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The Main Causes of Early School Leaving at the Remote and Rural Areas: Practical Implications for Educational Planning and Policy

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Abstract. This research paper explores the main causes of early school leaving and provides a comprehensive understanding of the underlying challenges, including implementation of education policy. The study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine this issue. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four distinct groups, with a total of 36 participants, including education managers, principals, deputy head teachers, school learners, and learners' parents. Additionally, group discussions were conducted with classroom teachers and education managers to gather diverse perspectives. The study highlighted five main factors contributing to early school leaving which are home socioeconomic status, family background, teachers, learners, and domestic education budgets. The key findings included that the more adverse and problematic the challenges faced by young learners, the greater the risk of school abandonment and that head teachers, educational staff, managers, and parents must bear greater responsibility for addressing school dropout than the learners themselves. This research serves as a call to action, urging increased attention and intervention from the family, community, and society to support at-risk learners. The findings highlight the need to ensure all learners experience the core values of inclusive and equitable education, aligned with the principle of "no one is left behind" and "no man is an island." This requires the combined efforts of families, communities, and society, alongside the enhanced support of NGOs and targeted government education policies. Particular emphasis should be placed on addressing the needs of pupils in remote and rural areas.

Keywords: early school leaving; risk factors; educational planning and policy; causes and effects, remote and rural areas

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1. Introduction

It is a universal truth that education is a fundamental human right. As noted by international bodies, "No one can be left behind schooling and learning with any single reason" (UNICEF, 1986; UNGA, 1989; UN, 2005). For many learners, attending school, sitting in a classroom, and meeting dedicated teachers are not an educational experience but a cherished dream. Learning—both in youth and throughout life—brings joy and empowerment. Merriam-Webster (2024) defined learning and lifelong learning as the core joys of life. It helps to form the foundation of youth vitality, personality, and national progress.

According to UNICEF (2023), accessing education allows individuals to fulfil their potential, helps them to discover, and to contribute meaningfully to their families, community and society. Children, especially those of school age, deserve the opportunity to thrive in environments that foster growth, creativity, and critical thinking. From an educational perspective, knowledge is one of the most valuable assets that learners can acquire. It helps them grow intellectuality, discover new opportunities, support their families, and contribute to their nation's progress. Over the years in Vietnam, early school leaving rates have been being significantly reduced but many challenges still exist that hinder younger learners' learning, especially with leaners in remote, rural and mountainous areas. Early school leaving makes a big difference to lifelong learning. Jordan et al. (1996), Leadbeater (1999), Rumberger and Thomas (2000) summarized that school factors that predict dropout and mobility rates in urban and suburban areas are "push" and "full".

Today, early school leaving is increasing in several countries, including Vietnam, especially in remote, rural, mountainous regions of the country, where multi ethnic groups reside, for example Khmer, H'Mong, Catu, and others. In these areas, socioeconomic status and personal income is quite low, with most of the inhabitants depending on agriculture and home-made products. Families' cost of living is below the poverty threshold (3.3$ per day), personal GDP is low, quality of education is poor and backward, and the educational level is lower than the national average.

Vietnam's government has directed that education is key to unlock individual understanding and knowledge. As Bowers et al. (2013) stated, everyone has the right to pursue learning for life. Pursuing education helps students generate knowledge and gain core values so they may enrich their goals. The Vietnamese policy underscores that education is the nation's priority and that investing into education is investing into people for future success.

Sarker et al. (2019) reiterated that education is a top investment for the growth of a nation. This prioritization is important in this era of digital industrialization and modernization. Despite these ideals, educators, managers, policymakers, and planners face challenging issues, including early school leaving and dropout. Behind the promise of education, lies the reality. Christle et al. (2007) stated that risk factors for school dropout exist in all life domains. Sarker et al. (2019) and Amoroso et al. (2021) further noted that early school leaving is often marginalized and there are negative consequences for the social, political, and economic

development of country. Shute and Cooper (2015) posed critical questions about the education system. They questioned whether something was happening negatively in schools and classrooms that distracted learners from education. These questions demand adequate answers yet they remain unresolved.

To comprehensively understand the term "early school leaving", Merriam Webster (2024) defined it as "a person who leaves his school or learning interruption before school age or does no more remain in school and no longer before certain course or program completion due to undesirable ways or unusual ways." Similarly, De Witte et al. (2013) stated that early school leaving and school dropout is to leave education without obtaining a minimal credential or basic education diploma. Márquez-Vera et al. (2013); Stearns (2018) wrote that school dropout is a big problem in the educational community due to the considerable percentage of young people who do not complete compulsory schooling. Such students often reduce their efforts and involvements at school, withdrawing from their commitment to school and its completion (Feldman et al., 2017). Obviously, early school leaving and dropout is a severe issue that can occur irrespective of a learner's background, including factors such as remote and rural areas, school level, grade, age, gender, ethnicity, or family situation.

