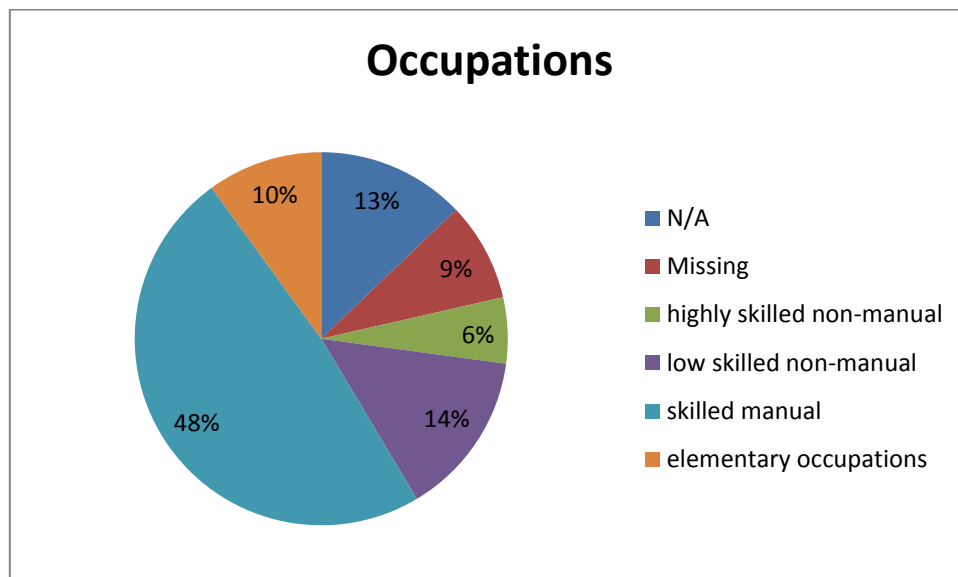


5.3.2 The Education System and the Labour Market

5.3.2.1 Job Opportunities (Occupations)

Occupation					
N/A	Missing	Highly skilled non-manual	Low skilled non-manual	Skilled manual	Elementary occupations
9	6	4	10	34	7

Figure 5.4: Occupations of the Early School Leavers



Participants were asked to list their place of work or the type of job they do. Each occupation was given an occupation code as provided by the National Statistics Office (according to International Standard Classification of Occupation)

Table 5.2: Codes of Occupations

<u>Occupations</u>	<u>Codes</u>
Highly skilled non-manual occupations	1,2,3
Low skilled non-manual occupations	4,5
Skilled manual occupations	6,7,8
Elementary occupations	9

Nine (13%) participants were listed under the not available section, meaning that they either do not work or else they are still looking for a job. Another six (9%) did not answer this question. Only four (6%) of the participants are involved in highly skilled non-manual jobs. Another ten participants (14%) have a low skilled non-manual occupation while the majority, thirty-four (48%) have a skilled manual occupation.

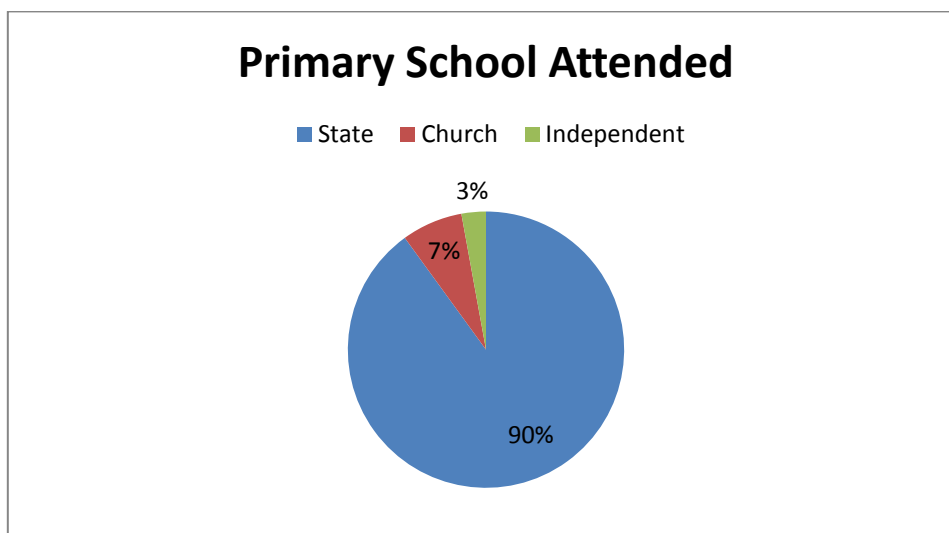
The fact that **only 6% of the participants** have a highly skilled manual job indicates that the provision of jobs that require low levels of qualifications are available in our country.

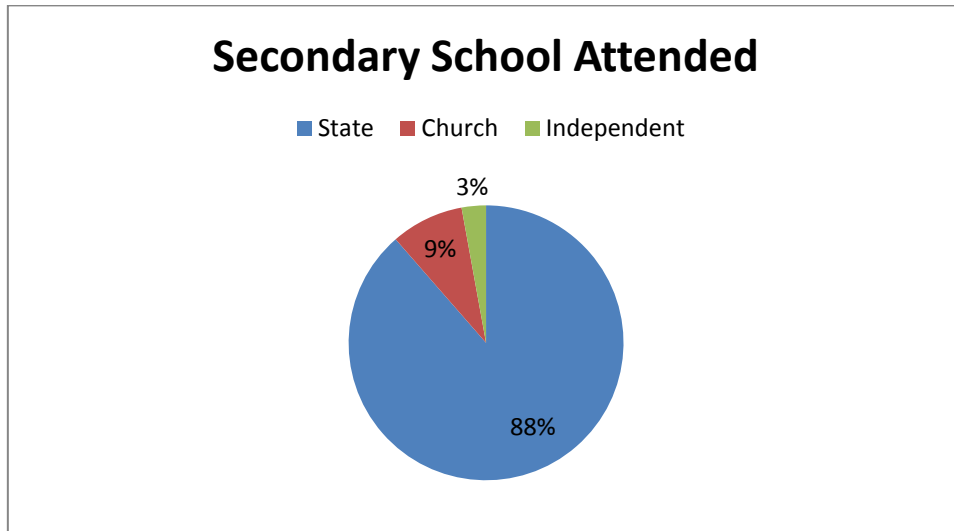
This could reflect the reason why Early School Leavers do not continue to further improve their qualifications. The Ministry of Education and Employment (2012) reported, that good quality training and the amount of labour market opportunities available, are all disincentives for students to continue with their education (NESSE, 2010).

5.3.2.2 School Attended

Primary School Attended			Secondary School Attended		
State	Church	Independent	State	Church	Independent
63	5	2	62	6	2

Figure 5.5: Primary and Secondary School Attended





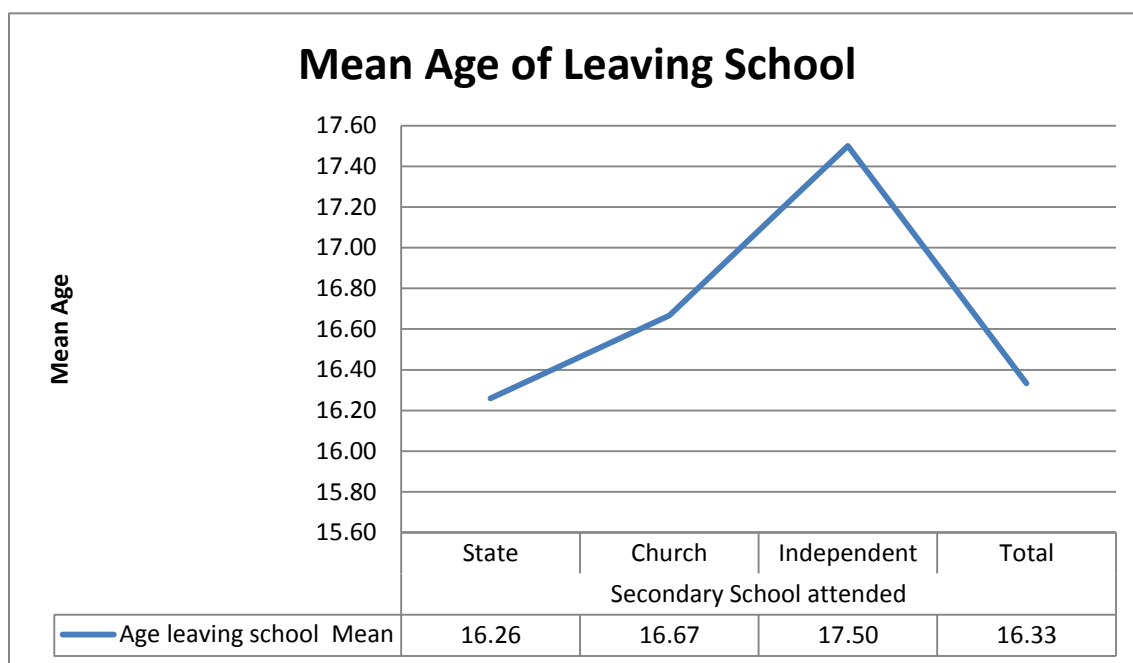
The attendance in a State School for both primary and secondary education featured strongly amongst the participants. Ninety Percent claimed that they attended a state school for primary while 88% did so for secondary as well. This finding indicates what Gatt (2004) reported; that Maltese students attending church schools and independent schools are at less of a risk of dropping out of school.

In fact as shown in Table 5.3, in calculating the mean age of school leaving, it is clearly shown that those attending a State School for secondary education are more likely to leave school at an earlier age than those attending church and independent schools.

Table 5.3: Mean Age of Leaving School with Respect to the Secondary School Attended

Secondary School Attended	Mean Age of leaving school	Rounded Figures
State	16.26	16
Church	16.67	17
Independent	17.50	18

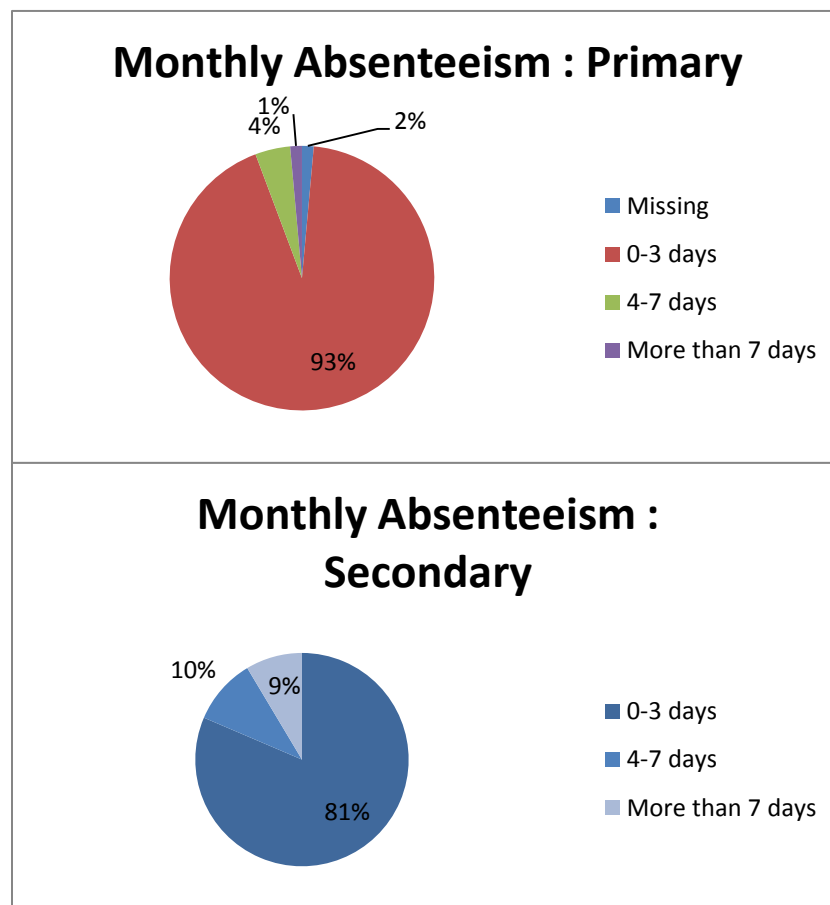
Figure 5.6: Mean Age of Leaving School with Respect to Secondary School Attended



