

Factors Influencing Dropout: A Case Study on Dropout's Parents in a Northwest Province of Cambodia

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Abstract

This study employed a descriptive survey design to examine the factors influencing high school dropout. Data were collected from parents of 60 dropouts, selected through random sampling. The data were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, with the support of SPSS and Microsoft Excel. Results indicated three major factors: parental illiteracy (20%), low socioeconomic status (68.3% of families earned USD 100–200 per month), and distance from home to school (5.16%). The study recommends implementing home education programs, investing in curricula to reduce parental illiteracy, and providing counseling services.

Keywords: Dropout, parental illiteracy, socio-economic status, and school distance

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Education is the main pillar to develop the socioeconomics in each country in the world, which shapes human development through education from kindergarten level 1 to higher education. In the process, it has confronted many challenges. Various parties must take the strongest steps to address the issue of dropouts.

The introduction sets the stage for an in-depth examination of the school dropout phenomenon in Battambang Province, located in Northwestern Cambodia. This issue is of critical importance, as it intersects with broader goals of educational equity and national development. The increasing demands of the job market, along with evolving competency standards, indicate that it is time to address the root causes of school dropout.

This section outlines the research objectives and theoretical foundations guiding the study, offering an in-depth look at the broader academic and policy context. To mitigate school dropout, Cambodia's National Education Law (2007) emphasizes the development of human resources through lifelong education. As stated in Article 2, the law aims to equip learners with knowledge, skills, moral character, and national pride, thus contributing to economic development through the Pentagon Strategic Plan. In line with this, the government seeks to raise the national literacy rate from 80.4% in 2019 to 85.6% by 2024, a gap that is particularly pronounced in rural areas (Literacy, 2024). Despite these efforts, illiteracy remains at 14.4% in 2024, and poverty persists at 16.6% (Manoj Mathew, 2024), both of which are key factors influencing school dropout.

The growing prevalence of school dropouts in Cambodia and beyond has become a matter of national and international concern, underscoring the relevance of this study. However, defining what constitutes a "school dropout" is contentious, making evaluation and research complex. The term generally refers to a student's failure to enroll for a certain number of consecutive semesters, yet the literature reflects varying definitions based on timeframes and contexts (Grau-Valldosera & Minguillón, 2014). Related terms such as "attrition," "withdrawal," and "non-completion" are often used synonymously, while others like "retention," "persistence," and "completion" serve as antonyms. As Ashby (2004) notes, these inconsistencies in terminology can affect how dropout is measured, addressed, and understood.

Multiple factors contribute to dropout rates. While Cambodia has seen some socio-economic growth and a decrease in poverty, many communities, especially in rural areas, remain vulnerable. Although health and educational systems are expanding, the quality of services often remains poor. Cambodia still ranks among the lowest in the ASEAN region in terms of educational quality (Som Sotheary, 2025).

Additionally, psychological and family factors play a critical role. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1986), is an individual's belief in their capacity to perform specific behaviors and achieve goals. It significantly influences student achievement, being shaped by mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and social encouragement. Furthermore, family support is crucial. Parental involvement profoundly impacts children's academic, social, and emotional development. According to UNESCO (2021), parents who actively support their children's education help enhance academic performance and overall school engagement.

In conclusion, the Cambodian government has established a legislative and strategic framework through the National Education Law and the Pentagon Strategy to reduce dropout rates and strengthen human resources. This effort recognizes the complexities associated with the dropout issue, particularly the intertwined effects of poverty and family engagement. Addressing school dropout, therefore, requires a holistic and inclusive approach, taking into account both institutional interventions and socio-economic conditions to achieve sustainable educational development.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study carries several significant implications. First, it identifies the fundamental parental factors that contribute to student dropout and examines their impact on academic performance. Second, the findings provide evidence-based recommendations to address school-related challenges. Third, the study serves as a valuable reference for school administrators and policymakers, particularly within the Department of Education, Youth, and Sport in Battambang Province. Finally, it offers a practical case study for schools across Cambodia, supporting nationwide efforts to reduce dropout rates.

