

Educational Relationships and a Sense of Belonging at School: A Key to Preventing Dropouts

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Abstract: - This study explores the teacher–student relationship and students’ sense of school belonging help prevent school dropout in Moroccan secondary schools. School dropout remains an issue with academic and social consequences. The study involved 480 students from educational settings. Data were collected through validated questionnaires. The results show that positive relationships with teachers strengthen students’ sense of belonging to their school. This stronger attachment reduces the risk of leaving school early. Mediation analysis confirms that school belonging explains part of the positive effect of teacher support on dropout prevention. However, the teacher–student relationship also has a direct influence. This suggests that other factors, such as motivation, self-confidence, and classroom engagement, play an important role. The findings emphasize the need to create supportive and inclusive school environments. They also encourage teacher training in relational skills, mentoring, and personalized guidance to improve student engagement and reduce dropout in Moroccan secondary education.

Key-Words: - Educational relationship, sense of belonging, school dropout, school engagement, school climate, academic success

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1 Introduction

School dropout is a major problem in today’s education systems. It has consequences for both students and society. Students may experience social marginalization, employment difficulties, and low self-esteem. Society, for its part, faces a shortage of skilled workers and high costs [1], [2]. In the past, this phenomenon was often attributed to academic difficulties. Today, we know it is more complex. It depends on several factors. These factors can be personal, familial, pedagogical, or institutional [3], [4].

In Morocco, the situation is even more complex. There are differences between types of schools. We distinguish between urban public, rural public, and private schools. These contexts are very different. Resources, supervision, and the school climate vary. This influences student engagement and the risk of dropping out. The teacher-student relationship plays a key role. It depends on the quality of interactions. It includes support, availability, recognition, and communication [5], [6]. A good relationship builds trust and motivation. It also enhances the sense of security and engagement. Conversely, a negative relationship can be problematic. The student may

disengage and feel isolated. This can lead to dropping out [7]. A sense of belonging at school is also very important. It involves feeling accepted and integrated [8], [9]. A student who feels they belong participates more. They make more effort and remain motivated. This reduces the risk of dropping out [10], [11]. A supported student develops a positive attitude toward school. This helps them persevere despite difficulties.

This article examines the teacher-student relationship, a sense of belonging, and school dropout rates. It shows that a positive relationship promotes inclusion and reduces dropout rates.

2 Analysis

Human interactions promote academic engagement. This section examines the links between teacher-student relationships, a sense of belonging, and school dropout rates.

2.1 The Educational Relationship Is a Pillar of the School Climate

The educational relationship is based on support, fairness, and communication. It promotes academic success. Interaction supports learning [12]. It

creates a climate of trust [13]. Its quality influences academic engagement.

2.2 A Sense of Belonging at School Is a Determinant of Engagement

A sense of belonging at school reflects how a student feels. They feel accepted, valued, and integrated into their school. This sense of belonging is very important for well-being at school [14]. It also acts as a protective factor against dropping out. According to attachment theory, students need strong relationships. These relationships provide them with a sense of security. They help students engage in learning. A sense of belonging acts as a form of protection. It can be viewed as a “psychological safety net.” It strengthens motivation, participation, and perseverance. Research confirms these ideas. Students who have a strong sense of belonging perform better. They develop a positive school identity. They are more engaged and have a more positive view of school [15].

2.3 Interaction Between Educational Relationships and School Belonging

The literature clearly shows a link between the educational relationship and the sense of belonging. When teachers listen to and respect students, students feel valued. They also feel supported. This strengthens their integration into the school. Their attachment grows stronger. Fair and caring instruction is essential. It builds trust between the student and the teacher [16]. This trust plays an important role. It fosters a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging then becomes a key factor in engagement and success. This mechanism is explained by the model of school engagement. This model comprises three dimensions: the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. All depend largely on the relational climate [16].

