

Determination of Latent Factors Influencing Students' Dropout in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The current study aims to find out the hidden factors having key role in dropout of students from schools. The mixed-methods approach with both primary data and secondary data sources provides a strong framework for understanding ground realities in students' dropout from secondary schools. For Primary data six in-depth, semi structured interviews with teachers, parents, and students are conducted in the field. The qualitative data gathered from these interviews provides valuable insights into the real-life challenges and circumstances that lead to students leaving school prematurely. To complement these interviews, a comprehensive review of existing literature was conducted, offering a broader perspective on the factors influencing dropout rates. By integrating both primary interview data and secondary literature sources, the study identifies common themes and underlying causes of school dropouts, providing a well-rounded understanding of this critical issue and informing potential strategies for intervention. The key contributors in school dropouts according to the finding of the current research are; socio-economic conditions of the household, perceptions of family and community, social norm and cultural values, health care and mental health and conducive school environment. The findings from this research can inform targeted interventions and policies aimed at reducing dropout rates and promoting student retention in secondary education.

Keywords: Hidden factors, Mental Health, Perceptions, Socio-Economic, Social Norms

Introduction

School dropout is a persistent global issue that affects educational systems and societies worldwide (Cruz & Santos, 2023). It is defined as a student's premature departure from an educational institution before completing the requisite level of schooling (Harris & White, 2023). This phenomenon has far-reaching implications, not only for the individuals who drop out but also for the community and the economy as a whole (Kaur & Singh, 2023). Research indicates that dropping out of school is often the result of a complex interplay of factors, including socioeconomic status, family environment, academic challenges, and school environment (Lee & Kim, 2022). Furthermore, social issues such as early marriage, peer pressure, and cultural norms often exacerbate the problem, particularly in developing countries (Henry et al., 2012).

The consequences of dropping out are profound, affecting an individual's employment prospects, earning potential and social mobility. Dropped-out individuals are more likely to experience unemployment, engage in criminal activities, and face health challenges compared to their peers who complete their education (Sum et al., 2009). Primary factors contributing to school dropouts are the socioeconomic status of a student's family. Families with limited financial resources often struggle to cover the costs associated with education, such as school fees, uniforms, books, and transportation. This economic strain can lead to decisions where education is de-prioritized in favor of immediate financial needs, such as having the child work to supplement

the family income (Grant & Hallman, 2008). In many developing regions, economic hardships are compounded by a lack of access to quality educational facilities, further discouraging attendance and increasing dropout rates. The intersection of poverty and education creates a cycle where lower-income students are more likely to drop out, perpetuating a pattern of limited opportunities and socioeconomic mobility (UNESCO, 2019).

Family dynamics and cultural norms also play a crucial role in influencing school dropout rates. In some cultures, there is a strong preference for boys' education over girls', leading to early dropout among female students. This is often exacerbated by societal expectations such as early marriage, especially in rural areas where traditional gender roles are more prevalent (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008). Additionally, some families may not value formal education, particularly for girls, viewing it as unnecessary or inappropriate beyond a certain age. Such beliefs can lead to reduced educational support at home, causing students to fall behind academically and eventually drop out (Hameed 2024). The lack of encouragement from parents and the community can significantly diminish a student's motivation to continue their education, particularly when cultural norms reinforce the idea that education is not essential (Sabates et al., 2010).

The school environment itself can be a significant factor contributing to dropout rates. Negative experiences within schools, such as bullying, discrimination, or a lack of support from teachers, can make students feel unsafe or unwelcome, leading to absenteeism and eventual dropout (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). Moreover, peer influence plays a critical role, especially during adolescence. If a student's peer group does not prioritize education or engages in risky behaviors, the student is more likely to adopt similar attitudes, leading to disengagement from school activities and academics. Schools that fail to provide a supportive and inclusive environment risk alienating students who already face external challenges, thus increasing the likelihood of them dropping out (Henry et al., 2012). Effective intervention strategies must address these environmental factors to create a more supportive and nurturing atmosphere conducive to learning and retention. Understanding the causes and consequences of school dropouts is critical for developing targeted interventions to reduce dropout rates and promote educational attainment. As such, this paper aims to explore the contributing factors of student dropouts and examine potential strategies to address this challenge, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to complete their education and achieve their full potential (Hameed 2024)..