1.3 Research Question

The following key research questions drive this study:

- ✓ What are the characteristics of the parents of student dropouts in Battambang Province?
- ✓ What are the most significant parental factors contributing to student dropouts in Battambang Province?
- ✓ What strategic measures can be implemented to improve students' academic performance?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study, conducted in Battambang Province, aims to identify the most influential parental factors affecting students' academic performance. The data collected will inform the development of programs to support students who are at risk of dropping out. Specifically, the objectives are

- ✓ To find out the characteristics of the parents of student dropouts in Battambang Province
- ✓ To examine the parental factors that contribute to student dropouts
- ✓ To propose strategies aimed at improving academic performance among high school students

The study also seeks to understand the general status and challenges faced by parents of high school students in Battambang Province.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research examines the issue of school dropout in relation to parental factors in northwestern Battambang Province, Cambodia, with a focus on three districts: Ek Phnom district, Bannan district, and Bavel district. Specifically, the study investigates the influence of parents' perceptions on their children's education. In addition, it explores strategies to improve the quality of educational services, particularly in addressing dropout-related concerns such as enhancing student learning performance, meeting the needs of high school students, and increasing student motivation. The ultimate goal is to provide insights that will assist the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport in developing more targeted and effective strategies to reduce student dropout rates.

II. Method and Procedure

The study employed a quantitative research method. A descriptive survey was conducted with 60 parents who were randomly selected, with 20 participants from each of the Ek Phnom district, Bannan district, and Bavel district. The study was delimited to focus specifically on demographic factors, such as the gender of the parents.

2.1 Research Instrument

The main tool utilized to gather data was a structured questionnaire, which was composed of 25 items divided into four sections: 1. Demographic Information and Perceptions of School Dropouts. Participants responded to the second section using a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree. 3 = Neutral 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree. To ensure content validity, a draft version of the questionnaire was pretested with five parents of dropouts. Their feedback was used to revise and refine the items, improving the clarity of wording and ensuring they believed the questions were appropriate and made sense in the local context.

III. FINDINGS

3.1 Data analysis

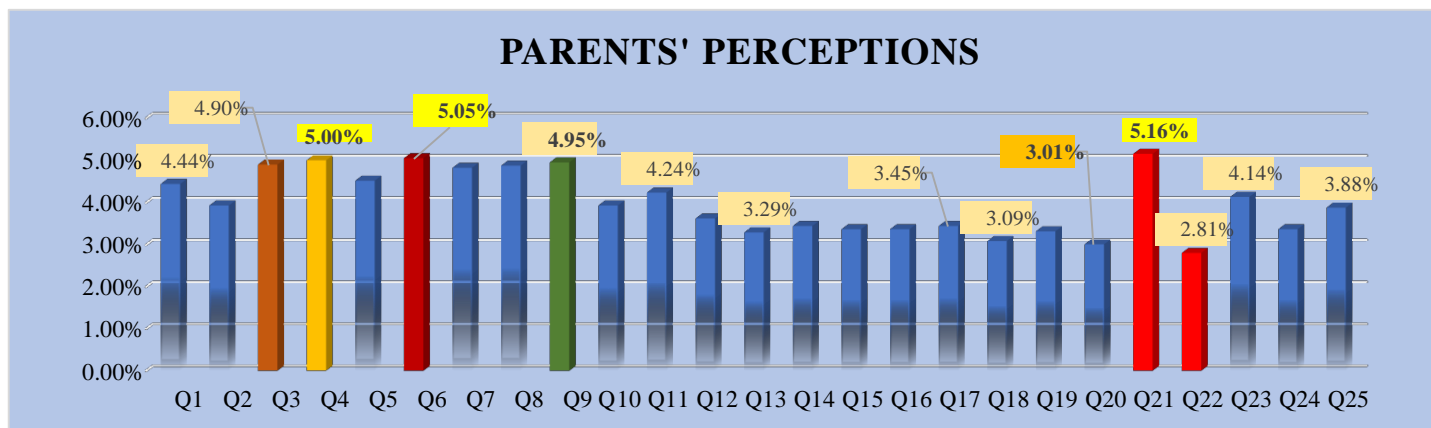
We've analyzed the data at four levels: (a) Excel for entering data and (b) SPSS to fix the data and to check the scales' reliability, using the Cronbach alpha coefficient. 3.2 Descriptive Statistics Table 1 below presents the descriptive statistics results for the main factors. It was found that

