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Reducing School Dropout in Madagascar through Policy and Community Interventions

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Abstrak

This study aims to examine strategies to reduce school dropout in Madagascar through policy interventions and community involvement. School dropout remains a significant challenge influenced by socioeconomic constraints, weak school environments, and gaps between policy design and local implementation. This research employs a qualitative approach, with data collected from 10 key informants consisting of school leaders, teachers, local authorities, and community representatives selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis is used to identify key patterns related to the causes of dropout and effective intervention strategies. The findings indicate that poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and limited educational resources contribute to low student engagement, while weak policy enforcement reduces the effectiveness of existing reforms. On the other hand, strong community participation, including the involvement of parents and local governance systems, plays an important role in supporting students' educational continuity. This study emphasizes that alignment between policy and community-based practices can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of dropout reduction efforts. It recommends strengthening policy implementation, improving school environments, and increasing active community engagement. Future research is suggested to examine the long-term impact of interventions across different regions in Madagascar.

Keywords Dropout, Community, School, Madagascar

Introduction

School dropout remains one of the most persistent challenges facing education systems worldwide, particularly in developing countries where socioeconomic vulnerabilities,

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institutional weaknesses, and cultural dynamics intersect to limit educational attainment (Pritchard et al., 2000). Defined as the premature discontinuation of formal schooling before completion, dropout is not merely an educational issue but a multidimensional problem with profound social, economic, and public health implications (Emynorane et al., 2024). Individuals who leave school early are more likely to experience unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion, thereby reinforcing cycles of inequality (Rumberger, 2011). School dropouts also constitute a major public health concern because they are closely associated with adverse health outcomes and reduced life opportunities (De Ridder et al., 2012).

In broader literature, dropout is often conceptualized as a gradual process rather than a single event, driven by a complex interplay of individual, family, school, and community factors. Early theoretical contributions emphasize the role of student disengagement in initiating withdrawal from school (Finn, 1989). Multiple theoretical pathways, including academic failure, deviant behavior, and weak social bonding, have been identified as predictors of dropout (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). More recent studies reinforce the importance of student engagement, suggesting that emotional, behavioral, and cognitive connections to school are critical determinants of persistence (Appleton et al., 2008). Disengagement has also been shown to predict delinquency and substance use, which further highlights its long-term consequences (Henry et al., 2012).

Building on this understanding, scholars and policymakers have increasingly focused on interventions aimed at preventing dropout and promoting school completion. School-based strategies, such as improving academic support and addressing behavioral issues, have demonstrated measurable success in reducing dropout rates (Fortin et al., 1999). Early warning systems that identify at-risk students and provide timely interventions are also effective in keeping students on track (Balfanz et al., 2007). Systematic reviews indicate that comprehensive dropout prevention programs, combining academic support, mentoring, and family engagement, can improve school completion rates, although their effectiveness varies depending on context and implementation (Wilson et al., 2011). These findings highlight the importance of evidence-based and multifaceted interventions in addressing dropout.

The literature also points to the limitations of approaches that focus exclusively on schools. Preventing dropout requires moving beyond prevention toward ensuring school completion through systemic approaches (Lehr et al., 2003). Social work perspectives emphasize the need to address broader socioeconomic conditions, including poverty and family instability, which contribute to dropout (Dupper, 1993). A recent scoping review confirms that effective interventions often extend beyond the classroom and incorporate policy measures, family engagement, and community participation (Eslamian et al., 2023; Fortin et al., 1999; Wilson et al., 2011). These insights suggest

that sustainable solutions must integrate both institutional and community-level strategies.

In the context of Madagascar, the issue of school dropout is particularly acute due to structural inequalities, poverty, and regional disparities. Cultural practices and local educational perspectives significantly shape schooling experiences, particularly in rural and underserved regions (Bien-Aimé et al., 2025). Education is widely recognized as a key driver of social transformation, yet barriers to sustained participation persist across different regions of the country (Michel et al., 2026). Economic and developmental factors, including the role of sectors such as tourism, also influence educational progress and access to schooling (Eric et al., 2025). These contextual factors highlight the need for localized and culturally sensitive approaches to addressing dropouts.