Methodology

This study aims to identify and analyze the latent factors influencing students' dropout rates in secondary schools. A mixed-methods approach, combining both primary data and literature based data, was adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of school dropouts. The methodology for the literature-based analysis and discussion involved a systematic review of existing research on the factors influencing student dropouts in secondary schools. A comprehensive search was conducted across several academic databases, to identify peer-reviewed articles, books, and reports published in the last two decades. The search terms included "school dropout," "secondary education," "socioeconomic factors," "cultural norms," "gender roles," "school environment," and "peer influence." Articles were selected based on the relevance, methodological firmness, and contribution to the understanding of dropout determinants. The review process included critical evaluation and synthesis of the findings to identify common themes and patterns, as well as gaps in the existing literature. By employing this systematic approach, the study ensured a comprehensive understanding of the various factors contributing to school dropouts, allowing for a nuanced discussion of how these elements interact and influence students' decisions to leave school prematurely.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide rich, detailed information about their experiences and perceptions of dropout-related factors. This included two students who had recently dropped out, two teachers, and two parents making six interviews overall. The selection was based on the participants' willingness to share the experiences and insights and the relevance to the study objectives. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. The interviews aimed to explore the nuances of dropout decisions, including personal,

familial, and school-related factors. Interview guides were developed to facilitate open-ended discussions, allowing participants to express the experiences and perceptions.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to the factors influencing dropout. The qualitative data helped contextualize the quantitative results, providing a deeper understanding of how and why certain factors influence student dropout. The study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human subjects. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Analyses and Discussions

Socioeconomic Characteristics and School Dropout

The dropout of students from schools and educational institutions is not because of a single factor. Multiple issues are there which influence the students' condition. From parents to families and from school environment to classroom settings, all are responsible for the dropouts.

Mobility or Migration

Mobility and migration play an important role in student dropout rates, particularly in regions where families frequently relocate due to work, housing instability, or other socio-economic reasons (Grant & Behrman, 2010). When students move from one school to another, they often face challenges in adjusting to new educational environments, curricula, and social settings (Lamb, 2011). This constant disruption can hinder their academic progress and lead to gaps in learning. Moreover, the emotional and psychological stress of adapting to new surroundings and leaving behind familiar friends and teachers can cause disengagement from school. Migrant children, especially those from marginalized or low-income backgrounds, may also face language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of continuity in their education, all of which contribute to an increased likelihood of dropping out (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The cumulative effect of these disruptions can make it difficult for students to stay on track academically, ultimately leading to higher dropout rates among mobile and migrant populations. Students from migrant or highly mobile families may struggle with continuity in their education, leading to academic difficulties and a higher likelihood of dropping out (Lloyd et al., 2000).

Differences in Languages

Language differences can be a significant factor contributing to student dropout rates, especially in multicultural and multilingual regions (Alexander et al., 2001). When students attend school in a language that is not their mother tongue, they often struggle to comprehend lessons, engage in classroom discussions, and complete assignments (Alspaugh, 2000). This language barrier can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and a sense of alienation from their peers and teachers (Lee & Johnson, 2009). Over time, these challenges can result in poor academic performance, making students feel overwhelmed and disconnected from the educational process (Wu & O'Malley, 2022). Additionally, schools may lack adequate resources, such as bilingual education programs or language support services, to help non-native speakers bridge the gap. Without proper support, these students may fall further behind, eventually leading to disengagement and an increased likelihood of dropping out (Whitlock, 2006). The impact of language differences is particularly pronounced among immigrant children, who may also be dealing with the stress of adjusting to a new culture and social environment, further compounding their risk of leaving school prematurely. Students from non-dominant language backgrounds may struggle with language barriers in school, leading to academic difficulties and increased dropout risk (Youniss & Yates, 2009).