5.3.2.3 Absenteeism

Primary: Monthly Absenteeism				Secondary: Monthly Absenteeism		
Missing	0-3 days	4-7 days	More than 7 days	0-3 days	4-7 days	More than 7 days
1	65	3	1	57	7	6

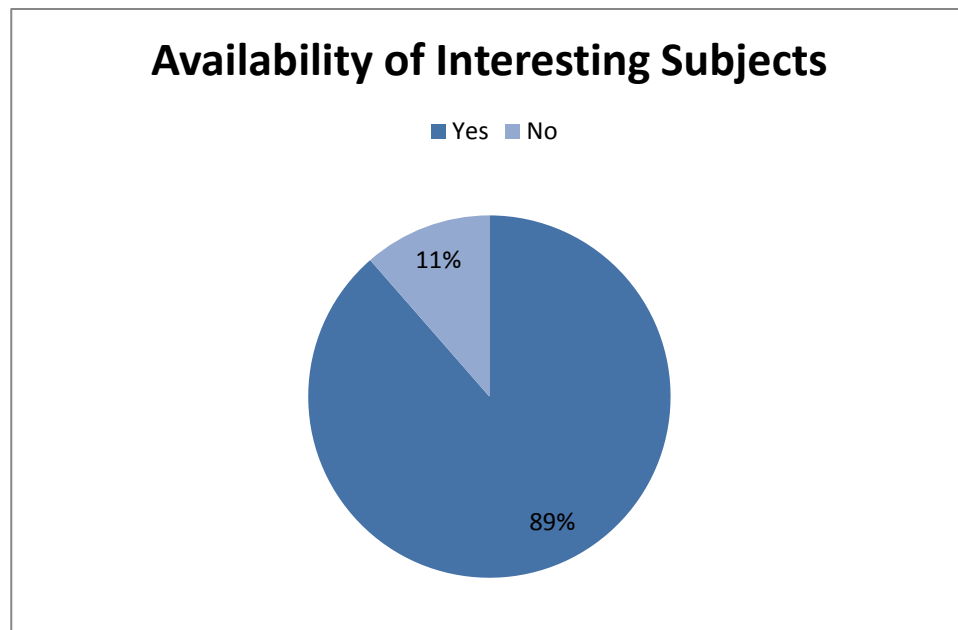
Figure 5.7: Number of Days Absent from School



Even though in literature it was identified that Early School Leaving might be related to absenteeism (Clark et al.2005), it does not seem to be the case with the people surveyed. When asked how many times they were absent from primary school, 2% did not answer while 93% claimed that they were absent for only 0-3 days each month. Around 4% claimed that they failed to attend school for around 4-7 days while only 1% stated that they used to be absent for more than 7 days. On the other hand this percentage increased a bit when it came to secondary schooling. Now, it was 9% that claimed to be absent for more than 7 days while 81% said that they used to be absent for between 0 to 3 days. The rest (10%) were absent for around 4-7 days.

5.3.2.4 Subjects of Interest

Figure 5.8: Availability of Interesting Subjects



With regards to subjects offered, 89% (62) stated that the schools provided subjects that they were interested in. The other 11 % (8) expressed a preference for other subjects like arts, introduction to engineering courses, languages like Greek and Spanish, and physical education. An important observation would be that most of the students that were not satisfied with subject availability at school were coming from State Schools. Only one out of the eight respondents claiming 'No' attended a church school. As literature states, these are all restrictive opportunities for academic success and unfortunately, schools that have restricted opportunities for academic success tend to have higher dropout rates.

5.3.2.5 Teacher-Student Relationship, Support and Guidance

Relationship with the Teachers		
Good	Quite Good	Not Good
49	20	1

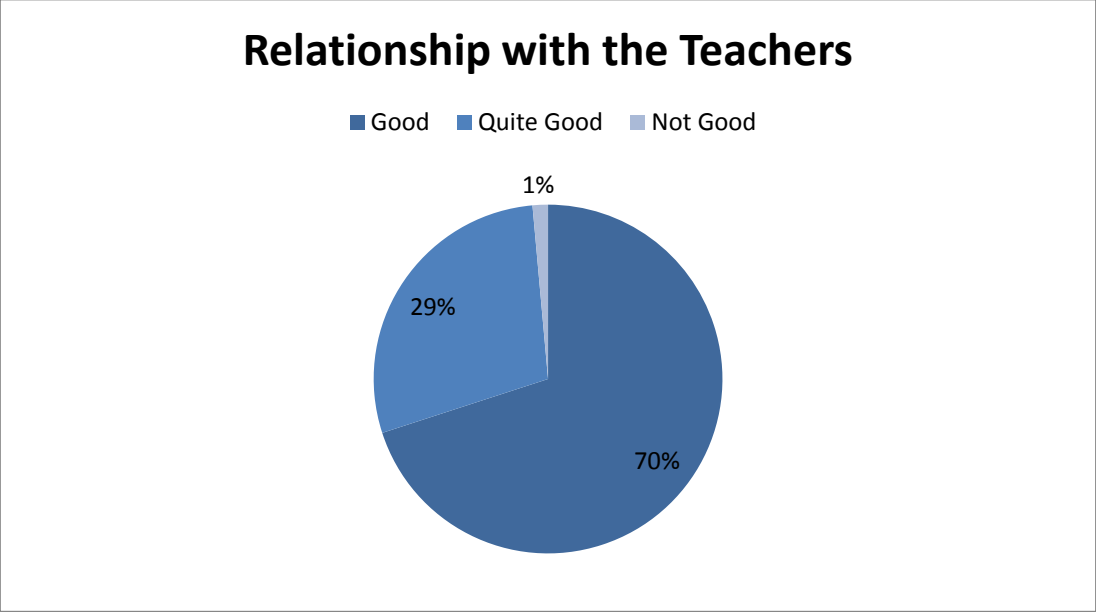
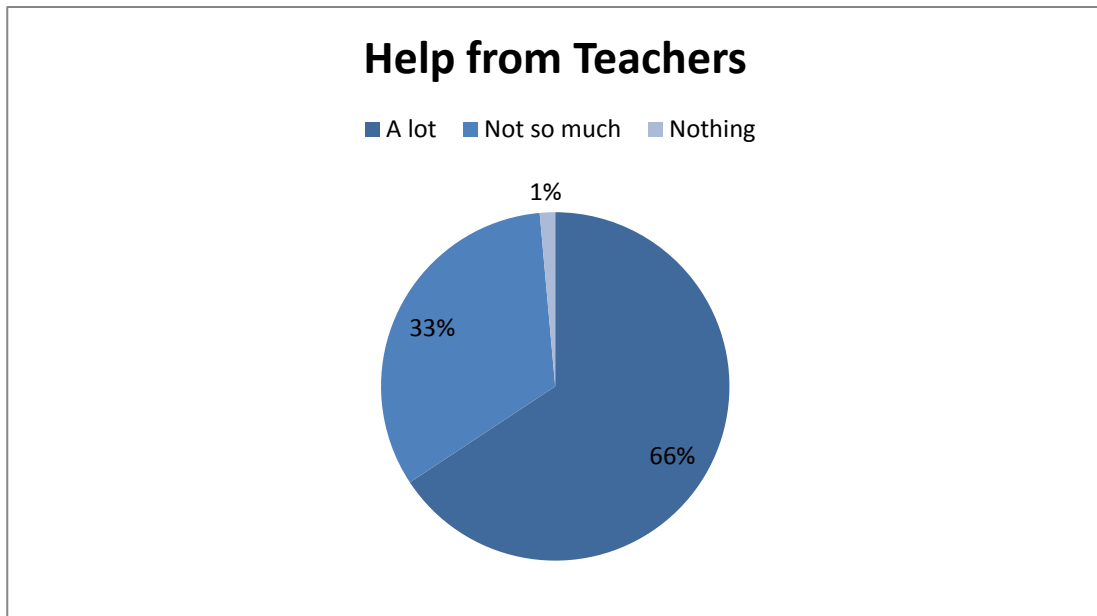


Figure 5.9: Teacher-Student Relationship

Seventy percent of the Early School Leavers (49) considered the relationship with their teachers as a good one, while 29% (20) said that the relationship was quite good. Only one person stated that the relationship was ‘not good’.

Figure 5.10: Availability of Help from Teachers

Help from Teachers		
A lot	Not so much	Nothing
46	23	1



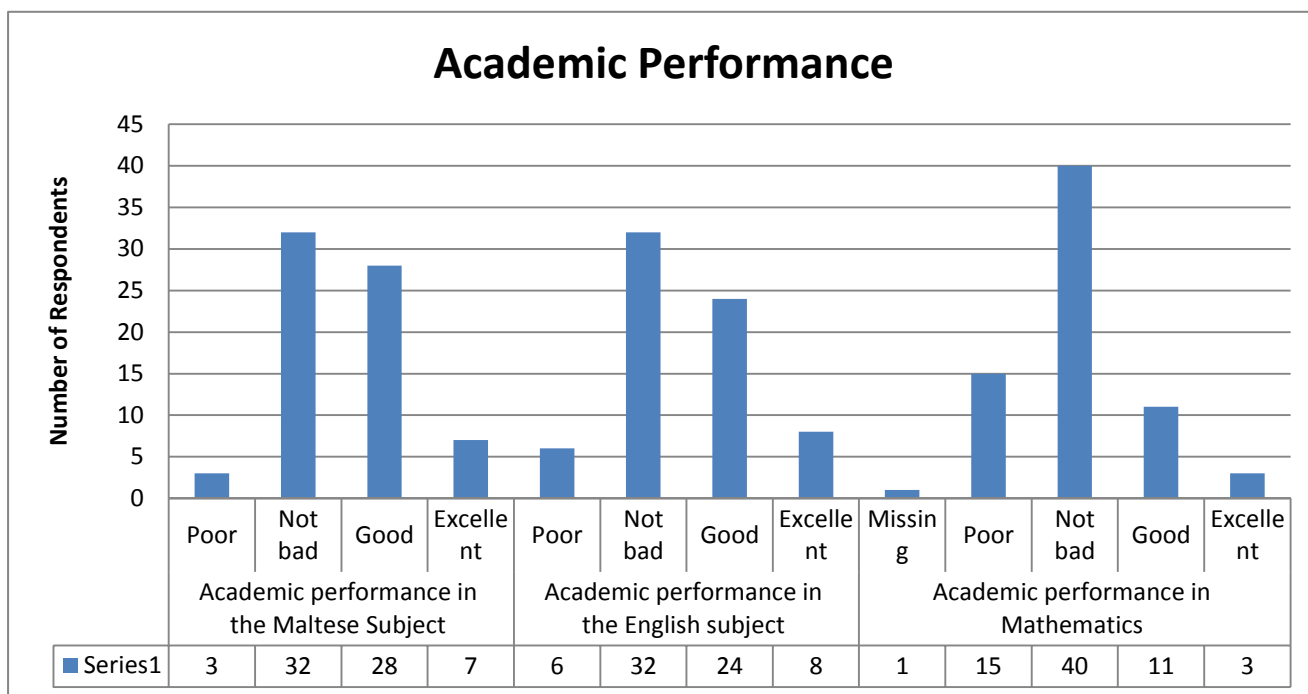
On the other hand when asked whether teachers were helpful in terms of academic achievement, (i.e. when faced with academic problems), the majority, 66% (46) opted for the 'a lot' option and 1/3 (33%) (23) of the participants chose the 'not so much' option. Again 1 (1%) particular participant said that no help was given when needed.

Since I had the opportunity to speak to some of these participants I was able to have a better insight to this question. Some stated that even though they had to choose an option provided in the questionnaire, still one cannot generalise such a question. A lot of the participants pointed out that they had a good relationship with most of the teachers, but still they did not feel comfortable with some of the other teachers. The same applies to when asked whether they were being given help from teachers when needed. Some teachers were helpful while others were not. Some also argued that some teachers clearly showed that they preferred particular students to others (unfairness) and so students did

not feel comfortable about this. This argument of unfairness was also mentioned by Massa, Bartolo and Tabone but in no point of the discussion did any student mention that they performed poorly at school because of this relationship. This factor does not seem to be a problem with these participants since the majority felt that they had a 'good' relationship and many were provided 'a lot' of help from teachers.