Table 1. Participants Demographics

Criteria	N	Percentage
Gender		
Female	38	63.3
Male	22	36.7
Total	60	100

Parents: The responses from parents differed notably from those of other participant groups, reflecting both positive and negative perspectives shaped by their local contexts and the specific districts in which they reside within Battambang Province. A higher proportion of respondents were women, with 38 females (63.3%) and 22 males (36.7%) participants. This gender distribution suggests that mothers may play a more central role in decisions and perceptions regarding their children's education, particularly in relation to school dropout. Such insights highlight the importance of incorporating parental, and especially maternal, perspectives into strategies aimed at reducing dropout rates.

The responses from parents differed notably from those of other participant groups, reflecting both positive and 3.2 Overall Figure: Parents' Perceptions on Dropouts



Based on the overall graph, the perceptions of dropout parents from Ek Phnom, Bannan, and Bavel districts revealed a clear relationship between several influential factors contributing to high school dropout in Battambang Province. Participants identified the most significant factors as follows: Q21, cited by 5.16% of respondents; Q6, cited by 5.05%; and Q4, cited by 5.00%. In contrast, Q22, reported by only 2.81% of respondents, was considered less influential. These findings suggest a general consensus among parents regarding the key factors driving student dropout, while certain items were perceived as less impactful.

3.3 Parents' Attribution

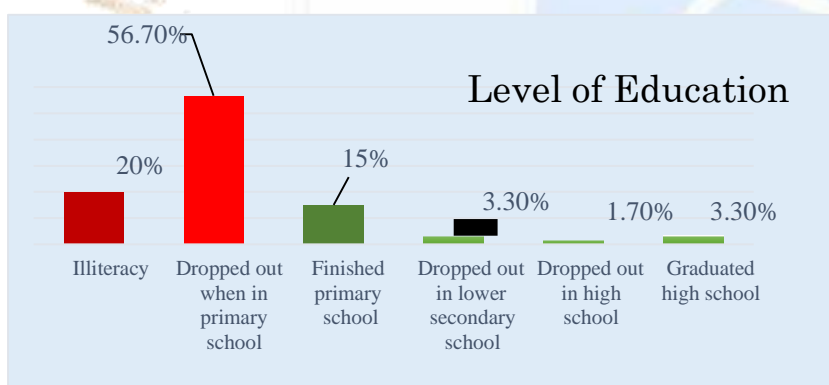


Figure 1 shows that among the 60 respondents, the majority (56.7%, n = 34) did not complete primary school, while 20.0% (n = 12) were illiterate. Nine respondents (15.0%) completed primary school, 3.3% (n = 2) dropped out during lower secondary school, 3.3% (n = 2) completed high school, and 1.7% (n = 1) dropped out after that level.

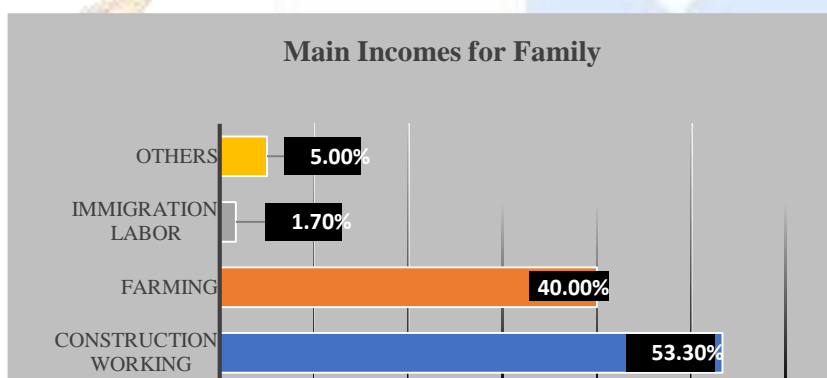


Figure 2 illustrates the primary sources of family income among the respondents. Out of 60 participants, 32 (53.3%) identified construction work as their principal source of income, followed by farming, which supports the livelihoods of 24 respondents (40.0%). In addition, one respondent (1.7%) reported relying solely on income derived from immigrant labor.