School dropout is multifaceted and closely linked to various educational and social contexts (Kaplan & Yahia, 2017). This issue poses a national risk. Amoroso et al. (2021) highlighted that school dropout is a serious problem not only for individuals, parents, the school system and the community, but also for society. Learners who drop out face severe consequences throughout their lives, such homeless, jobless and under-aged labor. They often encounter fewer employment possibilities, low-paying jobs with limited advancement potential, and diminished skills and knowledge. Moreover, school dropout negatively affects individuals' psychological well-being (O'Connell & Sheikh, 2009).

The research goal and setting described in this paper are part of an educational project which was planned and set by the locale-based authority as an official provider. Especially, this project was offered two researchers, one of whom used to be a teacher of English for bilingualism education. This researcher wished to help the students in the poor community in which he had been raised. This study was conducted to enhance inspections of the main causes and effects of early school leaving and school dropout in the poor and remote rural district region of Khmer. This project mainly aimed to identify the main causes and then recommend strategies and feasible solutions to improve the quality and standardization of education and to support individuals suffering losses and to reduce opportunities in education. The project sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the main causes and effects on early school leaving and dropout?
2. What do the main causes tell us about Vietnamese general education and current implementation of education policy and planning?

2. Literature Review

This literature review provides a comprehensive overview and a synthesis of findings on the early school leaving and school dropout from previous studies. Several countries worldwide have made significant efforts to provide their residents with the best opportunities for success in general education or massive open online training. However, since 2010, the global rates of early school leaving or dropout have remained steady. According to UNESCO (2012), approximately one in every six (16%) lower secondary school-aged adolescents and one in three (35%) upper secondary school-aged youth remain outside the general education system. This lack of educational access diminishes their chances of securing normal employment in the future. Early school failure and dropout have severe consequences throughout an individual's life, including fewer job opportunities and negative impacts on psychological well-being (Barton, 2005, 2006; O'Connell & Sheikh, 2009).

In an extensive review of 389 qualitative and quantitative studies conducted to explore the causes and effects of school dropout in the USA, Europe and other countries, numerous contributing factors were identified (Gfroerer et al., 1997; Garnier et al., 1997; Manlove, 1998; Obot et al., 1999; Plank et al., 2008; Newcomb et al., 2002; Stearns and Glennie, 2006; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Robst, 2010; De Witte & Rogge, 2013; De Witte & Csillag, 2012; Taş et al., 2013).

Kaplan and Yahia (2017), Mangan et al. (2010) and Ogresta (2020) noted that key predictive factors of early school leaving and dropout stemmed from a wide range of reasons. These reasons may be family economic and financial difficulties, poor academic performance, deviant attitudes and behaviors, and inappropriate roles for students, substance abuse (e.g., drug and tobacco addiction), truancy, bullying, school violence, early sexual involvement, school-age pregnancy, parenthood, and the influence of deviant school peers.

Several longitudinal studies conducted in many different locations in the United States and Canada found that there is no single reason why students drop out of general school. Students who dropped out or left school early were classified into different categories, such as lacking a connection to the school environment or holding negative perceptions towards school. Examples of negative perceptions include feeling unmotivated, numb feelings, losing personal beliefs in learning, lacking empathy for lessons, disliking peers and teachers, and experiencing academic challenges. Social temptations, temporary youthful rebellion, and other factors also contributed.

According to Bridgeland et al. (2008), statistically, 42% of students disliked attending school and avoided meeting teachers. A further 43% of students missed too many school days, making it impossible to catch up academically and, consequently, they chose not to return to school. Additionally, 69% of students reported a lack of motivation regarding subjects, lectures, tasks, tests, and homework, while 26% left school due to unwanted early parenthood. About 22% became child laborers, going to work to support their families financially. Another 68% admitted that they missed classes to engage in deviant activities with anti-

school peer groups. In many cases, parents (68%) were unaware of their children's poor school attendance until it was too late, often realizing the issue only when the child was on the verge of dropping out. Among the respondents, 35% cited failing in school as the major reason for their decision to leave (Bridgeland et al., 2008). Other studies have reinforced these findings. For example, 69% of students were under absenteeism review, ignored lesson, and missed tests or exams.