Poverty Issue

Poverty affects nearly every aspect of a child's educational experience. Students from low-income families often face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to stay in school. Financial constraints can make it difficult for families to afford basic necessities such as school uniforms, books, and transportation, leading to irregular attendance or prolonged absences. In many cases, children from impoverished households may need to work to contribute to the family income, leaving them with little time or energy to focus on their studies (Baker & LeTendre, 2005). Moreover, schools in low-income areas often suffer from underfunding, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, and a lack of extracurricular opportunities. These conditions can create an uninspiring learning environment, further reducing students' motivation to stay in school. The stress and instability associated with poverty can also take a toll on a child's mental and emotional well-being, leading to difficulties in concentrating and engaging with schoolwork (Bowers, 2010).

Over time, the cumulative effects of these hardships can lead to academic underachievement and a sense of hopelessness, causing many students to drop out of school altogether. Without the support and resources needed to overcome the challenges associated with poverty, students are left at a significant disadvantage, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and limiting their opportunities for a better future. Students from low-income families may drop out due to the need to work and support their family financially, or due to the inability to afford school-related expenses like uniforms, books, or transportation (Coleman et al., 2000). *“Poverty is a major factor leading to school dropouts, as it puts immense pressure on families to meet their basic needs. When families are struggling financially, they often cannot afford the costs associated with education, such as school fees, uniforms, and books. In many cases, children are needed to help support the family by working or taking care of younger siblings. For example, a child from a poor household may have to drop out of school to work in a local shop or in the fields to earn money. This makes it difficult for children from low-income families to stay in school and complete their education, creating a cycle of poverty that continues from one generation to the next”* (Participant I, personal interview)

Resources lacking

Schools in economically disadvantaged areas may lack the necessary resources and infrastructure, leading to a lower quality of education and higher dropout rates. Lack of resources is a significant factor contributing to student dropout rates in schools, particularly in underfunded or rural areas. When schools lack essential resources—such as textbooks, learning materials, technology, and adequately trained teachers—students are deprived of the quality education they need to succeed. In classrooms with outdated or insufficient materials, students may struggle to keep up with the curriculum, leading to frustration and disengagement. The absence of basic facilities like libraries, laboratories, and extracurricular programs further limits students' opportunities to explore their interests and develop critical skills, making the learning experience less enriching and motivating (O’Conner, 2013).

Moreover, in schools with large class sizes and too few teachers, students may receive minimal individual attention, making it difficult for those who are struggling to get the help they need. This lack of support can lead to falling behind academically, causing students to lose confidence in their ability to succeed. Over time, the cumulative impact of inadequate resources can create a sense of hopelessness and a belief that education is not a viable path to a better future. For many students, this discouragement leads to increased absenteeism and, eventually, dropping out of school. In areas where poverty and lack of resources intersect, the barriers to staying in school are even greater, perpetuating cycles of educational inequality and limiting opportunities for upward mobility (Demaray & Malecki, 2009).

Perceptions of Family and Community for dropout of students

Involvement of Parents

Lack of parental support or involvement in a child's education can lead to disengagement and poor academic performance, increasing the likelihood of dropout. Parental involvement plays a crucial role in a child's academic success, and its absence can be a significant factor leading to student dropout. When parents or guardians are not actively engaged in their child's education, students may lack the encouragement, guidance, and support needed to persevere through academic challenges. Without parental interest in their schoolwork or attendance, students might perceive education as unimportant, leading to decreased motivation and effort in their studies (Farrington, 2013).