5.3.3 Individual Characteristics

Figure 5.11: Academic Performance



When asked what they thought of their academic performance, the majority of the participants (i.e. 46% in Maltese and English and 57% in mathematics) viewed their performance as 'Not bad' in all the three main subjects. Another 40% (28) and 34 % (24) viewed that they did well in Maltese and English respectively and only few participants stated that they performed excellently in these subjects. Only 4% (3) stated that they achieved poor performance in the Maltese subject while only 9 % viewed their performance in English as being poor.

On the other hand when it came to mathematics, 21 % (15) stated that they performed poorly in this subject while only 16% (11) believed that they did well. Another 4 % (3) claimed that they performed excellently while another 2% (1) of the participants did not answer this question. This could be another indication why such students leave school early, as literature cited that students having low maths scores (and poor reading abilities when entering secondary school) are more likely to drop out.

5.3.4 Family Factors

5.3.4.1 Number of Members in the Family

Family members	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight
Respondents	2	10	20	22	8	4	4
Percentage	3%	14%	29%	31%	11%	6%	6%

Figure 5.12: Number of Members in the Family

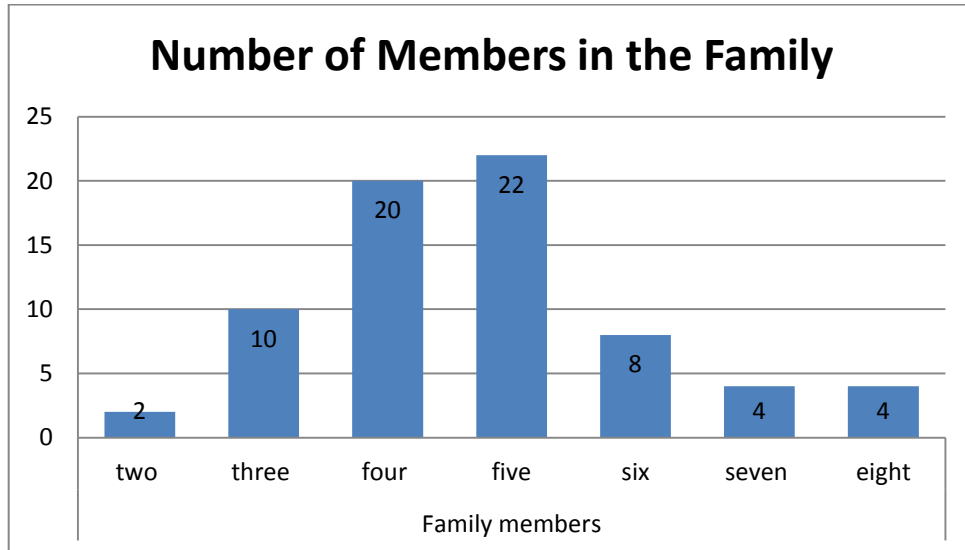
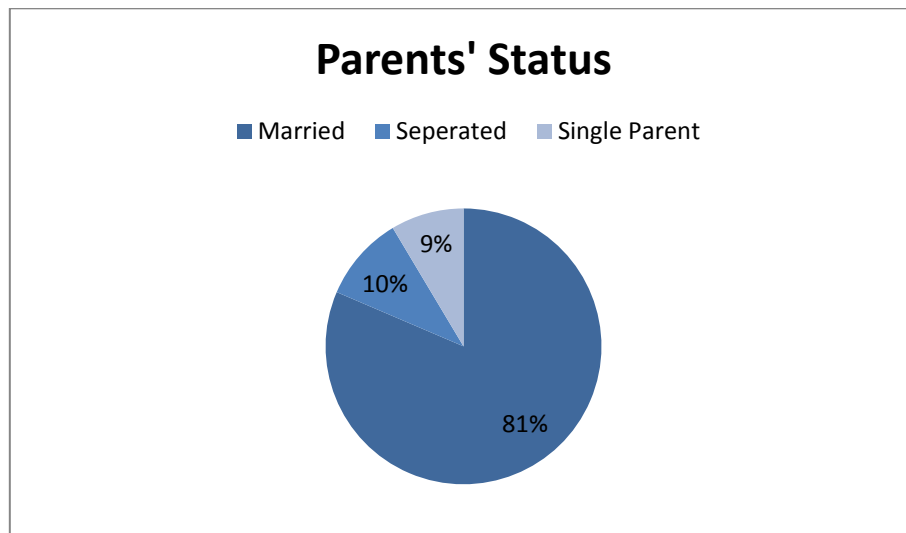


Figure 5.12 above, clearly illustrates that there are five members in the family of most participants. Another eight participants (11%) cited that there are six members in their family, while another four (6%) quoted that there are seven and eight members respectively in their family. The rest claimed that there are four members or less in all. Indirectly, having more than half of the participants being part of a big family (five members or more), might have served as an incentive for the participants to leave school. In fact Gyonos (2011) did point out that when someone is part of a big family, there might be the risk that children would be expected to provide help in the family with the consequence that they would have to stop attending schooling.

5.3.4.2 Parents' Status

Figure 5.13: Parents' Status



Parents' Status		
Married	Separated	Single Parent
57	7	6

Parental status also play an important role in deciding whether to continue education or not. Only seven participants (10%) came from a broken family background while another six (9%) had a single parent. For this 19%, it could be the case that the decision of leaving school early increased because of the situation in the family.

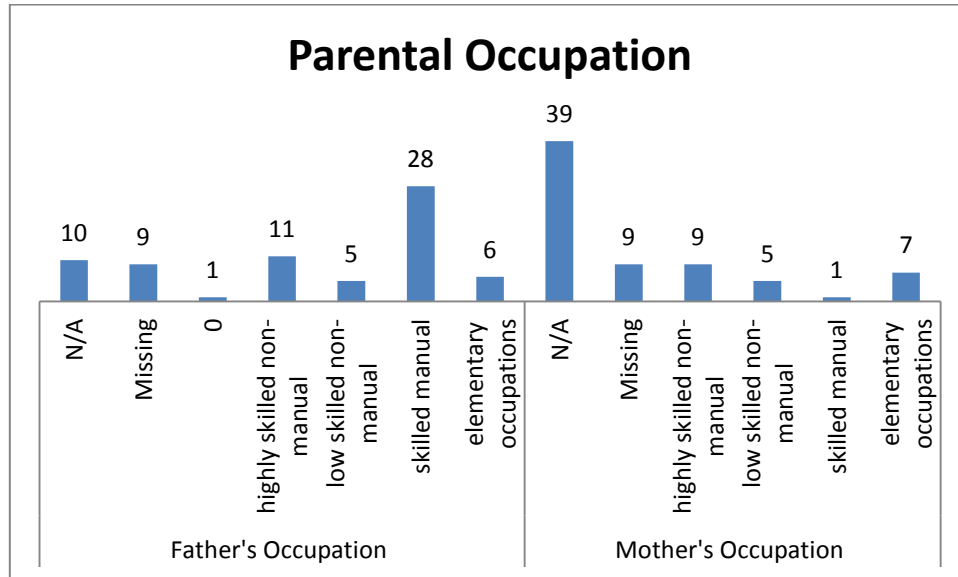
5.3.4.3 Parents Occupation

Father's Occupation							
	N/A	Missing	Army Personelle	Highly Skilled Non- Manual	Low Skilled Non- Manual	Skilled Manual	Elementary Occupations
Respondents	10	9	1	11	5	28	6
Percentage	14%	13%	1%	16%	7%	40%	9%

(Note Army Personelle are not included in ISCO groups thus it was given a code of 0)

Mother's Occupation						
	N/A	Missing	Highly Skilled Non- Manual	Low Skilled Non- Manual	Skilled Manual	Elementary Occupations
Respondents	39	9	9	5	1	7
Percentage	56%	13%	13%	7%	1%	10%

Figure 5.14: Occupation of Parents



It could be clearly identified that the majority of the Father's Occupation were skilled manual occupations while most of the mother's occupations were listed under N/A since they were all housewives. Only a small percentage contribute to highly skilled non manual jobs. Having skilled manual occupations, families might encounter financial pressures, especially those whose mother's work is that of a housewife. As Gyonos (2011) cited, this may put pressures on students to leave education at an early stage so that they can join the labour market and help with the family's financial situation.

5.3.4.4 Parents Level of Education

Father's Highest Level of Education				Mother's Highest Level of Education			
Missing	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Missing	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
4	9	47	10	2	6	52	10

Figure 5.15: Father's Level of Education

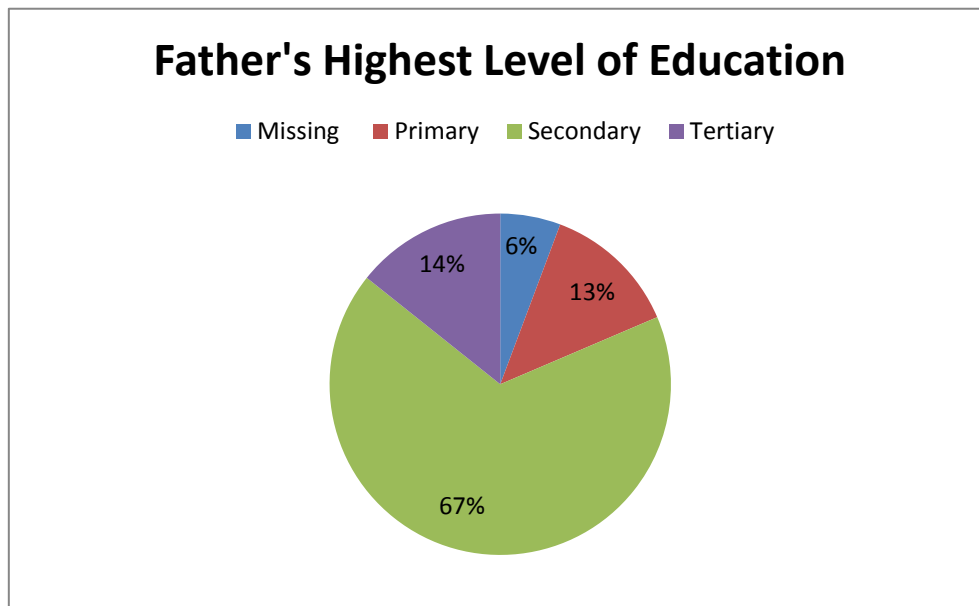
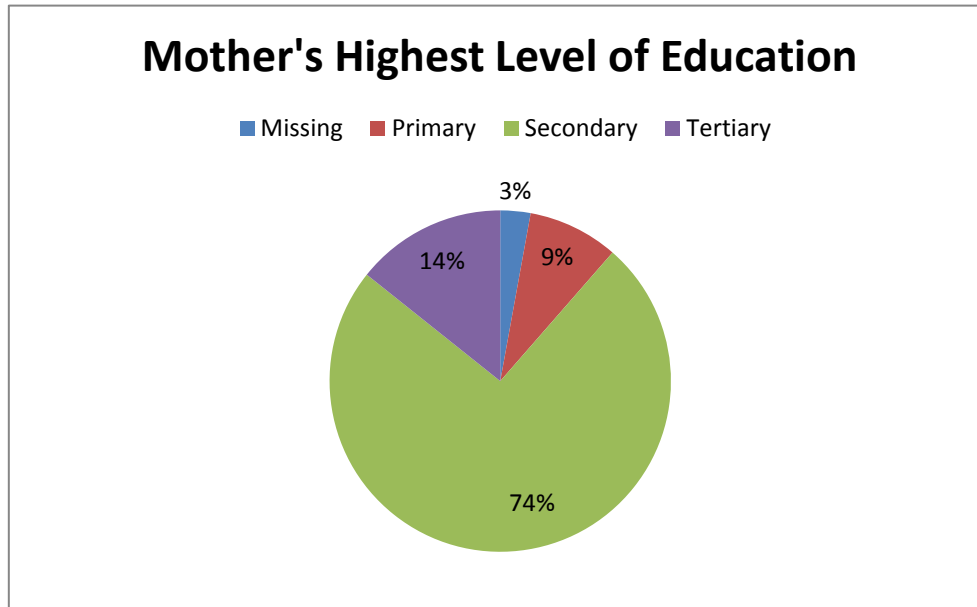


Figure 5.16: Mother's Level of Education



In analysing the highest level of education achieved by the participant's parents, one can note that the majority of the parents only achieved a secondary education. Only 14 % (10) of the father's and mother's managed to complete tertiary education. For 13 % (9) of the father's and 9% (6) of the mothers, the highest level of education obtained was primary education while a low percentage of participants were not aware of the educational level of their parents.