Studies conducted in Western countries have highlighted how deviant behaviors disrupt the education system. Factors such as tobacco use, e-smoking, alcohol abuse, juvenile delinquency, gambling, gatherings, dating, and teenage parenting were identified as key contributors to early school leaving and school dropout (Battin-Pearson, 2000; Renna, 2008).

Large-scale studies in Denmark, conducted by Winding and Andersen (2015), showed that school failure was related to differences in socioeconomic status. Families with the lowest socioeconomic status faced a significantly higher risk of their children not completing general education, compared to families with the highest socioeconomic status. Winding and Andersen (2015) found that low household income leads to low education level in the society. Economically disadvantaged families often experience social, health, and educational inequalities, which hinder their children's ability to succeed academically. The rate of school dropout is higher in families with low socioeconomic status (Henry et al., 2010; Kearney & Levine, 2014; Mahuteau & Mavromaras, 2014; Sarker et al., 2019; Chikhungu et al., 2020).

Using qualitative research, Smyth and Hattam (2001), Kogan et al. (2005), and Morgan (2018) highlighted some strong evidence found in tobacco use, including e-smoking and cigarette smoking, to school failure and dropout. Recent studies of addictive substance use, such as alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarette smoking, nomophobia (smartphone addiction), and television addiction, conducted in the UK, the Netherlands, Australia and other countries, have revealed significant associations between these behaviors and school dropout. Specifically, higher levels of alcohol use were correlated with increased absenteeism, bullying, fighting, early school leaving, and dropout rates. In general, school dropout is closely connected with various life problems and risk factors (Smyth & Hattam, 2001; Aloise-Young et al., 2002; Chatterji, 2006; Miller, 2018; Gubbels et al., 2019).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical models used in this paper anchor the study, providing multiple perspectives to explain the true nature of research issues.

Problem-Prone Behavior and General Deviancy Theory

The problem-prone behavior and general deviancy theory explains that learners who drop out of school often do something unfavorable due to behavioral mismatches or behavioral inappropriateness and psycho-sociology in developmental phases of the adolescence and younger adulthood (Jessor, 2017; Newcomb et al., 2002). Studies by Jessor (2017), Gottfried (2017), and Garase (2017) examined co-occurring and varied forms of deviant behaviors, such as truancy, bullying, early school leaving, teenage pregnancy, health problems and others,

and found that these issues, as behavioral mismatches, frequently result in students' leaving school. These findings underscore the complex interplay between deviant behaviors and early school leaving.

Social Learning Theory, Primary Socialization Theory, and Deviant Affiliation Theory

Relevant to mixed theories, when the bonds of school, family, and society become weakened, adolescents may be at greater risk of being influenced by deviant peers or classmates. Aloise-Young et al. (2002) stated that when socialization support is deficient, school-aged adolescents become more vulnerable to risky behaviors. According to Fagan and Pabon (1990), deviant behaviors exhibited by peers and classmates can significantly distort the cognitive and behavioral development of others. Examples include substance use, smoking absenteeism, and truancy and others. Townsend et al. (2007) argued that association with deviant peers likely leads to deviant attitudes and deviant behaviors through the processes of formation of individual habits and social learning and attitude formation.

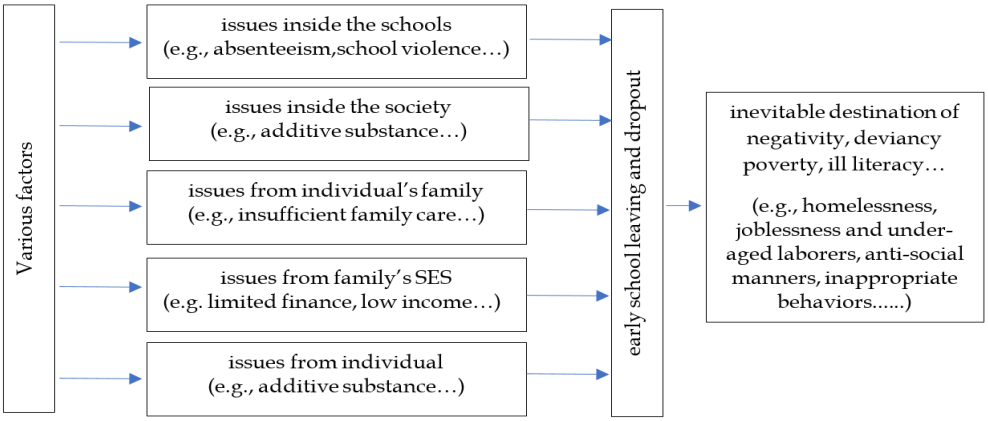

Figure 1: Flowchart of early school leaving

3. Research Design and Methods

This study was designed as a qualitative case study. Qualitative research aims to explore authentic contexts and insider perspectives (Lincoln, 1998). Additionally, this study fit well with exploring a specific phenomenon of interest in depth and within its real-word context (Yin, 2009). The authentic raw data were refined after collection and themes were coded and classified to respond to the main causes and effects of early school leaving and dropout.