In some cases, parents may be unable to participate in their child's education due to their own educational limitations, long working hours, or other socioeconomic pressures. This lack of involvement can result in students feeling isolated and unsupported, making it difficult for them to stay on track academically. Additionally, students without engaged parents may struggle with issues like poor time management, lack of discipline in completing homework, and difficulty in balancing school with other responsibilities (Garnezy, 2000).

The absence of parental involvement also means that early signs of academic or behavioral issues may go unnoticed or unaddressed, allowing problems to escalate to the point where dropping out seems like the only option. Over time, the lack of parental engagement can erode a student's confidence and sense of belonging in the school community, further increasing the likelihood of dropout. Engaged and supportive parents, on the other hand, can provide the emotional and practical support that is vital for students to overcome obstacles and remain committed to their education (Finn, 2006).

Structure of Family

Students from single-parent households, or those experiencing family instability such as divorce or domestic violence, may face challenges that contribute to dropping out. Family structure is a significant factor influencing student dropout rates, as it often shapes the level of stability, support, and resources available to a child. Students from non-traditional or unstable family structures, such as single-parent households, blended families, or families experiencing divorce or separation, may face unique challenges that increase their risk of dropping out of school (Nguyen & Hargrove, 2023).

In single-parent households, for example, the parent may struggle to balance work, childcare, and other responsibilities, leaving little time or energy to support their child's education. Financial constraints are also more common in these households, which can lead to difficulties in affording school supplies, extracurricular activities, or even basic needs, further contributing to academic struggles (Chen & Gregory, 2010).

Children in families undergoing significant transitions, such as divorce or the introduction of a stepparent, may experience emotional distress, instability, and changes in living situations. These disruptions can lead to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and disengagement from school. Additionally, students may take on additional responsibilities at home, such as caring for younger siblings or contributing to household income, which can interfere with their ability to focus on their education (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002).

Parents' Academic Background

Parents who have a low level of education may be less equipped to support their children's academic endeavors, leading to lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates. The educational background of parents is a significant factor influencing student dropout rates, as it directly affects the level of academic support and value placed on education within the home. Parents with limited education may be less equipped to help their children with schoolwork, navigate the educational system, or advocate for their child's needs. This lack of academic guidance can leave students without the necessary support to overcome

challenges in their studies, leading to frustration and a higher likelihood of falling behind (Taylor & Nelson, 2011).

Furthermore, parents with lower educational attainment may not emphasize the importance of education as strongly as those with higher education levels. This can result in a home environment where academic achievement is not prioritized, and where children might not receive the encouragement needed to persevere through difficulties. In some cases, these parents may also have lower expectations for their children's academic success, which can negatively impact the students' own aspirations and motivation to stay in school (Anderson & Brown, 2022).

Additionally, parents with limited education might not have the knowledge or resources to help their children explore higher education or career opportunities, making it more difficult for students to see the long-term benefits of completing their education. This lack of future-oriented guidance can lead students to disengage from school, seeing it as irrelevant to their immediate or long-term goals. When parents have a low level of education, their children are at a higher risk of dropping out due to the compounded effects of limited academic support, lower expectations, and reduced emphasis on the importance of education. This cycle can perpetuate educational inequality, making it challenging for students from less-educated families to break out of the cycle of poverty and achieve upward mobility (Catalano et al., 2004).

Social Norms and Cultural values

Gender Biasness

In some cultures, girls may be expected to marry early or take on household responsibilities, leading to higher dropout rates among female students. *“In some cultures, early marriage significantly impacts school dropout rates. For instance, in certain communities where early marriage is a prevalent practice, girls are often withdrawn from school once they reach a certain age to prepare for marriage. This cultural norm prioritizes marriage over education, leading to higher dropout rates among girls. In these communities, the expectation for girls to assume household responsibilities and fulfill traditional roles as young wives often outweighs the perceived benefits of continuing education. As a result, many girls leave school prematurely” (Participant V, personal interview).* Gender norms play a critical role in contributing (Parveen et al., 2023) to student dropout rates, particularly in societies where traditional roles and expectations dictate different educational opportunities and priorities for boys and girls. In many cultures, deeply ingrained gender norms can restrict access to education for girls, who may be expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities, marriage, or care giving over their schooling. This societal pressure often leads to early school leaving for girls, especially in regions where early marriage is common or where there is a cultural emphasis on preparing girls for roles within the household rather than for careers or higher education (Freeman & Freeman, 2004).