2.4 Influence on School Dropout

School dropout often results from disengagement, social isolation, and a breakdown in the relationship with the school. A weak educational relationship reduces engagement. A weak sense of belonging promotes isolation and dropout [17]. The impact of the educational relationship often manifests through a sense of belonging [18]. Thus, the educational relationship strengthens a sense of belonging and promotes school persistence.

3 Numerical Results and Interpretations

A quantitative study was conducted on 480 Moroccan high school students. It analyzes the educational relationship, school attachment, and the risk of dropping out. The TSRS scale by [19], the PSSM scale by [20], and the scale inspired by [21] were used. They provide reliable data for statistical analysis.

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

A quantitative study was conducted with a sample of 480 learners. The results, presented in Table 1, were obtained from the analysis and processing of data collected through a questionnaire.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and ranges of the study variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Educational relationship (TSRS)	3.84	0.71	1.8	5
Sense of Belonging (PSSM)	3.76	0.66	1.9	5
Risk of dropping out	2.12	0.83	1	5

Source: Created by the author

The data show an overall level of *modéré* to *élevé* in terms of educational engagement and school attachment, and a low-to-moderate risk of dropping out.

3.2 Correlation Between Variables

Table 2 presents the correlations between the variables studied. It shows the Pearson coefficients (*r*) and *p*-values. These results illustrate the links between the educational relationship, the sense of belonging, and the risk of dropping out

Table 2. Matrix of binary correlations (Pearson's *r*) and associated *p*-values

Cross-variables	<i>r</i> (Pearson)	<i>p</i> – valeur
Educational engagement ↔ School belonging	+0.62	< 0.001
Educational relationship ↔ Risk of dropping out	–0.55	< 0.001
School belonging ↔ Risk of dropping out	–0.68	< 0.001

Source: Created by the author

A high-quality educational relationship strengthens the sense of belonging. These two factors reduce the risk of dropping out of school. These findings confirm the research by [22] and [23].

3.3 Multiple Regression Model

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis. It assesses the effect of the educational relationship and the sense of belonging on school dropout rates. The β coefficients, t-tests, and p-values measure the influence of each factor. The R^2 coefficient indicates the proportion of variance explained by the model

Table 3. Results of the multiple regression model predicting the risk of dropping out (β , t , p et R^2)

Predictive variable	β standardisé	t	p – valeur
Educational relationship	-0.28	-7.11	< 0.001
School affiliation	-0.46	-10.82	< 0.001
Explained variance (R^2)	+0.54		

Source: Created by the author

The multiple regression model aims to determine the extent to which the educational relationship and the sense of belonging at school can predict the risk of dropping out. The standardized β coefficients indicate the strength and direction of each predictor variable's influence on dropping out, regardless of their units of measurement. The results first show that the educational relationship has a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.28$, $t = -7.11$, $p < 0.001$). The more positive the teacher-student relationship, the lower the risk of dropping out. However, the most significant effect comes from the sense of belonging to school, which has a higher coefficient ($\beta = -0.46$, $t = -10.82$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that this variable is the strongest predictor of dropping out among the factors examined. The explained variance index ($R^2 = 0.54$) reveals that 54 % of the variation in the risk of dropping out is jointly explained by these two dimensions, which represent a substantial proportion in the field of educational science.

A sense of belonging is a key factor in reducing dropout rates. The teacher-student relationship indirectly contributes to this by reinforcing it. These findings confirm the work of [24]. A positive

relationship promotes inclusion, engagement, and academic persistence.