This research was conducted by a team of two researchers from a Ho Chi Minh City-Based-University: led by a teacher, who used to work as a primary school teacher of English language as bilingual education and greatly supported by the dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages. This team maintained close contact with eight schools and two departments of education (including three elementary schools, three secondary schools, two high schools, one division of education, one department of education and training, and 36 participants in a remote and rural district in the Western provincial region (Mekong Delta Region), South Vietnam.

Permission to conduct the study were sought through emails to three groups and a letter to a fourth group:

1. Education managers (n=4).
2. Headmasters (n=4) and deputy head teachers (n=6).
3. General school students (n=16), including: (a) primary school younger learners (n=5); (b) junior school students (n=5); and (c) senior school students (n=6).
4. Parents (n=6).

Ethical consideration was strictly respected throughout the research. Informed consent was prioritized and participants were given details about the interview content in advance to help them prepare. Ethical concerns, professional values, and local culture norms were emphasized to ensure respect and compliance. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. All of the information provided was and will be kept confidential. The research team expressed gratitude to participants with polite messages in text and a thank you card, emphasizing the importance of their contributions to the educational field and national development goals.

The interviews for groups 1 and 2 were held at the headquarters of the district's education and training department, where education managers, headmasters, and head teachers convened for monthly meetings. Interviews were scheduled after these meetings during the summer of the 2024–2025 academic years, specifically in late August 2024. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and consisted of open-ended questions. Group discussion guidelines were based on theoretical frameworks and open-ended questions about concerned issues (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Bozer & Jones, 2018). Group 1 discussions (coded as RM) were conducted from 10:00 a.m. until 10:32 a.m., followed by Group 2 discussions (coded as RT) from 10:50 a.m. until 11:25 a.m. Interviews with general school students (coded as RL) took place in mid-October 2024, coinciding with the start of the new academic year. To express gratitude, each participating student received a set of eight books as a thank you gift for the new school year.

For the final group, parents (coded as RP), interviews were conducted during the first-term exam report meeting. The participants were provided with interview content in advance to ensure thorough good preparation. Researchers emphasized flexibility and comfort during the interviews, adhering to Brinkmann's (2014) suggestion that flexibility in timing and content facilitates effective discussions and allows for meaningful follow-ups.

It is noted that all the interviews between researchers and participants were conducted in Vietnamese and Khmer, and then the summarized contents were provided to the participants for review. This allowed them to carefully verify the information before the researchers analyzed and identified emerging themes (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive codes

Codes	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Position Chair	Qualifications/ Degrees	Experience (Years)	Disciplines Specialization	Type of Institution School/Others
RM1	Khmer	M	Ed.chair	University	24	Maths	Public
RM2	Kinh	M	Ed.chair	University	27	Vietnamese literature	Public
RM3	Kinh	F	Ed.chair	University	21	Civic education	Public
RM4	Kinh	M	Ed.chair	College University	18	IT	Public
RT5	Kinh	M	Principal	University	15	Biology	Public
RT6	Kinh	F	Principal	University	17	History	Public
RT7	Kinh	M	Principal	University	15	Biology	Public
RT8	Khmer	F	Principal	Edu. management	17	Maths	Public
RT9	Khmer	M	Head teacher	University	25	Vietnamese Literature	Public
RT10	Khmer	M	Deputy head teacher	University	22	Science	Public
RT11	Kinh	F	Head teacher	University	15	Biology	Public
RT12	Kinh	M	Head teacher	University	20	Chemistry	Public
RT13	Kinh	M	Head teacher	Edu. management	19	Civics	Public
RT14	Kinh	M	Deputy head teacher	University	22	history	Public
RL15	Kinh	M	Pupil		10 *		Public
RL16	Kinh	M	Pupil		10 *		Public
RL17	Kinh	F	Pupil		11*		Public
RL18	Khmer	M	Pupil		10 *		Public
RL19	Kinh	F	Pupil		11*		Public
RL20	Kinh	M	Middle student		14*		Public
RL21	Kinh	M	Middle student		14*		Public
RL22	Kinh	M	Middle student		14*		Public
RL23	Khmer	F	Middle student		15*		Public
RL24	Kinh	F	Middle student		15*		Public
RL25	Kinh	M	Senior student		16*		Public
RL26	Kinh	M	Senior student		17*		Public
RL27	Kinh	M	Senior student		17*		Public
RL28	Khmer	F	Senior student		16*		Public
RL29	Khmer	M	Senior student		16*		Public
RL30	Kinh	M	Senior student		17*		Public
RP31	Kinh	M	Parenthood	Father	48*	Odd worker**	Department
RP32	Khmer	M	Parenthood	Father	29*	Factory worker	Household
RP33	Khmer	F	Parenthood	Mother	46*	Farmer**	Household
RP34	Kinh	F	Parenthood	Single mother	29*	Homemaker	Household
RP35	Kinh	M	Parenthood	Father	62*	School safeguard**	Household
RP36	Kinh	M	Parenthood	Father	53*	Farmer**	Dorm