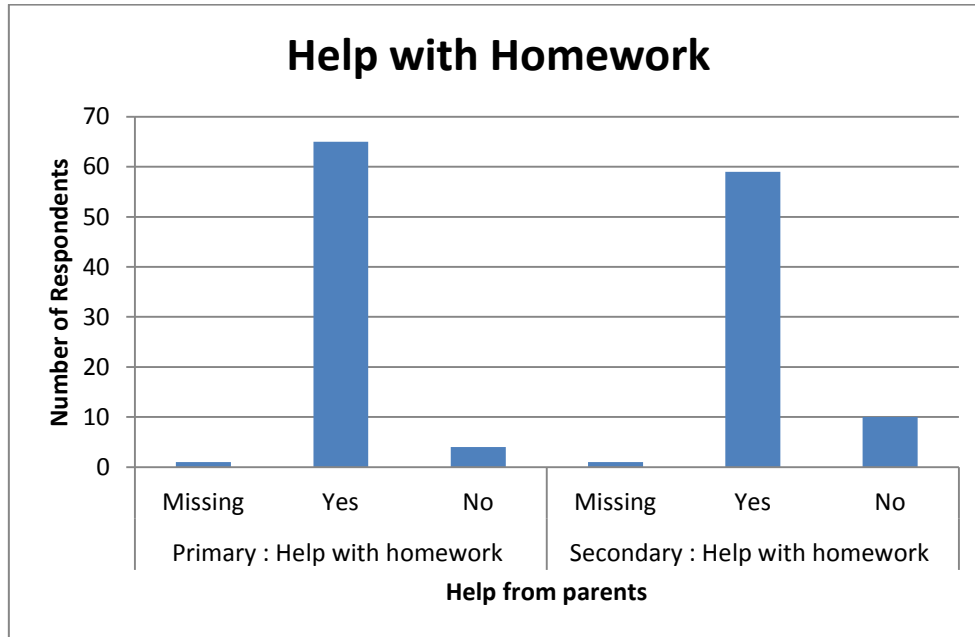
From the Table 5.4 below one can realise that the higher the level of education obtained by the parents, the more likely it is for students to stay in school.

Table 5.4: Mean Age of Leaving School with Respect to the Education Level of the Parents

	Highest Level of Education Acquired by the Father				Highest Level of Education Acquired by the Mother			
	Missing	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Missing	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Mean age of leaving school	16.00	16.22	16.32	16.50	16.00	16.00	16.33	16.50

This is again in line with the literature as it indicates that if the parents have attended tertiary education and graduated, it is more likely that children continue their studies. This in turn leads to our next finding. Parental help with homework is considered another important factor according to literature and educated parents are said to be better in helping their children with the homework. Apart from this educated parents also understand that higher education is the best choice for their children’s future and so they will encourage their children to continue with their studies (Traag and Van der Velden, 2008).

Figure 5.17: Help with Homework During Compulsory Schooling



Help with Homework during Primary Education			Help with Homework during Secondary Education		
Missing	Yes	No	Missing	Yes	No
1	65	4	1	59	10

When asked whether parents were of help with homework, quite a good number stated that parents did offer help both during primary and secondary education, however during secondary education the percentage of those who said that they were provided with parental help decreased by 9% (from 93% to 84%). In obtaining the mean age of early

school leaving in relation to help provided from the parents, one can note that;

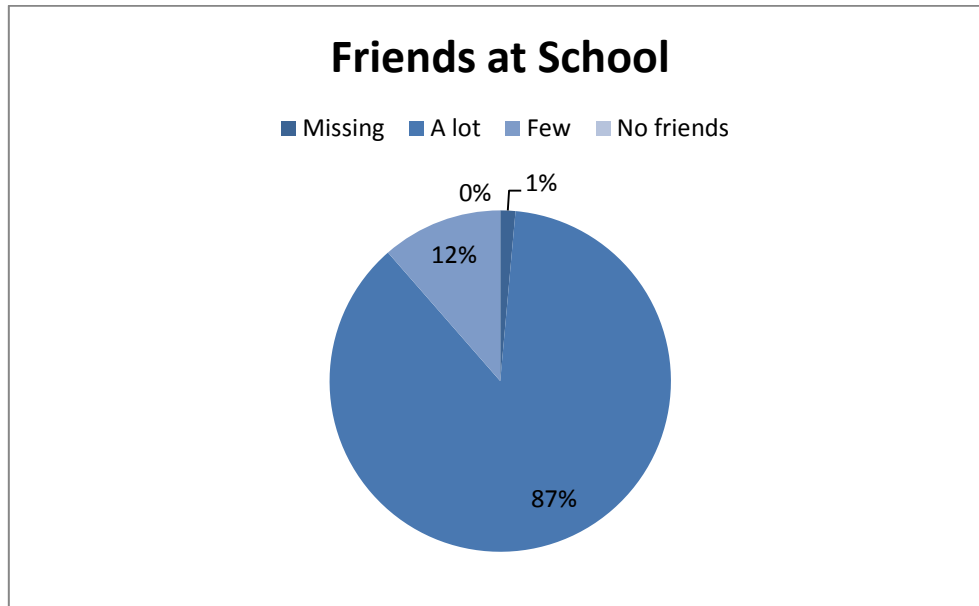
	Primary		Secondary	
Help Provided	Yes	No	Yes	No
Mean Age of Leaving School	16.38	15.25	16.24	15.7

Students that are helped by parents at home, leave school later than if they were not provided with any help. This finding is backed by Dale's (2010) findings. On the other hand, as opposed to what Beekhoven and Dekker cited, these findings show that many had family support even though the majority of the parents had only gained their compulsory education level and were not of a high economic status.

5.3.5 Other Factors: Peers

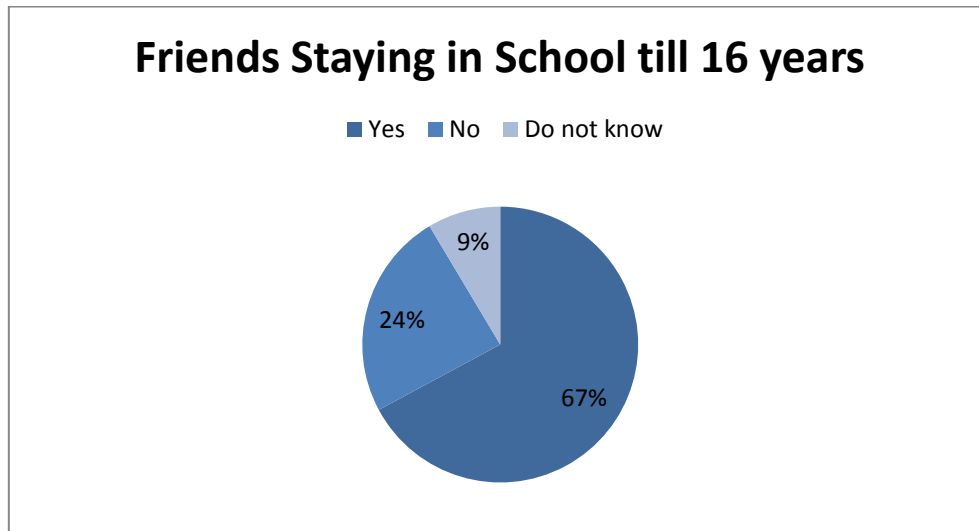
Loneliness or the feeling of being an outsider at school did not feature strongly in any of the surveys as 87% (61) said that they had a lot of friends. Only 12% (8) stated that they had few friends while none of the participants stated that they had no friends.

Figure 5.18: Peers at School



Friends at school			
Missing	A lot	Few	No friends
1	61	8	0

Figure 5.19: The Decision of Friends in Staying in Compulsory Education



Friends Staying in School till 16 years		
Yes	No	Do not know
47	17	6

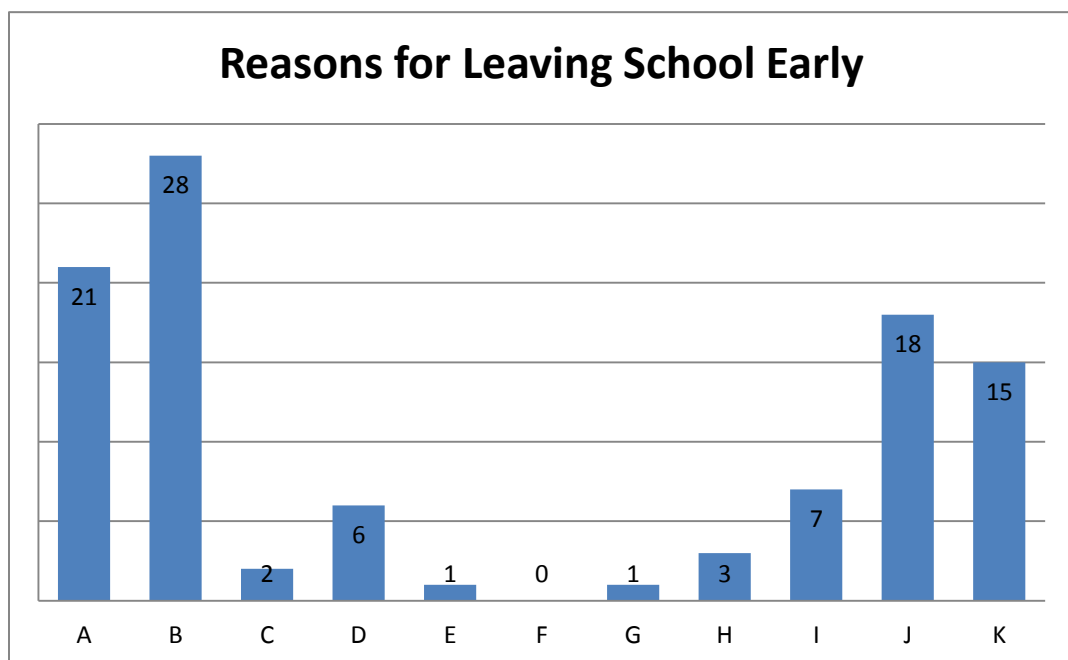
The majority of the early school leavers' friends seem to have finished compulsory education, as only 24% (17) of the respondents had friends that did not manage to obtain this level of education. On the other hand 9% (6) did not have the information of whether their friends continued up to compulsory education or no. In light of what Tanja Traag et al. (2012) reported, for that 24% of the respondents, this might have been one of the push factors to not continue education.

5.3.5.1 Reasons for Early School Leaving

Table 5.5: Factors Contributing to the Decision of Leaving School Early

A	I felt that I was not good at school
B	I was not interested in education
C	Had bad relationship with the teachers and other administrative staff of the school
D	I was bullied at school
E	I felt different/ unwanted by my peers
F	Drug and alcohol problems
G	Had a child to look after
H	Peer Pressure
I	Family Problems
J	Job opportunity available
K	Other Reasons

Figure 5.20: Reasons for Leaving School Early



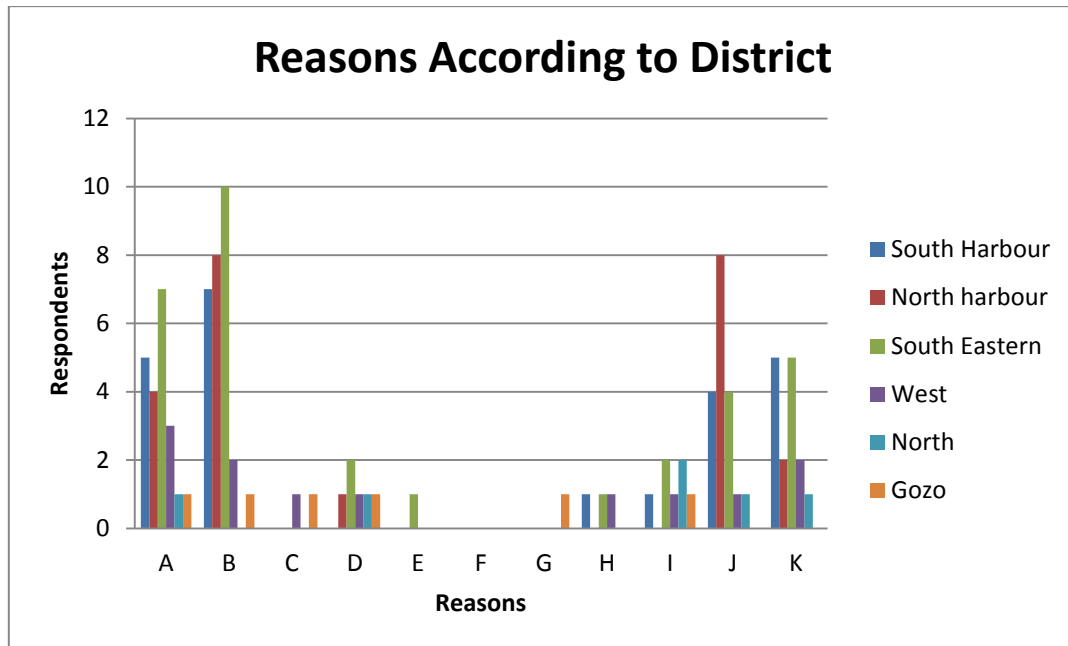
The participants were provided with eleven possible choice factors which contributed to their decision of leaving school early. 'I was not interested in education' and 'I felt I was not good academically', both featured as two strong factors in contributing to such a decision. As Gatt (2012) reported, the 'Job opportunity available' also featured to be a strong aspect here and other reasons like 'financial problems' or 'in need of money', 'wrong choice of course', 'failure in my 1st year of MCAST' and 'I didn't like school', were all listed as main factors.