For boys, gender norms can also be detrimental, particularly in contexts where they are expected to enter the workforce at a young age to contribute to the family income. In such cases, boys may be pressured to drop out of school prematurely to take on jobs, especially in low-income families or communities where there is a strong emphasis on masculinity being tied to earning power. Moreover, in schools where teaching practices or curricula reinforce traditional gender roles, students who do not conform to these norms may feel marginalized or alienated, leading to disengagement and an increased likelihood of dropping out. For instance, girls may lose interest in continuing their educations if they perceive that the school environment or the subjects offered are not relevant to their lives or future aspirations (Gibb et al., 2008).

In environments where gender norms are rigid, students of both genders may lack role models who have successfully balanced education with societal expectations, further diminishing their motivation to stay in school. These gendered expectations and pressures, whether on girls or boys, create significant barriers to

educational attainment and contribute to higher dropout rates, reinforcing cycles of inequality and limiting opportunities for social and economic mobility (Gresham & Elliot, 2008). *“Gender bias can lead to higher dropout rates, especially for girls in certain communities. In areas where traditional views prioritize boys' education over girls', girls might be pressured to leave school early to take on household duties or get married at a young age. For example, in some cultures, girls may be taken out of school to help with chores or to prepare for marriage, while boys continue their education. This bias not only limits educational opportunities for girls but also reinforces a cycle where girls' education is undervalued, increasing the likelihood of dropping out” (Participant III, personal interview)*

Cultural Influence

Cultural attitudes significantly influence student dropout rates, particularly in communities where education is not highly valued or is viewed through a lens shaped by traditional beliefs and practices. In some cultures, the emphasis on education, especially for certain groups like girls or children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, may be minimal (Parveen et al., 2023). For example, in communities where traditional roles are prioritized, boys might be expected to enter the workforce early to support their families, while girls might be encouraged to marry young and assume domestic responsibilities, leading to early school leaving (Montgomery & Clements, 2009).

In other cases, education may be seen as irrelevant to the immediate needs of the community, particularly in rural or economically disadvantaged areas where survival and day-to-day labor are prioritized over long-term educational goals. Parents and community leaders may view formal education as unnecessary, especially if the available schooling does not align with the local economic activities or if there is a belief that schooling offers little tangible benefit in improving life outcomes (Patel & O'Donnell, 2002).

Additionally, in some cultures, there may be skepticism or distrust toward the formal education system, particularly if it is perceived as a tool for promoting values that are at odds with traditional beliefs. This can lead to resistance to sending children to school, particularly if the curriculum is seen as culturally irrelevant or if schools are not seen as safe or supportive environments for children from minority or marginalized groups. Cultural attitudes that devalue education can also be reinforced by generational cycles, where parents who themselves did not complete their education may not see the importance of their children doing so. This lack of emphasis on education within the family and community can lead to a lack of motivation and support for students, making them more likely to drop out, especially when they face academic challenges or other pressures (Eccles & Roeser, 2009).

When cultural attitudes do not support or prioritize education (Qasim et al., 2024), students are at a higher risk of disengaging from school and dropping out, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits opportunities for future economic and social mobility. In certain communities, education may not be highly valued, or there may be cultural beliefs that prioritize work over schooling, especially for boys (Green & Haines, 2008).