Note. F = Female. M = Male. * *represents* "Age". ** *represents* "Seasonal Occupation".

3.1 Data Analysis and Discussion

Financial difficulties, poor home economics, limited income, and deficiencies in household budget have been strongly associated with academic failure, including school dropout and early school leaving. This association was evident in the coded group responses: G1 (coded: RM1; RM2; RM3; RM4); G2 (coded: RT5; RT6; RT7; RT8; RT9; RT10; RT11; RT12; RT13, RT14); G3 (coded: RL16; RL19; RL24; RL25); and G4 (coded: RP31; RP32; RP33; RP34; RP35, PR36).

A participant descriptively noted:

> "*family financial constraints are closely implicated in school leaving or dropout as children do heavy workloads to support the family (child labor) such as lottery vending, taking care of younger siblings, babysitting or working underage due to inadequate parental care as parents often work outside.*"

This finding aligns closely with the previous literature of early school leaving, while also offering new insights. Studies by Tamm (2008); Taş et al. (2013), Gonzalez (2014), Mahuteau and Mavromaras (2014), Kearney and Levine (2014), Winding and Andersen (2015), Henry et al. (2015), and Sarker et al. (2019) similarly noted that financial struggles are the central causes of educational discontinuation. Additional research by Torraco (2018) also highlighted the critical role of economic challenges in perpetuating educational inequality and early school leaving rates.

It is evident that a great deal of research has been undertaken to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between school dropout, early school leaving, and learners themselves. Findings from thematic interviews analysis generalized conclusive evidences of higher dropout rates among children. Beyond financial limitations, the complexity of the dropout phenomenon emerged, as coded as in G1 (mostly RM1; RM2; RM3; RM4); G2 (RT5; RT6; RT7; RT8; RT9; RT10; RT11; RT12; RT13; RT14); G3 (RL16; RL21; RL23; RL24; RL26; RL28; RL29); and G4 (RP31; RP32; RP33; RP34; RP35; RP36; RP37). A significant concern identified was "a hidden public health hazard, a youth social catastrophe," in which learners are gradually losing prospects due to gadget addiction (e.g., excessive mobile phone, tablet usage, excessive internet surfing at shops, gaming, and television addiction), and frequent substance use (e.g., e-smoking, cigarettes, alcohol consumption). Before-age usage of tobacco, e-smoking, and smartphone addiction was strongly associated with increased dropout risks and gradual self-destruction of youth.

Reported examples highlight the severity of these issues.

One parent stated:

> "*…my son spends his all time at the game shop from morning to night; he finds it fun and meaningful in the game world. He does not come home to eat or sleep. Seriously, he ignores or misses the classroom attendance.*"

Similarly, a junior schoolboy shared:

> "*… truthfully, I am ready to play truant and skip classes without being punished by parents or teachers. I have my own time. I can smoke freely,*

> *bully mates for money for extra smoking, or steal money from my parents or neighbors to pay for phone fees, game fees, or party expenses.*"

These findings align closely with studies by Bridgeland et al. (2008), Renna (2008), Pfeiffer and Cornelissen (2010), Gottfried (2017), and Garase (2017), which emphasized the role of behavioral and environmental factors in exacerbating early school leaving rates. Additionally, these studies highlight the critical role of economic challenges in perpetuating educational inequality and early school leaving rates.