3.4 Mediation Analysis

Table 4 presents the results of the mediation analysis method proposed by [25], aimed at examining whether the sense of school belonging plays a mediating role in the effect of the educational relationship on the risk of dropping out. The table distinguishes between the direct effect of the educational relationship on dropout, the indirect effect mediated by the sense of belonging, and the total effect combining both contributions. The coefficients, 95% confidence intervals, and p-values allow for the assessment of the strength and significance of each effect, highlighting the central role of a sense of belonging as an explanatory mechanism of the educational relationship in preventing school dropout

Table 4. Direct, indirect, and total effects of the educational relationship on the risk of dropping out

Effect	Coefficient α	IC 95 %	p
Direct effect (→ - dropout relationship)	-0.21	[-0.29, -0.13]	< 0.001
Indirect effect (→ - school affiliation relationship → -dropout relationship)	-0.31	[-0.39, -0.24]	< 0.001
Total effect	-0.52		

Source: Created by the author

The results of the mediation analysis show that the educational relationship influences the risk of dropping out both directly and indirectly. The direct effect of the educational relationship on dropping out is significant ($\alpha = -0.21$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that, regardless of the sense of belonging, a high-quality teacher-student relationship reduces the risk of dropping out. However, the indirect effect mediated by the sense of belonging is even greater ($\alpha = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$), and accounts for nearly 60% of the total effect ($\alpha_{total} = -0.52$), highlighting the central role of school belonging as an explanatory mechanism. A positive educational relationship strengthens students' sense of belonging. This reduces the risk of dropping out of school. These findings confirm the work of [25] and [26]. They

underscore the importance of an inclusive school climate in promoting student retention.

The findings suggest that the teacher–student relationship should be strengthened. Mentoring, tutoring, and student-centered approaches can help achieve this. They also highlight the importance of fostering a sense of belonging to prevent students from dropping out of school. This must become a priority. It is important to create an inclusive school environment. Student participation must also be encouraged. Strengthening their sense of school identity is equally essential. There is also a direct effect. This means that not everything depends on a sense of belonging. Therefore, action must be taken on other fronts. For example, school supervision is important. Communication practices must be positive. Behavior management also matters.

In summary, a sense of belonging plays a central role. It serves as a link between the educational relationship and school dropout rates. The results show that the quality of relationships is essential. School inclusion is also very important. These factors help us better understand the problem. They allow us to propose concrete actions. They also serve to guide educational policies. The goal is to strengthen human relationships and student engagement. We must also take into account the direct effects that help reduce dropout rates.

4 Conclusions

School dropout is currently a major challenge for the Moroccan education system. It impacts students' educational trajectories. It also affects the country's social and economic development. This study seeks to understand the role of the educational relationship and the sense of belonging to school. It analyzes their influence on school retention. It also examines their effects on the risk of dropping out. The results are clear. The educational relationship plays an essential role. The quality of interactions between teachers and students is decisive. Support, respect, communication, and availability are very important. This relationship directly influences the student's decision to stay in school. It also has an indirect effect. This indirect role is mediated by a sense of belonging. This sense means that the student feels accepted, supported, and integrated. They feel valued at their school. This factor is central. It accounts for more than half of the total effect of the educational relationship on dropout rates. In other words, a good relationship strengthens a sense of

belonging. And it is primarily this that reduces the risk of dropping out.

These results confirm several studies. Schools cannot succeed without positive human relationships. Trust and respect are essential. In Morocco, the context makes the situation more difficult. Social inequalities exist. Learning conditions can be challenging. Classes are sometimes overcrowded. All of this increases the risk of dropping out. It therefore becomes very important to strengthen the relationship between teachers and students. These findings have concrete implications. It is not enough to focus solely on academic matters. Solutions must not be purely academic or disciplinary. A comprehensive approach must be adopted. It is important to improve the school climate. Teachers must also be trained in educational communication. Inclusive practices must be encouraged. Student participation must be valued. Other measures can be helpful. Mentoring and personalized tutoring are promising avenues. Listening and psychosocial support are also important. All these measures must be consistent. They must be part of a clear educational policy. This policy must emphasize the human dimension of teaching.

In summary, this study highlights the importance of educational relationships and a sense of belonging. These elements are essential for student retention. School must be a place where students feel recognized and supported. They must feel that they belong there. Strengthening these aspects can help reduce school dropout rates in Morocco. It can also promote success for all students.

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