Healthcare Problems and Mental Health

Mental Health

Mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety, can lead to absenteeism and lack of engagement, increasing the likelihood of dropout. Mental health issues are a significant factor contributing to student dropout rates, as they can profoundly impact a student's ability to engage with and succeed in their education. Students experiencing mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, or chronic stress may struggle with concentration, motivation, and overall academic performance. These difficulties can lead to a sense of frustration and hopelessness, making school feel overwhelming or irrelevant (Smith & Clark, 2023).

Mental health issues often manifest in a range of symptoms, including frequent absenteeism, difficulty completing assignments, and a lack of participation in classroom activities. As these symptoms persist, students may fall behind academically, which can further exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and disengagement. This cycle of poor performance and emotional distress can eventually lead to a decision to drop out of school (Waggoner, 2002).

Additionally, mental health problems can affect students' social interactions and relationships. Students dealing with mental health issues may have trouble forming or maintaining friendships, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. A lack of social support can further contribute to disengagement and dropout, as students may feel disconnected from the school community and less motivated to continue their education. The stigma surrounding mental health can also play a role in dropout rates. Students may feel embarrassed or ashamed to seek help, leading them to suffer in silence and avoid accessing necessary support services. Without appropriate intervention and support from school counselors, teachers, or mental health professionals, students may struggle to manage their mental health issues effectively, increasing the likelihood of dropping out. Addressing mental health concerns in schools involves creating a supportive environment where students feel safe to discuss their struggles and seek help. Providing access to mental health resources, counseling services, and creating an inclusive and understanding school culture are essential steps in supporting students and reducing dropout rates related to mental health issues (Beck & Alford, 2005).

Illness and Chronic issues

Students with chronic health conditions may miss significant amounts of school, leading to falling behind academically and eventually dropping out. Chronic illness is a significant factor contributing to student dropout rates, as it can create substantial barriers to consistent school attendance and academic success. Students with chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, asthma, epilepsy, or autoimmune disorders, often face frequent absences due to medical appointments, hospitalizations, or the need for extended recovery periods. These interruptions in their education can result in missed lessons, difficulties keeping up with coursework, and an increased risk of academic failure (Martin & Williams, 2023).

The physical and emotional toll of managing a chronic illness can also affect a student's ability to focus and engage in school activities. The fatigue, pain, or discomfort associated with chronic conditions can make it challenging for students to participate fully in class, complete assignments on time, and maintain their usual level of academic performance. This can lead to a sense of frustration and helplessness, making school feel overwhelming or unattainable. Additionally, students with chronic illnesses may face social challenges, such as bullying or exclusion, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and impact their mental health. Peers may not fully understand their condition, leading to stigmatization or misunderstandings that further contribute to the student's emotional distress and disengagement from school (Hargrove & Nguyen, 2014).

The lack of adequate support and accommodations from schools can also play a role in dropout rates. Students with chronic illnesses may require specific accommodations, such as modified schedules, access to medication, or flexible deadlines. Without these supports, they may struggle to balance their health needs with academic requirements, increasing the likelihood of dropout. To mitigate the impact of chronic illness on school dropout rates, it is crucial for schools to provide tailored support and accommodations. This includes creating individualized education plans, offering flexible attendance policies, and ensuring that students have access to necessary medical care and support within the school environment. By addressing these needs, schools can help students with chronic illnesses stay engaged and succeed academically despite their health challenges (Farkas & Vicknair, 2004). *"Students with ongoing medical issues may miss*

a substantial amount of school, leading to gaps in their education and a sense of falling behind. For example, a child with a chronic illness like asthma or diabetes might frequently miss classes for medical appointments or because of their condition, making it difficult to keep up with their studies. As these absences accumulate, students can become disengaged and overwhelmed, eventually leading to drop out of school. This situation highlights the critical need for schools to provide additional support and resources for students facing health challenges to help them stay engaged and continue their education” (Participant VI, personal interview).