As literature indicates, lack of interest in education can be the consequence of several other factors discussed above. As Byrne and Smith (2010) reported, lack of interest might even be the consequence of the 'I felt I was not good' since achievement of poor academic results affects the self esteem of the person and at the end of the day this will lead students to lose interest in learning.

Here, one can see that even though when asked about their academic performance most of the students replied with 'not bad' or 'good' especially in Maltese and English, still one of the main reasons for leaving school remains the fact that they did not feel good at it. Also what Gatt (2012) reported about labour opportunities seems to be proven again by this question. However, although this does not imply that employment is the direct cause for such a high rate of school leaving, still, it can be an incentive.

An important observation would be to analyze the most common factor leading to Early School Leaving in terms of districts.

Figure 5.21: Factors Leading to Early School Leaving According to Districts



As illustrated, many of the early school leavers living in the South Eastern and South Harbour cited lack of interest in education and not feeling academically competent as important factors that caused them to not continue with their education. On the other hand, lack of interest in education and availability of job opportunities featured strongly among the reasons chosen by those coming from the North Harbour.

5.3.5.2 What Encourages Early School Leavers to Continue with Their Studies?

Figure 5.22: Factors that Encourage Studying

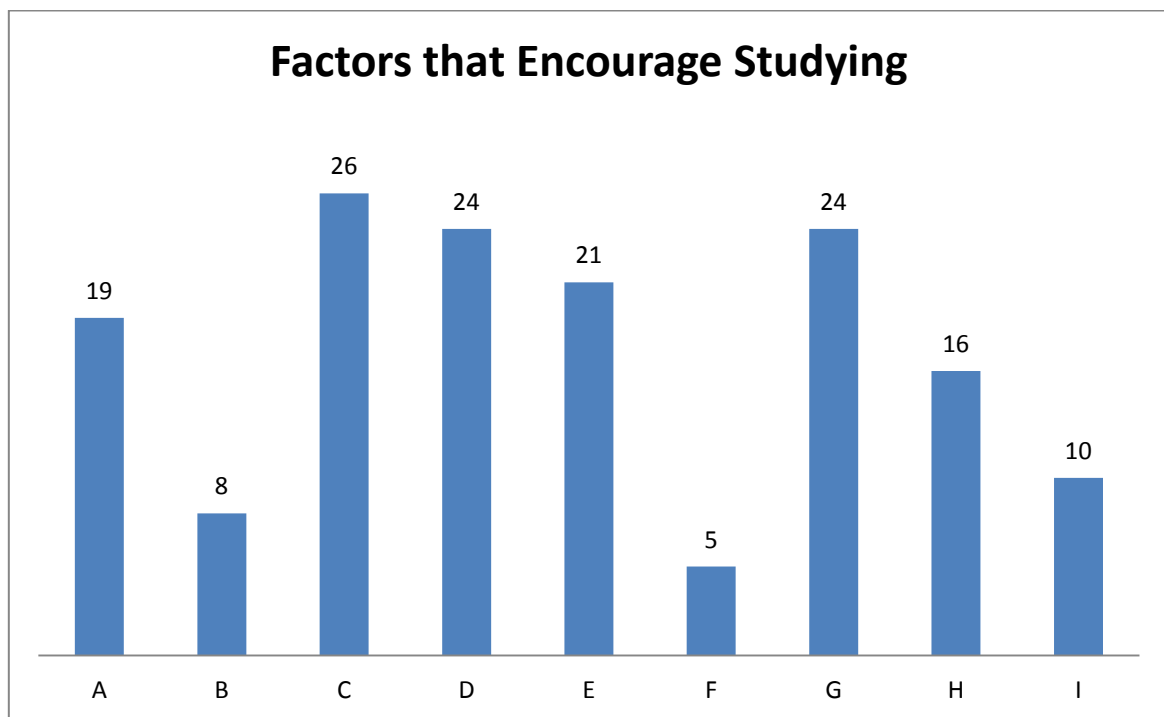


Table 5.6: Factors that Might Encourage Studying

A	More educational support from family members
B	Availability of after school programs in order to help students with their studies
C	Availability of opportunities to students with regards to practical subjects and less emphasis given on the theoretical aspects of the subjects
D	Providing opportunities of work related to the studies that the students are undertaking during secondary schools
E	Availability of information and services (better guidance to students) about the jobs available in the economy (so that they can make the right choice when choosing a job)
F	Not allocating students in classes according to districts
G	Offering subjects that students are more interested in
H	Opportunities to pursue extracurricular interests and develop talents
I	Others

When asked to choose the most appropriate characteristics, that could have encouraged them to continue with their studies, most of the school leavers opted for the 'Availability of opportunities to students with regards to practical subjects and less emphasis given on the theoretical aspects of the subjects'. 'Providing opportunities of work related to the studies that the students are undertaking during secondary schools' and 'Offering subjects that students are more interested in' also seem to have encouraged early school leavers to continue with their studies. Availability of information and services about the jobs available in the economy and more family support seems to be highly demanded as well. Streaming in schools, financial help to those who do not afford schooling and availability of more help in times when the students are going through tough period of times were also suggested.

5.4 Findings from the Questionnaires: Head Teachers

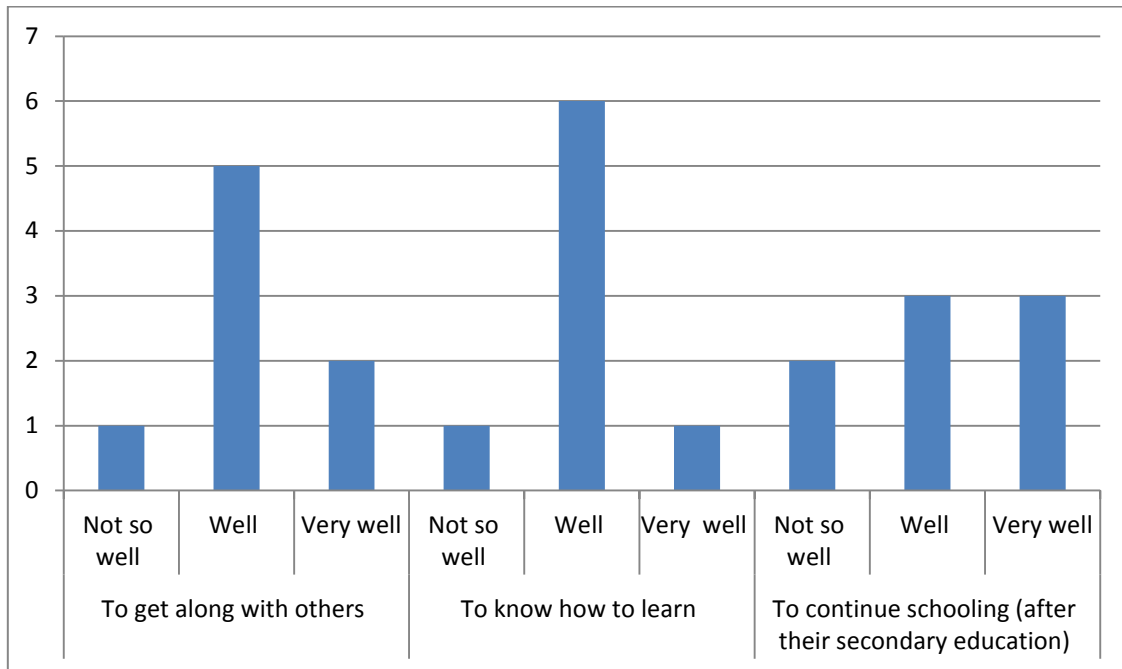
5.4.1 Head Teachers and School Profile

Eight different secondary schools from eight different colleges were visited in all. Three of these colleges were boys' secondary schools and another five were girls' secondary schools. The age of the Head Teachers who participated in the interview (four males and four females) ranged between 48 and 60 years old. Three Head Teachers were from the Western District, one from the Northern Harbour District, one from the Southern Harbour District and another two did not answer this question.

Figure 5.23 below shows the responses by the Head Teachers about the level of how well students are being prepared by schools in:

- i) getting along with others
- ii) learning how to learn and
- iii) Continuing schooling after compulsory education.

Figure 5.23: Responses from Head Teachers about how well Schooling is Preparing Students



Responses being how well to get along with others			Responses being how well to know how to learn			Responses being how well to continue schooling (after their secondary education)		
Not so well	Well	Very Well	Not so well	Well	Not so well	Not so well	Well	Very Well
1	5	2	1	6	1	2	3	3

The majority of Head Teachers surveyed indicated that they all think that students are prepared well in all areas. Only one Head Teacher stated that students are not prepared so well 'to get along with others' and 'to know how to learn' while two other Head Teachers

think that students are not well prepared when it comes to continue schooling after compulsory education. On the other hand another three Head Teachers think that students are very well prepared for such a challenge.

5.4.2 Early School Leaving Problem

When asked about Early School Leaving and the level of the problem in the school they were responsible for, two particular Head Teachers stated that this phenomenon does not seem to be a problem in their school. Another Head Teacher stated that a proportion of the 4th and 5th formers are not keen to continue with their education due to their lack of aspirations while another Head Teacher declared that quite a good number of their students only sit for one Ordinary level exam. Other Head Teachers highlighted that Early School Leaving does seem to be a problem while others focused on the fact that Early School Leaving together with absenteeism are two major problems which has not been adequately tackle up to today.

5.4.3 Possible Factors Contributing to Early School Leaving

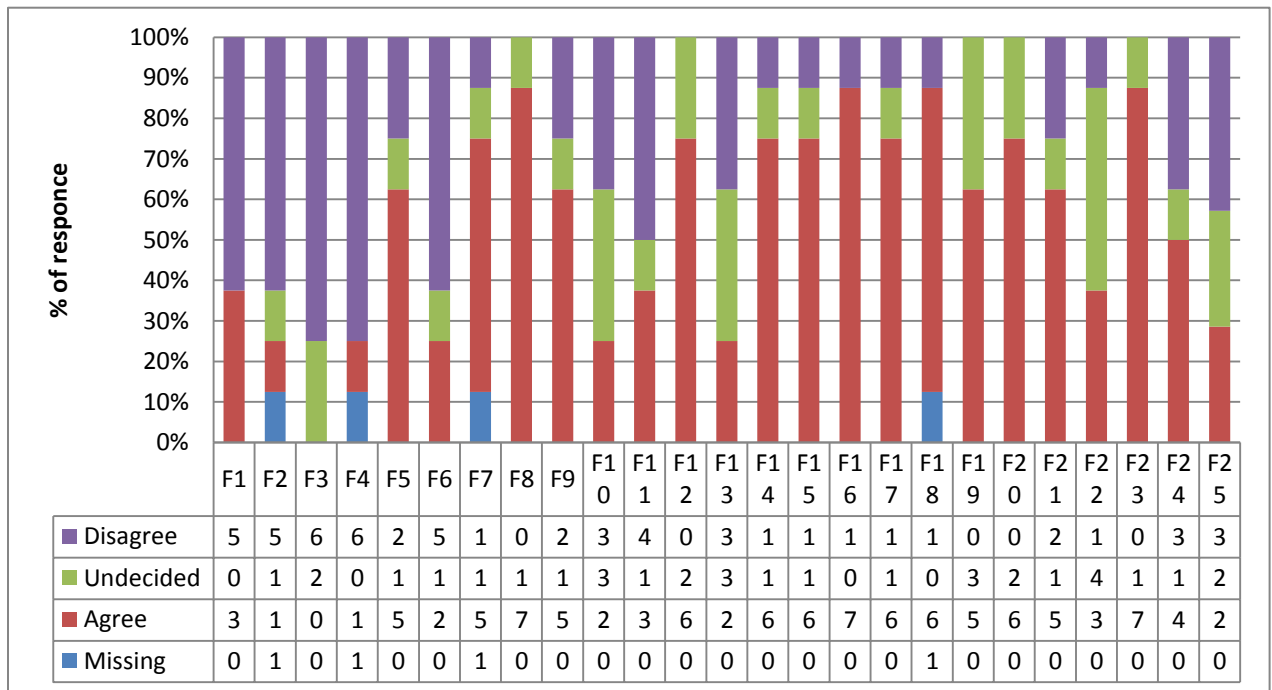
Twenty- five possible factors contributing to Early School Leaving were presented to Head Teachers.