Family background, particularly parental involvement, is identified as the third most significant factor contributing to early school leaving and dropout. Factors such as parental caring deficiencies, problematic parent-child relationships, and limitations or a lack of parental understanding of education play a critical role in disengaging children from school. These issues were coded as in G1 (RM2; RM3); G2 (RT5; RT6; RT8, RT9; RT11; RT14); G3 (RL22; RL26; RL27); and G4 (RP34; RP35; RP37) (see Table 1). Specific concerns included parental misunderstanding of their children, lack of domestic instruction, exposure to domestic violence, and inadequate supervision, allowing children too much freedom to engage in harmful activities.

A younger learner reported:

> *"Learning seems not to be much relevant to my life. I do not really care much about learning. I am fed up my subjects and books. I am bored with seeing the teachers. Instead, I prefer playing truant with my friends; I feel that I have more freedom."*

This statement highlights how family context and background significantly and negatively impact absenteeism and school dropout. These findings align with studies by Stearns and Glennie (2006), Townsend et al. (2007), Bridgeland et al. (2008), Rumberger and Lim (2008), and Feldman et al. (2017), which emphasized the critical role of family dynamics in shaping educational outcomes. These studies collectively suggested that strengthening parental involvement and support can play a crucial role in reducing dropout rates and improving student engagement.

A deterioration in the connection between learners, teachers, and families is one of the primary causes of school absenteeism and dropout. At home, nothing brings most parents more joy than witnessing their children grow, go to school with their school bags, and smile day after day. In schools, teachers often have burning desires and professional passions to educate and train their pupils to excel. However, despite the substantial time pupils spend in class and the routine one-to-one interactions they have with teachers, a disconnect in communication and relationships often emerges. Instead of fostering engagement, many pupils refuse to attend class, struggle to follow their teachers' instructions, and view the classroom as a lifeless environment. This phenomenon is evident in groups such as G1 (RM2; RM4); G2 (RT6; RT8; RT9; RT11; RT12); G3 (RL20; RL25; RL30) and G4 (RP34; RP37). The classroom, often considered a nurturing environment,

where teachers transmit knowledge and cultivate a dynamic atmosphere, has become a source of dissatisfaction for many pupils.

A junior pupil candidly shared:

> "*I am bored, so why do I come to class every day? What for? I do not find fun there. I hate my classroom. I dislike the teachers of Literature and Maths. The subjects are really time-wasting.*"

Similarly, a parent said:

> "*I sometimes do not want my girl to go to school anymore. When I am called to meet the school board, it is not about my child's learning progress. Instead, I am asked for insurance fees, school fees, financial support, and other expenses, I am so poor that I can hardly pay these amounts.*"

These findings align with studies by Mangan et al. (2010) and Ogresta et al. (2020), which emphasized how financial pressures, lack of meaningful connections, and dissatisfaction with educational experiences contributed to absenteeism and school dropout. This highlights the urgent need to foster stronger relationships among learners, teachers, and families to create a more supportive and engaging educational environment.

The rise of school dropout and early school leaving can partly be attributed to pupils' dissatisfaction with teachers, their teaching strategies, and the overall school atmosphere. Firstly, overly strict indoor policies, outdated principles, rigid disciplines, and old-fashioned teaching methods diminish pupils' interest in lessons. Harmer (2008) and Lennon (2020) pointed out that teachers can bore students and cause them to become exhausted. Supporting this, Scrivener (2012) stated that part of the job of teaching is to help the learners to discover new things. In modern classrooms, teachers often lack essential skills in classroom management and timely communication or interaction with pupils. Effective communication is one of the most critical factors for successful lessons. Encouraging personal contact and lesson-based information exchange between learners and teachers are essential and should be emphasized in teaching handbooks. However, Scrivener (2012) emphasized that there is no way that a book can teach how to solve organizational problems. First, there is no fixed book of guidelines that can ever tell teachers what to do in a particular situation. Second, equipment provided for teaching and learning is often outdated, insufficiently funded, and poorly maintained. This lack of investment hinders educational quality. Common sentiments, found in G1 (RM2; RT7; RT8; RT12; RT14), include statements such as:

> "… *due to old age, most teachers refused to renew knowledge or upgrade and sharpen their teaching skills. On average, two-thirds of the local teachers have only a basic level of educational background. They seem to enjoy daily routine of teaching rather than actively engaging with their pupils, continuing until retirement*" (see Table 2).