School Environment

Conducive School Environment

A negative school environment, including poor student-teacher relationships, lack of support, and a hostile or unsafe environment, can lead to disengagement and dropout. School climate plays a pivotal role in influencing student dropout rates, as it encompasses the overall environment, culture, and quality of interactions within a school (Huang & Liao, 2012). A negative or unsupportive school climate can significantly contribute to students' decisions to leave school prematurely. For instance, environments characterized by unsafe conditions, bullying, or harassment can make students feel threatened or unwelcome, leading to disengagement and dropout (Shea & Hesse, 2014).

Additionally, poor relationships with teachers, marked by a lack of support or engagement, can leave students feeling isolated and unsupported. Schools that fail to provide adequate support services or maintain high academic expectations can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and frustration, pushing students towards dropping out. Moreover, a lack of engagement opportunities, cultural insensitivity (Qasim et al., 2023), and inequity can further alienate students, undermining their motivation to stay in school. Addressing these issues by fostering a positive, inclusive, and supportive school climate is crucial for reducing dropout rates and ensuring students remain engaged and committed to their education (Mendez & Knoff, 2003).

Expectations of Teachers

Low expectations from teachers can result in students feeling undervalued or incapable, leading to reduced motivation and eventual dropout. Low teacher expectations can manifest as a lack of encouragement, reduced academic challenge, or minimal support for students struggling with their studies. When students perceive that their teachers do not believe in their potential or do not set high standards for their performance, they may internalize these expectations and develop a sense of hopelessness or inadequacy. This can result in decreased effort, lower academic achievement, and increased disengagement from school (Ma & Willms, 2004).

Furthermore, teachers who have low expectations might not provide the additional help or resources needed for struggling students to succeed. Without appropriate support, students who face academic challenges may fall behind, leading to frustration and a higher likelihood of dropout. The impact of low expectations is particularly pronounced in students who are already at a disadvantage due to factors such as socioeconomic status, learning disabilities, or language barriers (Choi & Kim, 2011).

Conversely, when teachers maintain high expectations and actively encourage their students, it can foster a positive learning environment where students feel valued and motivated to strive for success. Supportive teachers who believe in their students' potential can help build their confidence, improve their academic performance, and reduce the likelihood of dropout. Therefore, teacher expectations are a crucial factor in determining student engagement and retention, making it essential for educators to set high standards and provide the necessary support to help all students succeed (Bowers & Sprott, 2012).

Crowded Classrooms

Inadequate attention from teachers due to large class sizes can cause students to feel neglected and fall behind, increasing dropout risk. Crowded classrooms are a significant factor contributing to student dropout rates, as they can negatively impact the quality of education and the overall learning experience. In environments where class sizes are large, teachers often struggle to provide individualized attention to each student, which can lead to several issues that affect student engagement and academic success (Walker & Jennings, 2022).

Firstly, overcrowded classrooms can result in reduced interaction between students and teachers. With many students to manage, teachers may find it challenging to address individual learning needs, provide personalized feedback, or offer support to students who are struggling. This lack of individualized attention can lead to students falling behind, feeling neglected, and becoming disengaged from their studies (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

Secondly, large class sizes can create a chaotic and less conducive learning environment. The increased noise levels and distractions can make it difficult for students to concentrate and participate actively in class. This can hinder their ability to absorb and retain information, leading to poor academic performance and increased frustration (Rumberger, 2001).

Additionally, overcrowded classrooms can exacerbate issues related to classroom management and discipline. Teachers may find it harder to maintain order and implement effective teaching strategies, which can negatively impact the overall learning atmosphere. Students in such environments may experience higher levels of stress and discomfort, contributing to their decision to disengage and eventually drop out (Liu & Zhang, 2011).

The cumulative effect of these challenges can be a sense of disconnection and alienation from the educational process, making students more likely to abandon their studies. Addressing the issue of crowded classrooms by reducing class sizes and ensuring adequate resources and support can help create a more effective and engaging learning environment, thereby reducing the likelihood of student dropout.