Table 5.7: Possible Factors Contributing to Early School Leaving

Lack of school resources (including student-teacher ratio and class sizes - are students better off when they are in classes with a smaller amount of students?)	F1
Lack of teacher support and guidance	F2
The limited amount of students accepted in each course	F3
Repeating class	F4
Job opportunities (supply of low skilled labour)	F5
Discrimination, bullying and racism attitudes	F6
Lack of intellectual abilities	F7
Attendance pattern (the more students are absent from school the more likely to affect their decision to leave/continue schooling)	F8
Low academic performance (hw's, tests and exams)	F9
Substance abuse and alcoholism	F10
Vulnerable groups (students with mental and physical health problems like those with special needs, those with special education needs (SEN), the disabled and the "looked after")	F11
Socio-economic status of family (like parental income)	F12
Number of members in the family	F13
Parental separation	F14
Level of parental education (high level of parental education could be the case that it encourages students to continue studying)	F15
Family support in education	F16
Family structure (big Families, single parent families, domestic violence)	F17
Negative relationship between children and parents	F18
Clustering of same type of families	F19
Peer Pressure	F20
Demography (the area the students are coming from; southern, northern part of Malta etc)	F21
Having a child themselves	F22
Lack of interest in education	F23
Unwanted feeling (due to religious factors , skin colour, mental and physical conditions, disability)	F24
Others (like not feeling safe at school and more)	F25

The Head Teachers were asked to indicate the degree to which they thought these factors were relevant in their school using three indicators *Agree*, *Undecided* and *Disagree*.

Figure 5.24: Factors Contributing to Early School Leaving



The result in Figure 5.24 clearly indicates that: ‘Attendance pattern’, ‘Family support in education’ and ‘Lack of interest in education’, all feature strongly in the agree categories. The ‘socio-economic status of family’, ‘Parental separation’, ‘level of parental education’, ‘Family structure’, ‘Negative relationship between children and parents’ and ‘Peer Pressure’ also appeared to be important with six of the Head Teachers indicating that they *agree* with the relevance of these factors.

Mostly *disagreed* with ‘The limited amount of students accepted in each course’ and ‘repeating class’ as being contributory factors and many were undecided about the factor referring to having a child when students are young.

5.4.4 Teacher- Student Relationship

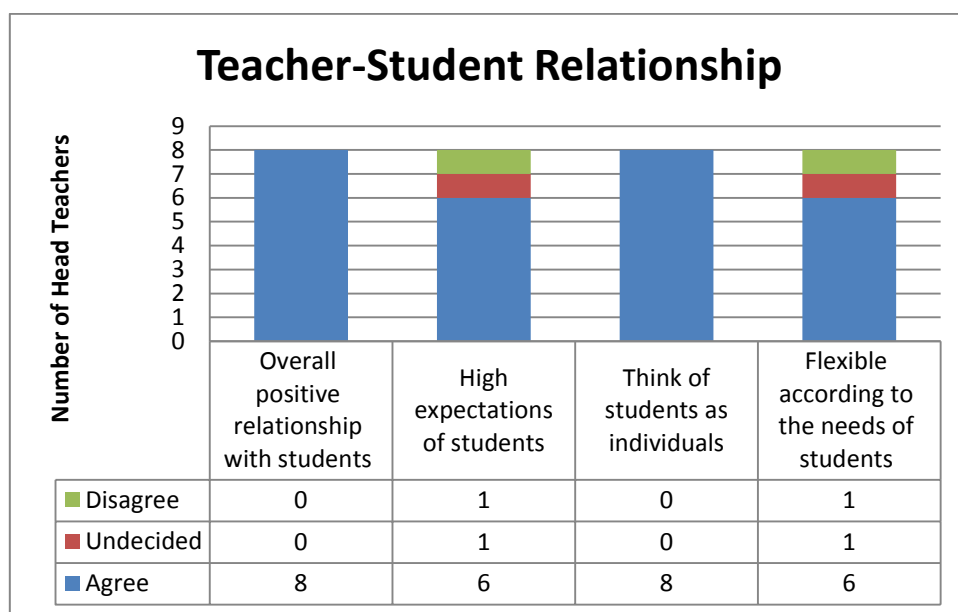


Figure 5.25: Teacher-Student Relationship

Head Teachers were also provided with four statements contributing to teacher-student relationship in which they were asked to indicate the extent to which these statements were true in their school. All Head Teachers agreed that there was an ‘overall positive relationship of teachers with students’ and that teachers considered each student as an individual and thus understood that all students had different abilities and needs when it

comes to learning. The majority also agreed that the teachers were ‘flexible according to the needs of the students’ and ‘had high expectations of students’.

When asked whether they thought that there are enough staff available in each school that could help students in their scholastic and personal problems, 50% replied no and the other 50% said yes.

Suggestions in order to improve this situation were recommended and are presented in the Table 5.8.

Table 5.8: Suggestions

Human Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stronger teams from the psycho-social area - Increase the number of guidance teachers, counsellors and psychologists. 2. Teachers of vocational subjects and youth workers.
Legislation	Adequate, appropriate and effective legislation.

In fact, the availability of **teacher support and guidance** were also cited as important factors in literature, as those students who are guided well throughout their studies are less likely to drop out of school.

5.4.5 Characteristics which Encourage and Motivate Students to Continue with Their Studies

Head Teachers were also asked to attach a value from 1 (lowest) to 3 (highest) to a number of factors that may encourage and motivate students to continue their education. The results are presented in Figure 5.26.

Figure 5.26: Characteristics that Motivate Students to Continue with Their Studies

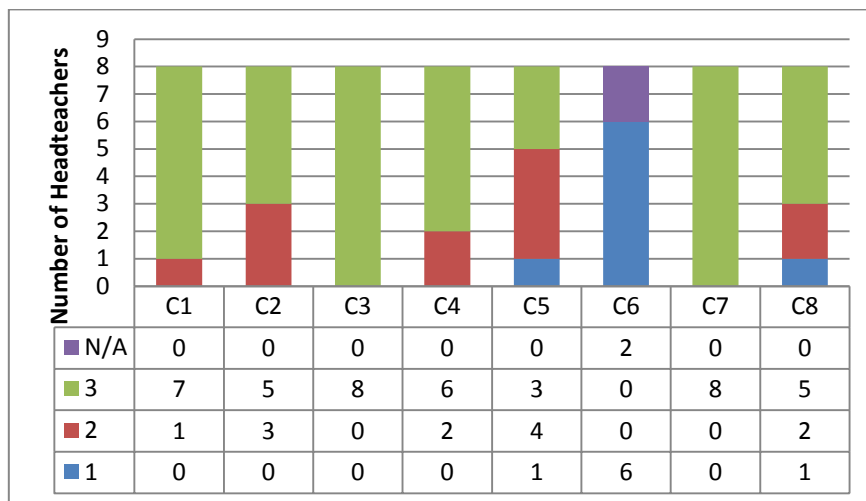


Table 5.9: Characteristics that Motivate Students to Continue with Their Studies

C1	More educational support from family members
C2	Availability of after school programs in order to help students in their studies
C3	Availability of opportunities to students with regards to practical subjects and less emphasis given on theoretical aspects of the subjects.
C4	Providing opportunities of work related to the studies that the students are undertaking during secondary schools
C5	Availability of information and services (better guidance to students) about the jobs available in the economy (so that they can make the right choice when choosing a job)
C6	Not allocating students in classes according to districts
C7	Offering subjects that students are more interested in
C8	Opportunities to pursue extracurricular interests and develop talents

As illustrated in Figure 5.26, the majority viewed 'Availability of opportunities to students with regards to practical subjects and less emphasis given on theoretical aspects of the subjects' and 'Offering subjects that people are more interested in' as the most important characteristics. More educational support from the family was also viewed as another important motivator for students to help them continue education. The least favoured was 'not allocating students in classes according to districts' since many stated that students are allocated in classes according to the subjects chosen and not according to the area they come from. Finally other reasons suggested were the provision of the Alternative Learning Programme (ALP), which offers students possible alternatives by giving them the opportunity to study and work at the same time.

5.4.6 Some General Opinions

When asked for a general opinion on Early School Leaving in Malta, overall, everyone agreed that this is a serious problem that begins at the stage of primary education. Head Teachers recognized that as a country Malta has a big problem of absenteeism which is the outcome of the lack of interest and support towards education from the parents' side. Many stated that the exploitation of the welfare system was mostly to blame.

Some also mentioned the fact that children are provided with subjects that they are not interested in and that the policies implemented do not reflect our situation today.

5.5 Findings from the Questionnaires: Managers

5.5.1 Early School Leavers and Their Approach towards Work.

When asked what their opinion on Early School Leavers was, nearly all managers agreed upon three important observations. They all realise that these people would simply want to go out to work because they want money. Secondly they realised the Early School Leavers are more interested in jobs that require manual trade. Some managers also observed that Early School Leavers come from unsupportive or broken families.

An important observation by one particular manager was that these people were so young that they would be undecided of the career path that they would want to choose. It is a problem that relates to parents as well since the educational focus is nowadays lacking at home especially when both parents have a job themselves.

Various opinions were given when asked about the approach of these people towards work. Some argued that the attitude of early school leavers towards work is very low and the approach towards work in terms of behaviour, responsibility and soft skills at the place of work is also lacking. On the contrary, other managers argued that these people have positive attitudes towards work and that they seem to work harder when it comes to manual labour to maintain their job. In fact some of these people nowadays are even

leaders at their place of work because the main reason that they leave school is usually that they are not interested in learning or else because of financial problems.

5.5.2 Early School Leavers and Training

Managers stated that even though these people do participate in training provided by the company (like health and safety and on the job training), many would not be interested in other academic training. As observed, such behavior arises as a consequence of lack of self esteem, as these Early School Leavers simply do not believe that they are capable of passing an exam (as previously highlighted in the literature). Apart from this, many a times, academic training takes place in the weekend or else after work hours and although some would be willing to enhance their competences, training or courses after working hours would put them off in deciding to attend such courses. Some of these early school leavers work on a shift basis which makes it even more difficult to take up other initiatives.

5.5.3 Workplaces Initiative to Further the Workers' Education

All workplaces stated that they support education. However because of the reasons stated in the section above; these people opt to not undertake any further academic courses. One particular participant also stated that she would like to send her workers on a course related to technical work as in this way they might feel more responsible for the work they do as well.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed interpretation of the findings obtained. It indicates that diverse factors are the root to the Early School Leaving problem in Malta. With our Early School Leaving rate placing the third from the bottom amongst all member states, the analysis above presents the awareness to the efforts needed to overcome such an issue.

Chapter 6: Implications, Policies and Recommendations

This study was set up to identify the key factors which lead Maltese students to decide to leave school early. The rate of Early School Leavers in Malta has been a concern to various groups of stakeholders. Hence, by consulting educators, employers and Early School Leavers, this study focused on outlining the barriers that prevent these young people from achieving their educational potential and thus from contributing fully to the social and economic development.