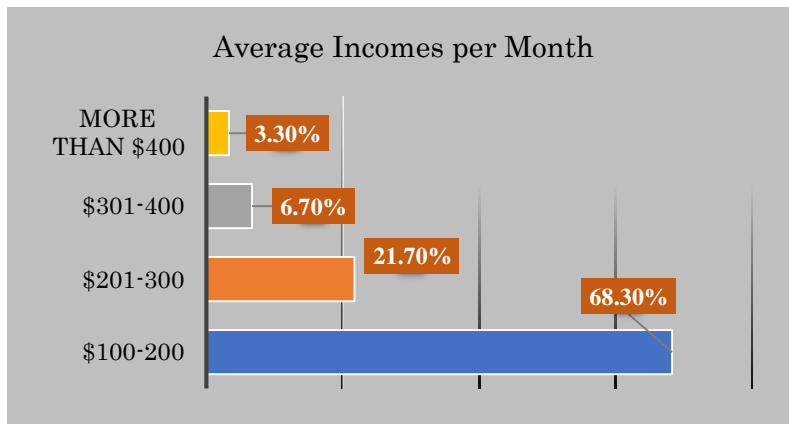


Figure 3 presents the monthly incomes of dropout families. Among the 60 respondents, 41 (68.3%) reported earning between \$100 and \$200 per month, representing the largest income group. The second largest group includes 13 respondents (21.7%) who reported monthly earnings between \$201 and \$300. Additionally, 2 respondents (3.3%) indicated earning more than \$500 per month.

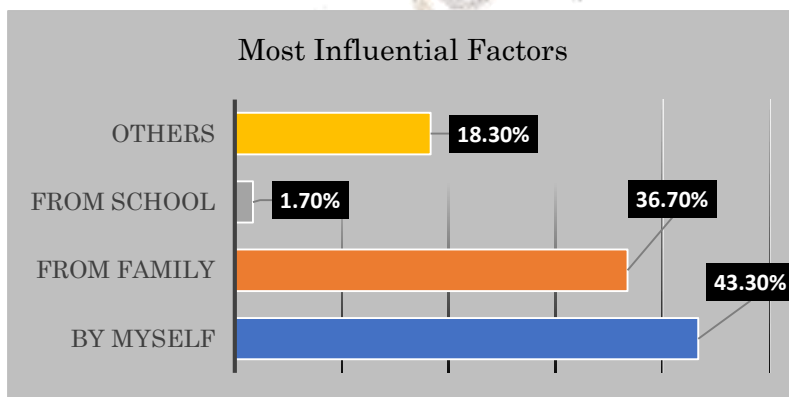


Figure 4 presents the factors most affecting school dropout. Among the 60 respondents, 26 (43.3%) reported that their children independently decided to leave school. The second most frequently cited factor, identified by 22 respondents (36.7%), was family influence. Only one respondent (1.7%) attributed the dropout to the school itself, while the remaining 11 respondents (18.3%) cited other contributing factors.