Peer or Fellow's influence

Associating with peers who have a negative attitude toward school or who have already dropped out can influence a student's decision to leave school. Peer influence plays a crucial role in determining student dropout rates, as the attitudes and behaviors of fellow students can significantly impact a student's decision to stay in or leave school. Negative peer pressure, such as associating with friends who devalue education or engage in disruptive behaviors, can lead students to adopt similar attitudes, reducing their motivation and increasing dropout rates (Spence & Ladd, 2007).

Additionally, students who experience bullying or social exclusion may feel isolated and unsupported, making school seem unwelcoming and increasing the likelihood of disengagement. Peer competition and feelings of inadequacy can also contribute to dropout, as students may feel discouraged when comparing themselves to more successful peers (Juvonen & Graham, 2005). Furthermore, peer networks that emphasize risky behaviors, such as substance abuse or delinquency, can lead to disciplinary issues and absenteeism, further raising the risk of dropout (Roberts & Davis, 2023). To address these challenges, schools should focus on creating a positive social environment, promoting supportive peer interactions, and implementing programs that reduce bullying and foster constructive social networks, helping to keep students engaged and committed to their education (Johnson & Geltner, 2011).

Societal Exclusion

Students who are bullied or feel socially excluded may withdraw from the school environment, eventually leading to dropout. Students who face exclusion due to race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or other factors often encounter a range of challenges that impact their ability to stay in school. Limited access to

resources, such as underfunded schools with inadequate facilities and materials, can hinder academic progress and engagement. Discrimination and bias from peers or school staff can create a hostile environment, reducing motivation and increasing the likelihood of dropout (Coleman et al., 2000).

Economic barriers, including the inability to afford school supplies or transportation, further exacerbate these challenges. Additionally, cultural insensitivity within schools can alienate students from diverse backgrounds, making them feel disconnected from their education. Societal exclusion also impacts family and community support, with marginalized communities often lacking the resources needed to advocate for students effectively. To address these issues, it is essential to promote equity and inclusion in education, ensuring that all students have the support and opportunities necessary to thrive and remain in school (Ladd & Burgess, 2001).

Bullying

Bullying is a significant factor in student dropout rates, as it creates a harmful and toxic school environment that profoundly affects students' emotional and academic well-being. Victims of bullying often experience severe emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression, which can impair their ability to focus on studies and participate in school activities. This psychological impact leads to decreased motivation and increased disengagement from school (Smith & Slater, 2023).

Bullying can result in poor academic performance due to difficulties concentrating and falling behind in coursework. To avoid bullies, students may start skipping classes, leading to absenteeism and further academic struggles. Social isolation caused by bullying can make students feel alienated and unsupported, contributing to their decision to leave school. Effective measures to combat bullying include implementing strong anti-bullying policies, offering counseling and support for affected students, and fostering a positive and inclusive school culture. By addressing these issues, schools can create a safer and more supportive environment, helping to reduce dropout rates associated with bullying (Thompson & Gomez, 2023).

Conclusion

The study determined the factors influencing students' dropout from secondary schools. The analyses on school dropouts consistently identified a complicated set of factors that contribute to students leaving school without completing the academic year. Research indicated that socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of dropout rates, as financial hardships often force students to prioritize work over education to support their families. Additionally, cultural and societal norms can discourage continued education, particularly for girls in certain regions, where early marriage and traditional gender roles reduce the perceived value of schooling. The role of the school environment, including the presence of supportive teachers and a positive peer culture, also emerges as a critical factor. Negative experiences, such as bullying or a lack of engagement, can lead to a sense of alienation and increase the likelihood of dropping out. Furthermore, studies suggest that the interplay between these factors creates a cumulative effect, where multiple disadvantages compound over time, making it increasingly difficult for students to remain in school. Understanding these diverse influences is essential for developing targeted interventions to reduce dropout rates and improve educational outcomes.

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