6.1 Implications

One of the aspects which contribute to the number of Early School Leavers is the education system itself. Existing research suggests that a displeasing relationship between an educator and a student is one of the main reasons that can lead students to leave school early. Yet, according to this study, the teacher-student relationship does not seem to have had a major impact on the academic performance of students or on the decision not to continue with their education. It seems that though some Early School Leavers did sometimes feel uncomfortable with their educators, or that the latter were not always helpful, yet the majority of Early Leavers still had a positive relationship with their teachers. However, the experience of students at school is only one of the substantial contributing factors to Early School Leaving.

This research has confirmed that some students quit education because, in Malta, people with low qualifications are still provided with labour opportunities. In fact, the vast majority of young people that took part in this research were employed. The Head Teachers that were interviewed foresee this factor as being influential on a young person's educational career, while the Managers admitted that they do sometimes need people with a low level of education to do some of the work that they provide.

Family factors also appeared to be of significance throughout the whole study. The majority of Head Teachers categorized family support, family structure and the relationship between students and their parents as being highly significant in terms of Early School Leaving. From this research, it comes into view that parents who do not value education can have a substantial and negative influence on a young person's educational career. Almost half of the Early School Leaver participants claimed that their fathers performed skilled manual occupations, while only a few said that their parents achieved a tertiary level of education. Thus, this study is consistent with other literature that states that children of graduated parents are more likely to continue their studies. In addition, this research has confirmed that more guidance from home, such as help and supervision in homework, would have encouraged the majority of school leavers to continue with their studies.

Individual characteristics also emerged as an important contribution towards the decision of leaving school early. However, such characteristics are sometimes difficult to distinguish

from family related factors, since they would be related to a young person's upbringing and to the importance given to education within the family. Even though a high percentage of the school leavers claimed that they attended school on a regular basis, the majority of the Head Teachers identified the high rate of absenteeism as one of the main pull out factors from school. Lack of interest in the subjects provided and in education also featured as a significant matter throughout the study. In addition to this, the research also indicates that some students choose to quit education because many feel that they are not good at school.

Last but not least, the study identified that the majority of the early school leavers surveyed come from the South Eastern District with more than half of the respondents being males, indicating that males are more likely to disengage from school and that Early School Leaving is more of a problem in certain areas of Malta.

6.2 The Effects of Early School Leaving

Early School Leaving is recognised as one of the major challenges faced by the European society. It slows down economic development (European Parliament, 2011) and thus, a benchmark to achieve a level of no more than 10% of Early School Leavers by 2010 was set by the European Council in order to obtain smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Early School Leaving is a representation of waste of individual life opportunities and unfortunately in Europe, thousands of young people leave school early with the consequence of not having the sufficient skills for later life, increasing the risk of social exclusion, poverty and unemployment. Early School Leavers are more likely to be in low paid jobs and less likely to be 'active citizens' and thus more depend on welfare and social programmes (European Parliament, 2011; Europa, 2013). Crime, violence and substance abuse are more likely to be found among these young students (Youth Forum Yuenesse, 2008) however, as a concept, it contributes to wider economic costs in terms of higher welfare payments, lower tax revenues and lower productivity. It also generates a lot of social costs with an increased demand on the health system and lower social coherence (NESSE, 2010). Apart from this, Member States are also concerned with the increasing skill mismatches that are occurring due to the fact that economies are in need of highly skilled employees and besides all this, due to the demographic changes that the European countries are going through, they cannot afford to continue losing human skills (Gyonos, 2011; Commission Staff working paper, 2010; European Commission, 2013).

Having one of the highest rates in Europe, Malta seems to be very worried because apart from the fact that as a country we are still far away from the stipulated target of 10%, it is also detrimental to the objective of making lifelong learning a reality.

6.3 Policies and Recommendations

Policies to reduce Early School Leaving must be developed in a way adaptable to the national conditions. In our country, various measures have been developed and implemented in order to reduce the rate. Policy actions include grants and vouchers offered to attract individuals to continue learning (GHK, 2013). In the national reform program under the Europe 2020 Strategy, it was indicated that earlier on in 2013, a plan was launched by the Ministry for Education and Employment, with the aim to reach Europe 2020 targets.

The implementation of the new curriculum framework, and the development of new forms of learning, like e-learning and the availability of opportunities for vocational education training during compulsory education years, were all being considered in terms of preventive measures. On the other hand, intervention measures, like further guidance during compulsory education and review of existing measures with a focus on school, teacher collaboration and parents, were also considered. In addition to this, the introduction of a multi-stakeholder approach to address the needs of particular groups of students at risk of Early School Leaving was also taken into consideration.

Apart from the above, Head Teachers mentioned that schools are providing learning zones (Programmes specially organised for students that need some form of help) as a measure to help students to stay for longer at schools. Job Shadowing opportunities,

orientation visits, career talks and programmes for parents providing instructions as how to motivate their children to go to school are also provided.

Additionally, the study suggests that; first and foremost, Early School Leaving is an issue that must be tackled from the early years of the educational process. Providing subjects that are more enjoyable and interesting to students is another measure that could be used to reduce Early School Leaving. The implementation of the Alternative Learning Programme (ALP)⁴ and the availability of more practically oriented subject were also put forth by the respondents as measures that might serve to engage students in education for a longer period of time.

Substitution of exams with a continuous academic assessment was also suggested. This implies that students would not be graded solely on a yearly exam but instead, on continuous assessment throughout the year. This might in turn elevate the self esteem of students and thus help to encourage them to continue with their education.

Further suggestions emanating from the study relate to the provision of information services to both parents and students concerning career paths. Job shadowing also featured as a motivational factor that would help pupils to engage for longer in education. This is because such initiatives would give students more work exposure, providing them

⁴ This programme offers students possible alternatives by giving them the opportunity to study and work at the same time.

with the awareness of the responsibilities of such jobs and thus in this way students could decide better on the occupational path that they want to follow.

Participants put forth suggestions that focused on better parental involvement, stressing the important role parents play in encouraging their children in going to school. Some also emphasised the need for more human resources in the psycho-social area so that help could be provided to students facing problems. Head Teachers also felt that adoption of harsher penalties with regards to absenteeism might help reduce this problem which in turn may alter the rate of school leaving.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

This study attempted to indicate what causes young people in Malta to disengage from school. The research presents that Early School Leaving is a multifaceted process influenced by various factors. Even though the school leaving experience differs from one person to another, one can say that the root of such process lies in the primary stage of education.

Even though policies have been undertaken, much work still needs to be done. Effective policies need to be created in a way that they incorporate all the aspects that trigger Early School Leaving. Reducing Early School Leaving inclusively requires a precarious review of the entire Maltese education system. At the end of the day, lessening such a rate is

important in our country as it does not only benefit the school leavers themselves but all the individuals, society and the economy as a whole.

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School: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Gender: male female

Where do you live? : _____

1. How do you think schools in Malta are preparing students well for the following :

	Not so well	Well	Very Well
To get along well with others			
To know how to learn			
To continue schooling (after their secondary education)			

- 2 A. Do you think Early School Leaving (“defined as those persons between 18 and 24 years of age whose highest education level of education or training is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short and who are not in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey as a percentage of the total population of those aged 18 to 24.” (NSO, 2013) is a problem in your school?

yes no

B. If yes, is it too much of a problem? Comment

- 3 The following outline possible factors contributing to young people leaving school early. Indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with these factors by placing (/) under the applicable box (according to your school)

	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Lack of school resources (including student-teacher ratio and class sizes - are students better off when they are in classes with a smaller amount of students?)			
Lack of teacher support and guidance			
The limited amount of students accepted in each course			
Repeating class			
Job opportunities (supply of low skilled labour)			
Discrimination, bullying and racism attitudes			
Lack of intellectual abilities			
Attendance pattern (the more students are absent from school the more likely to effect their decision to leave/continue schooling)			
Low academic performance (hw's, tests and exams)			
Substance abuse and alcoholism			
Vulnerable groups (students with mental and physical health problems like those with special needs, those with special education needs (SEN), the disabled and the "looked after")			
Socio-economic status of family (like parental income)			
Number of members in the family			
Parental separation			
Level of parental education (high level of parental education could be the case that it encourages students to continue studying)			
Family support in education			
Family structure (big Families, single parent families , domestic violence)			
Negative relationship between children and parents			
Clustering of same type of families			
Peer Pressure			
Demography (the area the students are coming from; southern, northern part of Malta etc)			
Having a child themselves			
Lack of interest in education			

Unwanted feeling (due to religious factors , skin colour, mental and physical conditions, disability			
Others (like not feeling safe at school and more)			

- 4 Thinking about the teachers in this school (overall), how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements. For each statement please check the applicable box.

	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
Overall positive relationship with students			
High expectations of students			
Think of students as individuals			
Flexible according to the needs of students			

- 5 A. Do you think that in Malta, there are enough persons available in each school who could help students in their scholastic and personal problems?

Yes

No

- B. List one suggestion that could be done to improve this situation

- 6 Attach a value from 1 to 3 (1;lowest, 3; highest) to the following characteristics, that according to you will encourage and motivates students to continue on with their studies ?

	More educational support from family members
--	--

	Availability of after school programmes in order to help students in their studies
	Availability of opportunities to students with regards to practical subjects and less emphasis given on theoretical aspects of the subjects
	Providing opportunities of work related to the studies that the students are undertaking during secondary schools
	Availability of information and services (better guidance to students) about the jobs available in the economy (so that they can make the right choice when choosing a job)
	Not allocating students in classes according to districts
	Offering subjects that students are more interested in
	Opportunities to pursue extracurricular interests and develop talents
	Others :

7 What measures are taken into consideration to be implemented in your school so as to motivate students to continue education ? Are there any measures undertaken at the moment?

8 How do you think it is best to lessen the problem of Early School Leaving? What is the best way to deal with early school leaving in our country?

9 In general what do you think of Early School Leaving in Malta?

10 Other general opinions

Thank You

Early School Leavers: Survey

Workplace: _____

Date of birth: _____

Gender: male female other

Where do you live? _____

1. How old were you, when you started to receive some form of education?

Years

2. What school did you attend for primary education?

3. What was the name of your secondary school?

4. How many times were you absent from school every month?

In primary school:

0 – 3 days

4 – 7 days

More than
7 days

In secondary school:

0 – 3 days

4 – 7 days

More than
7 days

5. What do you think of your academic performance in the following subjects?

	Poor	Not bad	Good	Excellent
Maltese				
English				
Maths				

6. Did the school provide subjects that interested you most?

yes no

If no, what subjects were you interested in? _____

7. a) How was the relationship with the majority of the teachers?

Good Quite Good Not Good

b) Did you find any help from your teachers when you were facing academic problems? Tick the appropriate box

A lot Not so much Nothing

8. a) How many friends did you have at school? (Tick the appropriate box)

A lot Few No friends

b) Did the majority of your friends (friends from school and other friends) manage to continue their education till the age of 16?

Yes

No

I don't know

9. a) How many members are there in your family? Members

b) Status of your parents:

Married

Separated

Single parent

c) What is the highest level of education acquired by your parents ?

Father

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

Mother

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

d) What is the occupation of your parents?

Father _____

Mother _____

10. Were your parents, (or any other member of your family) helpful with your homework?

In primary: yes no?

In secondary: yes no

11. What were the main factors that you consider to be the main causes leaving school so early .Tick the most appropriate factors.

	I felt that I was not good at school (delivered poor results)
	I was not interested in education
	I had a bad relationship with the teachers and other administrative staff of the school.
	I was bullied at school.
	I felt different/ unwanted by my peers (due to religious factors , skin colour, mental and physical conditions, disability)
	I suffered drug and alcohol problems
	I had a child to look after
	Peer Pressure
	Family problems
	Opportunity of jobs
	Other reasons _____.