IV. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, derived from quantitative data, offer a comprehensive view of the school dropout phenomenon in three districts of Battambang Province. Quantitative data indicated that low parental education levels were a major factor: 56.7% of respondents had not completed primary school, and 20.0% had never received formal education. Economic hardship was another critical issue, with 53.3% of parents working in construction, 40.0% in farming, and 68.3% of families earning only between \$100 and \$200 per month. Notably, 43.3% of parents believed that their children had made the decision to drop out independently. Complementing these findings, interviews and field notes revealed broader contextual insights. Respondents emphasized the roles of schools, families, communities, and the government. Schools were urged to better communicate the value of education and provide student guidance. Families were considered key in encouraging academic engagement and moral development. Communities were called upon to actively support education, while students were encouraged to develop patience, responsibility, and resilience. Government involvement was identified as crucial in providing scholarships, school materials, transportation, job opportunities, and educational reform. Participants also recommended building schools in every village to improve access and reduce dropout rates. Together, these findings highlight the interconnectedness of educational, economic, and social factors contributing to school dropout and the need for a coordinated, multi-stakeholder response.

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigates the relationship between various factors contributing to school dropout rates, particularly the lack of schools in rural areas. In some districts, such as the Bavel District in Battambang Province, there is only one high school available. For instance, students from Boeng Bram Village must travel approximately 30 kilometers one way—about 60 kilometers round trip—to reach the high school in Bavel. The journey involves traveling on muddy roads during the rainy season and dusty roads in the dry season. Many parents of students who drop out cannot afford the gas and other expenses required to transport their children to school each day. Because of this, students often have to drop out. Among the 26 parents surveyed, 43.3 percent agreed that their homes were too far from the nearest school. Mrs. Theab Yut, 39 years old, lives in Kropeou Sesib Village, Boeng Bram Commune, Bavel District, Battambang Province, says,

"I have six children, five of whom have dropped out of school. My house is about 30 kilometers from Bavel High School. I don't have the money—around 10,000 riel (approximately USD 2.50)—to support my child's daily expenses. I also suffer from a chronic illness and have no job. Every night, we have to hunt for rats and frogs just to have food. Some of my children are hired to pick mangoes in the mango gardens. I didn't even finish primary school."

The second point is that 48.3 percent of parents reported their children's learning had not improved. This decline was attributed to a lack of adequately trained teachers, particularly in rural areas, and an outdated curriculum that often fails to align with current industry demands—leaving students ill-prepared for the workforce (LOMA, 2024a). The average monthly income for the parents of school dropouts ranged from USD 100 to 200, which is similar to wages in unskilled labor sectors, typically ranging from USD 150 to 300 per month. In contrast, skilled professionals in fields such as finance, engineering, and technology can expect monthly earnings between USD 500 and 2,000 (LOMA, 2024b). Regarding school safety, one parent stated, "It was unsafe to allow my child to go to school" (Q22). However, overall survey results show that 44 out of 60 respondents (73.3%) disagreed with this statement, indicating improved safety perceptions. This evidence suggests that the government has effectively implemented its village security and safety policies, including measures to protect children in schools. Furthermore, the government recently unveiled the 2024–2028 Action Plan, demonstrating its continued commitment to safeguarding children. The strategy has better reporting and monitoring procedures to stop violence at school and at home (UNICEF, 2024), and also figure 4, 26 out of 60 respondents (43.3%) revealed that their children made their own decisions to drop out by themselves for a variety of reasons, which were influenced by parents, community, and peer influence. Thus, there are required parental professional encouragement, assistance with academic performance, support for poor achievement, motivation for the most effective effort, awareness of children's social lives, and the frequency of parental visits to school with corresponding updates from teachers (Tsolou, 2020), and Community involvement is essential for assisting at-risk students and supporting the reintegration of dropouts into school or their move to productive society. Communities may substantially decrease dropout rates and foster positive results for children by offering alternative education, mentoring, vocational skills, and familial support. And also, peer pressure can result in academic dropouts, diminished grade retention, and social problems, especially criminal behavior, leading to students' disengagement from school (Paraman, M., & Hussain, R. B. M., 2022).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study proposes several recommendations to reduce school dropout rates, particularly among at-risk students, based on its findings. First, improving family economic conditions is essential to minimizing the need for children to migrate with their parents to labor in both domestic and neighboring countries. Families should have access to alternative educational options even when they relocate. For example, homeschooling—legal in all 50 U.S. states since the 1960s—offers a flexible, parent-directed form of education that could serve as a model (Martin, J., 2022). Second, it is critical to expand educational infrastructure in rural areas by building more schools and deploying well-trained teachers. Investment should ensure the equitable distribution of qualified teachers between urban and rural regions. Incentives should be provided to encourage educators to work in underserved communities. Third, increased funding is necessary for both teacher training and student support services, including the provision of free meals. Effective allocation of funds is vital. For