Table 2. Questionnaire for four groups and identified and classified themes

Groups	Contents asked	Themes identified and found
G1. Questions for education managers.	A. In your opinion, why do you think students leave school early and many of them are ready to drop out their school and never arrive back to their school? B. What are major reasons of early school failures and school dropouts? C. What are the biggest challenges in education management you are facing and involving at the moment? D. What should best strategies and policies be given for current and further improvements and education quality enhancements?	Overarching themes: 1. Temptations arriving inside and outside school; 2. Rebel in the youth; addictions, bullying, aggressive disruptive behaviors; 3. Home economic deficiencies; 4. Lack of family care; 5. School disciplinary action; 6. Failures of parental education history; 7. Misbehaviors from teacher/head teacher e.g., kicking them of out of school, sending learners to home; 8. Parent's misbehaviors towards children; e.g., kicking children out of home/scolding children, giving them rods… 9. Underachieved qualification of teaching, unqualified teachers; 10. Poor knowledge of education management.
Group 2. Questions for head teachers and classroom teachers	A. Why do you think students leave school early and many of them are ready to drop out their school and rarely come back to their school? B. What are major reasons of early school failures? C. What do you find particular challenges in your position/teaching? D. In your opinion, what should you do to bring your students/pupils back to school if they are of school dropout or long absent from school?	1. Lack of parents' home instructions; 2. Lack of family budget/financial constraints; 3. Frequent influences from peer deviances; 4. Negative education outcomes/grade retention; 5. Parents' limited perspectives for education/paternal education background; 6. Teacher poor quality; 7. Improve teaching, and calling for social helps/shares.
G3. Questions for senior/junior students and pupils.	A. How often do you play truant or absent from school? B. How long are you every time unauthorized absent from your school? C. How often you are off from school? If yes, What for? or Why? D. In your opinion, how do you feel as you are attending school? E. How important are teachers and friends, lessons to you? F. How meaningful is school, class to you? G. What is the most satisfying things about teachers, lessons, units?	1. Playing truant due to disliking teachers, boring lessons, classmate's negative influences; 2. Studying and attending school is not much relevant to learner's care; 3. Disability to follow/to catch up the lessons; 4. Child-laboring; e.g., wandering to sell lottery tickets for earn a living, working as odd work to support family; 5. Friends, teachers, units, lessons are never important, less are much about learning; 6. Only going to school for outside things; e.g., smoking, peer gathering, playing snooker, surfing internet, playing games, always visiting Facebook/TikTok/Facebook/Chatchit, Messengers…; 7. Due to poor family/school aged labors.
G4. Questions for parents	A. What is your daily life job? B. How was your educational level, background in your life? C. Tell us some reasons why children want to stop school? D. Do you like your child(ren) to continue to complete the basic education program? E. What is your home economics/specified finance?	1. Almost joblessness, no income, no or less money; 2. Beyond full understanding of children, less listening to family children…; 3. Due to parental issues (orphan, family death, lack of family beloved feelings, family careless, home instruction) 4. Being forced to stop school to make money for family support; 5. Teacher/friend bullying; 6. Negative educational outcome/class dropping out.
Note. * *represents "(deputy) head teachers". ** represents "teaching staff".*		

4. Results

After conducting interviews with the four groups, the data were analyzed to identify and extract overarching themes. The writers strongly believe that the main causes and effects of early school leaving and dropout stem from a combination of interconnected factors. The findings from the interviews have been classified into five main themes, focusing on the categories:

1. *Socioeconomic status:* The impact of household income, parental employment, and financial constraints on the ability to stay in school.
2. *Family background:* The role of parental involvement, family dynamics, and home environment in shaping students' engagement with school.
3. *Teachers-themselves:* Teachers' skills, attitudes, teaching strategies, and their ability to build close connections with students (teacher-student rapport).
4. *Learners-themselves*: Students' attitudes, behaviors, motivations, personalities, and personal circumstances towards their decisions about staying in or leaving school.
5. *Domestic budgets for education investment:* The availability and allocation of resources for schools, including school infrastructure, classroom equipment, and support for teaching and learning activities.

These thematic classifications partly provide a comprehensive understanding of the root of causes and effects behind early school leaving and dropout and offered actionable insights for educational planning and policy development to readers.

4.1 Pedagogical Implications for Practice

To ensure that "no child is left behind" and that "no child stands outside the school fence and wanders aimlessly in search of a livelihood", education systems must be prioritized inclusivity and accessibility. Children have a right to education, as outlined in key frameworks such as the *Lisbon 2000* Declaration in Portugal, the *Child Act 2001* in the United States, and the *Europe 2020* strategy in Europe. More importantly, children must be granted the opportunity to embrace "I" (implicit) and "E" (explicit) learning, enabling them to experience the joys and merits that education provides. Children should enjoy their inherent rights to education, not become victims of systemic neglect or suffer barriers that lead to dropping out of school. Educators, teachers, policymakers and others must work collaboratively to create supportive environments where every child can thrive and reach their full potentials and opportunities.