12. How old were you when you dropped out of school years

13. Tick the most appropriate characteristics, that according to you will encourage and motivate students to continue with their studies? (You can tick more than one)

	More educational support from family members
	Availability of after school programs in order to help students with their studies
	Availability of opportunities to students with regards to practical subjects and less emphasis given on the theoretical aspects of the subjects
	Providing opportunities of work related to the studies that the students are undertaking during secondary schools
	Availability of information and services (better guidance to students) about the jobs available in the economy (so that they can make the right choice when choosing a job)
	Not allocating students in classes according to districts

	Offering subjects that students are more interested in
	Opportunities to pursue extracurricular interests and develop talents
	Others :

14. Are you in some form of course or training at the moment? Specify

yes

no

Thank You

Kwestjonarju

Post tax-xogħol: _____

Data tat-twelid: _____

Sess: raġel mara oħrajn

Il-belt jew raħal fejn toqgħod: _____

1. Kemm kellek żmien meta bdejt tattendi għal xi forma ta' edukazzjoni?

snin

2. F'liema skola primarja kont tattendi?

3. F'liema skola sekondarja kont tattendi?

4. Bejn wieħed u ieħor, kemm-il darba kont tfalli fix-xahar?

fl-iskola primarja:

0 – 3
darbiet

4 – 7
darbiet

iktar minn
7 darbiet

fl-iskola sekondarja:

0 – 3
darbiet

4 – 7
darbiet

iktar minn
7 darbiet

5. Kif tħoss li kont tmur fl-eżamijiet tal-

	ħażin	mhux ħażin	tajjeb	tajjeb ħafna
Malti				
Ingliz				
Matematika				

6. L-iskola kienet tipprovdi tagħlim fis-suġġett/i li xtaqt inti?

iva le

Jekk le, liema suġġett/i xtaqt tkompli tistudja? _____

7. a) Kif kont tmur mal-maġġoranza tal-għalliema?

tajjeb mhux ħażin ħażin

b) Kemm tħoss li kont issib għajnuna min-naħa tal-għalliema biex tkompli tavanza fl-iskola?

ħafna ffit xejn

8. a) Kellek ħbieb l-iskola?

ħafna ffit xejn

b) Il-maġġoranza tal-ħbieb tiegħek (ħbieb tal-iskola jew ħbieb oħrajn), komplew l-iskola sa meta kellhom sittax-il sena?

iva le ma nafx

9. a) Kemm qegħdin membri fil-familja? membri

b) Il-ġenituri tiegħek huma:

miżżewġin

separati

ġenitur wieħed

ċ) X'inhu l-ogħla livell ta' edukazzjoni li għandhom il-ġenituri tiegħek?

il-missier

primarja

sekondarja

terzjarja

l-omm

primarja

sekondarja

terzjarja

d) X'inhu x-xogħol ta':

missierek _____ ommok _____

10. Kont issib għajjnuna mill-ġenituri jew xi membri oħra tal-familja biex tagħmel ix-xogħol tal-iskola:

fil-primarja: iva le? **fis-sekondarja:** iva le?

11. Liema minn dawn il-fatturi imsemmija hawn taħt taħseb li affetwaw id-deċizjoni tiegħek biex tieqaf mill-iskola. (Tista' timmarka iktar minn waħda.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Kont inħossni li m'inhix tajjeb fl-iskola.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ma kellix interess fl-iskola.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kelli relazzjoni ħażina mal-għalliema u l-amministrazzjoni tal-iskola.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kont <i>bullied</i> fl-iskola.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kont inħossni differenti / mhux aċċettat minn sħabi (minħabba reliġjon, kulur tal-ġilda, kundizzjonijiet fiżiċi jew mentali, diżabilità)

	Kelli problemi ta' alkoħol jew droga.
	Jien u s-sieħeb/sieħba tiegħi kellna tarbija qabel spiċċajt l-iskola.
	Ridt nagħmel bħal sħabi.
	Minħabba sitwazzjonijiet fil-familja.
	Kelli diġà opportunità ta' xogħol.
	Raġuni oħra _____.

12. Kemm kellek żmien meta waqaft għall-kollox mill-iskola?

snin

13. Liema minn dawn il-fatturi taħseb li setgħu jinkuraġġuk biex tkompli l-iskola?
(Tista' timmarka iktar minn waħda.)

	Iktar sapport minn membri tal-familja fl-edukazzjoni.
	Programmi speċjali wara l-ħin tal-iskola biex jgħinuk fl-edukazzjoni.
	L-iskola tipprovd iktar opportunitajiet f'suġġetti prattiċi u inqas enfasi fuq it-tijorija.
	Esperjenzi ta' xogħol pprovduti b'koperazzjoni bejn l-iskola sekondarja u s-settur tax-xogħol.
	Iktar servizzi ta' informazzjoni, min-naħa tal-iskola, biex nagħzel xogħol aħjar.
	Li l-klassi tkun imħallta bi studenti li jkunu ġejjin minn rħula differenti
	Li l-iskola toffri iktar suġġetti li jkunu ta' nteress għall-istudenti
	Opportunitajiet li jwasslu biex il-persuna tikseb it-talenti tagħha aħjar kif ukoll tinteressa ruħha f'attivitajiet extrakurrikulari
	Fatturi Oħra. Ikkummenta: _____

14. Bħalissa qiegħed tieħu xi kors ta' taħriġ? Speċifika.

Grazzi

Managers : Survey

Workplace/ Institution: _____

Date of birth: _____

Gender: male female others

Where do you live? _____

1. What is your opinion of the Early School Leavers?
What is the approach of these people towards work ?

2. What is the reaction of these people when they have to undergo some form of training ?

3. What is your company doing in order to encourage these people to proceed in further education or training

4. Other comments

Kwestjonarju

Post tax-xogħol/ Istituzzjoni : _____

Data tat-twelid: _____

Sess: raġel mara oħrajn

Il-belt jew raħal fejn toqgħod: _____

1. Kif taħseb li jħarsu lejn ix-xogħol dawn in-nies li daħlu fid-dinja tax-xogħol u m'għandom l-ebda' kwalifikazzjonijiet?

2. Kif jaġixxu għall-fatt li jkollom jaġhmlu sħarriġ fuq il-post tax-xogħol?

3. X'qed tagħmlu minn naħa tal-post tax-xogħol biex tneġġu l-ħaddiema jkomplu bl-edukazzjoni tagħhom?

4. Kummenti Oħra

Appendix 2: Total Number of Places Contacted

Fosterclark	Miss Selfridge
Rimus Riley Ltd	Suite Blanco
Union Print (Printing Publishing)	Dizz Ltd : Terranova
Print It Printing Services	Gafa (cleaning)
Printex Ltd	Abartex
Guttenberg Press	RM Design Ltd
Methode Electronics Malta Ltd.	Price Breakers Ltd : Cenndie Gel Malta
Farsons	Drop Chemicals Ltd
Quintano Foods	Nectar Group of Companies
Fildan Accessories	Nestle Malta
Bortex (Fine Tailoring)	Danish bakery
Delta (Malta) Ltd	EMY NUTS
JS Dimech	Goodies
Metallform Malta Ltd	Western Productions
Darrell Lea Foods Ltd	The General Soft Drinks Company Ltd
Consolidated Biscuit Co.Ltd	Electric Supplies and Services Limited
Motherwell Bridge	ST Micro electronics
Hili Company : Mc Donalds	Youth.Inc
Trelleborg Sealing Solutions	Employment and Training Corporation (ETC)
Playmobil	

Appendix 3 : Consent Letters and Consent Forms

Managers Consent letter

Date:

Dear Participant,

I am Jessica Spiteri and I am a student reading for a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) in Economics at the University of Malta. As part of my dissertation I am doing a research on Early School Leavers in Malta. I am interested in finding out more about the experiences and the factors that may lead students to discontinue their education (in terms of family related issues, individual characteristics, the education system and labour market) in our country. I would like to conduct a survey with the employees that are between 18 and 24 years of age who, during the reference period of the survey are not in education or training and do not have at least 5 Ordinary levels (or equivalent qualification).

My survey is aimed to get an idea of what leads students to drop out of school. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to give me permission and some time to conduct the survey with your employees. You may also choose not to participate. The survey will last approximately 10 minutes.

The survey is confidential and will be used only as part of this dissertation. If you have any questions now or at any stage of this study please contact me. The research should give valuable insight of the factors that lead students to drop out of school here in Malta as well an idea of what could be done to improve this situation. Your participation is highly appreciated.
Thank you for your participation.

Jessica Spiteri

Tutor

Mobile Number :

E-mail:

Early School Leavers : Consent letter

Date:

Dear Participant,

I am Jessica Spiteri and I am a student reading for a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) in Economics at the University of Malta. As part of my dissertation I am doing a research on Early School Leavers in Malta. I am interested in finding out more about the experiences and the factors that may lead students to discontinue their education (in terms of family related issues, individual characteristics, the education system and labour market) in our country.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to give up some time to take part in my survey which will last approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The survey will focus on the factors that might have led you to leave school at such an early age. The survey is confidential and will be used only as part of the project outlined. You can choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time; however your participation would be highly appreciated.

The survey is confidential and will be used only as part of this dissertation. If you have any questions now or at any stage of this study please contact me. The research should give; valuable insight of the factors that lead students to drop out of school here in Malta as well an idea of what could be done to improve this situation.

Thank you for your participation

Jessica Spiteri

Tutor

Mobile number :

Email:

Ittra ta' Kunsens

Data:

Għażiż Parteċipant,

Jien Jessica Spiteri, studenta fl-Universita ta' Malta. Ninsab fl-aħħar sena tal-kors tiegħi għall Baċcellerat fl-Ekonomija. Qiegħda nagħmel studju dwar dawk l-istudenti li jtilqu minn kmieni mill-iskola u nteressata inkun naf x' esperjenzi u x' fatturi (bħall fatturi familjari, individwali, dawk li għandhom x' jaqsmu ma' l –edukazzjoni jew ma' xogħol) wasslu lil dawn in-nies biex ma jkomplux l-edukazzjoni tagħhom f'pajjizna.

Jekk inti interessat li tipparteċipa, inti mitlub li tagħti ftit mill-ħin tiegħek biex timla' dal-kwestjonarju. Il – kwestjonarju m'għandux jieħu aktar minn 10 jew 15-il minuta. Bħala kwestjonarju jiffoka fuq dawk il- fatturi li setgħu wassluk biex ma tkomplix l-edukazzjoni tiegħek. Dan il-kwestjonarju hu kunfidenzjali u ħa jiġi użat biss għall fini ta' dan l-istudju. Tista' tagħżel li ma tipparteċipax pero l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek hi apprezzata ferm.

Jekk għandek xi mistoqsijiet inti mitlub li ssaqsi jew inkella ċċempel fuq in-numru provdut hawn taħt. Dan l –istudju għandu juri stampa ċara tal-fatturi li jwasslu lill studenti biex ma jkomplux l-edukazzjoni tagħhom kif ukoll għandu jagħti idea ta' x'jista' jsir biex inaqqsu ftit minn din il-problema f'pajjiza.

Grazzi tal-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek

Jessica Spiteri

Tutor

Numru:

Head Teachers : Consent letter

Date:

Dear Participant,

I am Jessica Spiteri and I am a student reading for a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) in Economics at the University of Malta. As part of my dissertation I am doing a research on Early School Leavers in Malta. I am interested in finding out more about the experiences and the factors that may lead students to discontinue their education (in terms of family related issues, individual characteristics, the education system and labour market) in our country.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to give up some time to take part in my survey. The survey will focus on the factors that might have led students to leave school at such an early age. The survey is confidential and will be used only as part of the project outlined. You can choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time. However your participation would be highly appreciated. The survey will approximately last 10 to 15 minutes.

The survey is confidential and will be used only as part of this dissertation. If you have any questions now or at any stage of this study, please contact me. The research should give valuable insight of the factors that lead students to drop out of school here in Malta as well an idea of what could be done to improve this situation.

Thank you for your participation.

Jessica Spiteri

Tutor

Mobile number :

Email:

Youth.Inc Consent letter

Date:

Dear Participant,

I am Jessica Spiteri and I am a student reading for a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) in Economics at the University of Malta. As part of my dissertation I am doing a research on Early School Leavers in Malta. I am interested in finding out more about the experiences and the factors which may lead students to discontinue their education in our country. I would like to conduct a survey with the youths that are between 18 and 24 years of age who, during the reference period of the survey are not in education or training and, do not have at least 5 O levels (or an equivalent qualification).

My survey is aimed to get an idea of what leads students to drop out of school. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to give me permission and some time to conduct the survey with these youths. You may also choose not to participate. The survey will last approximately 10 minutes.

The survey is confidential and the information will only be used as part of the research in my dissertation. If you have any questions now or at any stage of this study please contact me. The research should give valuable insight of the factors which lead students to drop out of school here in Malta as well an idea of what could be done to improve this situation. Your participation is highly appreciated.

Thank you for your participation

Jessica Spiteri

Tutor

Mobile number :

E-mail :