instance, Laos allocates 1.4% of its GDP to education and uses tax revenue and retained earnings to finance school meals, with additional support given to schools in service areas (Xayavong & Pholphirul, 2018). Thailand allocates 2.5212% of its GDP to education and has implemented a Public Policy for Quality School Lunch Development, providing USD 0.40 to 0.62 per student per day (WORLD BANK, 2023), along with transportation and scholarships. In contrast, Cambodia allocated 2.953% of its GDP to education in 2023 (CEIC, 2025). While it currently lacks a national free lunch program, the government has introduced the Joint School Feeding Transition Strategy, which marks the beginning of a handover from the World Food Program (WFP) to the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports in select schools (MoEYS, 2022). Finally, community re-engagement centers should be established in every district across Cambodia. These centers could follow the example of those in the United States, which support approximately 1.6 million young people aged 16–18 who are not enrolled in school or have not completed their secondary education; therefore, the education participation gap poses a serious economic and social challenge.

Implementing several interventions to address student dropouts influenced by parental illiteracy is crucial. These include the development of small businesses, vocational skill training for families, and capital investment initiatives to enhance household economic stability and integrate families into value chains that connect to the broader market. Such efforts can significantly improve the socio-economic conditions of families. Furthermore, community-based educational services should be established, including adult education programs in community schools, pagoda-based education provided by monks, and literacy support from religious denominations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the Cambodia Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. TVET, in particular, plays a vital role in delivering both skills development and literacy education.

In conclusion, addressing the issue of student dropout requires a multifaceted approach that combines economic, educational, and policy-level interventions. Strengthening family economic conditions, expanding access to quality education in rural areas, and equitably distributing trained teachers are crucial, as is ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to complete their education and providing special educational programs for illiterate people.

Appendix 1

Table S1. Inventory List of Questionnaires

No.	Statements	Codes
1	My child was too old for school.	Q1
2	My child was in poor health.	Q2
3	My child was very weak in studies, usually getting the worst grades.	Q3
4	My child's studies did not improve.	Q4
5	I was worried that my child had poor social relationships with friends.	Q5
6	My family was poor and could not support his/her further education.	Q6
7	My family was poor, so we needed him/her to help with the family's work.	Q7
8	My family was having financial problems (bank debt) and needed him/her to earn extra incomes.	Q8
9	I understand that even if you receive a lot of education, we cannot change our life.	Q9
10	People in the village don't need a lot of education to become rich or live happily.	Q10
11	I don't think the Cambodian education system is good.	Q11
12	My child needed to get married.	Q12
13	My child needed to care for a sick or elderly member in the family.	Q13
14	My child decided to stop studying because he felt so lonely at school.	Q14
15	My child did not want to go to school because the teacher forced him to pay for the extra classes.	Q15
16	The teacher is often absent, which is why my child doesn't learn much at school.	Q16
17	The teacher did not care his/her teaching even if he came to school, he just had to fulfill his/her duties.	Q17
18	Teachers or school principals usually used violence.	Q18
19	My child did not like the teacher or school principals.	Q19

20	My child was afraid of school because someone was bullying him/her.	Q20
21	School is too far from home.	Q21
22	I feel unsafe sending my children to school, because of the high crime rate.	Q22
23	My villagers still have limited understanding of the benefits of education.	Q23
24	My villagers know how to monitor and evaluate the training and learning process.	Q24
25	My villagers participated in preventing school dropouts.	Q25
26	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport	MoEYS
27	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UNESCO
28	The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund	UNICEF
29	World Food Program	WFP

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