Theoretically, while early school leaving and dropout is unavoidable, and may even be inevitable in certain cases, it is entirely possible to minimize this phenomenon. To reduce early school leaving and dropout rates, vocational and career education, as well as experiential learning, can play a pivotal role. One of the more interesting recommendations is to expand vocational training and vocational internship. Cerda-Navarro et al. (2017) and Rajasekaran and Reyes (2019) suggested that tailoring vocational education programmes to students' needs—particularly by aligning them with students' abilities and providing early vocational guidance—can help reduce the risk of school dropout.

Furthermore, fostering parental involvement is a crucial component of effective solutions. Optimal strategies should be developed through strong collaboration among school educators, families, communities, society, and government. By building cohesive partnerships, these stakeholders can create supportive environments and targeted interventions to address the fundamental causes of school dropout, ensuring that all children have the opportunity to become successful academically and socially.

First, and foremost, educators are instrumental in their roles as performers, helpers, tutors, and guiders in preventing school failure. Teachers can actively contribute to reducing dropout rates; they can implement strategic actions to involve students in their own educational journey and promote lifelong learning (Van Der Steeg et al., 2015; Coronel & Gómez-Hurtado, 2014).

Second, the family serves as a vital connection in closing the gap between home and school. Amoroso et al. (2021) noted that close cooperation between family and school should be frequently maintained, allied, and the awareness of families regarding learning at school should be raised. Parental care plays a crucial role in a child's learning process, fostering a supportive environment that promotes success in both academic and personal development. The role of family can be understood through three key structures:

1. *Structure of Family-Childcare:* This involves parents actively listening to their children, fully understanding their needs, and accepting initial failures with patience and showing empathy. Parents should help alleviate their children's anxieties, psychological stress, and behavioral challenges. By ensuring that their children do not feel lost, lonely, or left out, parents contribute significantly to their success both at school and at home (Strohschein et al., 2008; Leithwood & Patrician, 2017).
2. *Structure of Family and School*: This structure emphasizes the importance of frequent participation in teacher-parent meetings, monitoring school attendance, supporting homework, and tracking academic progress. Regular involvement in school activities helps address any disparity between home and educational institutions. Mahuteau and Mavromaras (2014) highlighted that the success of school-aged children heavily relies on their parents' active domestic instruction and engagement.
3. *Structure of Socioeconomic Status (SES):* The economic background of a family is a critical determinant of a child's success in school. Early school leaving and dropout rates are disproportionately higher among students from low-income families with limited financial resources. A stable home and economic foundation significantly influence children's ability to thrive academically (Taş et al., 2013; Mahuteau & Mavromaras, 2014; McDermott, 2018).

4.2. Recommendation

The education system should ensure that "a problem shared is a problem halved" and "no man is an island". This means that parents, teachers, educators, policy makers, psychologists, and all other stakeholders should also be responsible for supporting learners in any adverse circumstances. This should start with the

government's roles and responsibilities. The aim of education and economic targets should be merged. For example, in-service teacher training programs, which are directly related to the problems of early school leaving and school dropout, should be address frequently. Greater emphasis should be placed on both vocational skills and pedagogical competency, with children consistently placed at the center of educational initiatives. Finally, the continued professional development of teachers calls for ongoing study and training.

4.3. Delimitations

The information gathered during the research cannot be behalf of or generalized to the broader population due to the small sample size and the period of limited observation (i.e., 3 weeks).

A disadvantage of interviewing the school administrators, staff, parents and learners is the potential for inaccuracy because these locales are being partly financed with a poverty reducing program by the government and NGOs so there may be bias.

5. Conclusion

Briefly, although the explanations help to offer insights, they are not exhaustive. This research provides a valuable understanding of why many pupils discontinue school or fail in their education. School failures are rooted in complex factors involving family dynamics, school environments, learners-themselves, and socioeconomic status. Educators, researchers, teachers, parents, psychologists, and policymakers must work collaboratively to understand challenges and adversities associated with school dropout fully. With joint efforts, pupils' opportunities may be maximized to embrace lifelong learning and avoid becoming child labors, under aged workers, or victims of adverse circumstances. Rajasekaran and Reyes (2019) and Gonzalez (2014) stated that children must have pathways back to school, where they may be nurtured and loved by their teachers, parents, and communities. As Martin Luther King profoundly stated, "I have a dream." Educators should continue working on his dream so that children can fulfil their potential and their dreams. Educators share this dream—a dream for all children to overcome school failure and reclaim their potential. All learners must have access to school.

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