Community involvement has emerged as a particularly promising avenue for improving educational outcomes in Madagascar. Local governance mechanisms, such as the Dina system, can strengthen educational accountability and reinforce community norms that support schooling (Sulla et al., 2025). Active community participation contributes positively to school success by fostering shared responsibility and local ownership of education (Emynorane et al., 2026). Integrating career orientation into education systems can further enhance student motivation and better prepare learners for future opportunities, thereby reducing the likelihood of dropout (Ratna et al., 2026). These findings highlight the critical role of community-driven initiatives in complementing formal education policies.

Significant gaps remain in existing literature. Much of the global research on dropout prevention is based on high-income country contexts, which limits its applicability to developing countries such as Madagascar. Community involvement is increasingly recognized as important, yet there is limited integration of community-based approaches with formal policy frameworks. Context-specific models that account for the unique sociocultural dynamics of Malagasy communities, including traditional governance systems and local educational values, are still underdeveloped. There is also insufficient emphasis on translating educational innovations into practical and scalable solutions within local contexts (Janssen et al., 2013; Pritchard et al., 2000).

This study addresses these gaps by proposing an integrated approach to reducing school dropout in Madagascar through the combined lens of policy and community interventions. Effective strategies must not only improve school-level practices but also align with broader governance and leadership frameworks that shape policy implementation (Emynorane & Arrive, 2024). The study bridges institutional policies and grassroots practices to provide a more comprehensive and context-sensitive framework for addressing dropouts.

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic and contextually grounded perspective. Previous studies tend to focus primarily on either school-based interventions or community participation. This study integrates both dimensions within a unified

framework tailored to the Malagasy context. It also incorporates recent empirical findings from Madagascar, thereby contributing to the limited body of localized research on dropout prevention. The analysis of how policy measures can be effectively aligned with community practices provides a more comprehensive understanding of how to sustain school participation and completion.

Addressing school dropout in Madagascar demands a comprehensive approach that extends beyond conventional educational reforms. A deeper understanding of the issue within its social, cultural, and policy contexts is necessary to develop effective and sustainable solutions. This study contributes to both academic discourse and policy development by proposing an integrated framework for reducing dropout. Sustained participation in schooling is critical not only for individual educational achievement but also for promoting inclusive and long-term national development (Rumberger, 2011).

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore how policy and community interventions can reduce school dropout in Madagascar by capturing in-depth perspectives from key stakeholders. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 key informants selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement and expertise in education and community engagement. The informants included school principals, classroom teachers, local education officials, community leaders, parents, and representatives of non-governmental organizations working in the education sector. Selection criteria focused on participants with practical experience in addressing school retention and dropout issues within their communities, ensuring relevance and diversity of perspectives. Data collection emphasized open-ended questions to allow participants to share detailed insights into the causes of dropout and effective intervention strategies. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving coding, categorization, and identification of recurring patterns and themes related to policy implementation and community participation. To enhance data credibility and trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation by comparing responses across different participant groups, as well as member checking to validate interpretations with selected informants. Additionally, careful documentation of the research process and consistent coding procedures were maintained to ensure transparency and reliability of findings.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that reducing school dropout in Madagascar requires a dynamic interaction between policy implementation and community-based support

systems. Insights gathered from the 10 key informants highlight that dropout is influenced by interconnected structural, institutional, and sociocultural factors. Participants consistently emphasized that poverty, limited school resources, and weak policy enforcement contribute significantly to student disengagement. At the same time, strong community involvement and culturally grounded practices were identified as critical protective factors that encourage school retention. The analysis further shows that interventions are most effective when they combine formal education policies with active participation from families and local leaders.

To better illustrate these findings, the main themes derived from the data analysis are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Key Themes on School Dropout Reduction through Policy and Community Interventions in Madagascar

Theme	**Description**	**Supporting Insight from Informants**
Socioeconomic Barriers	Financial hardship, child labor, and lack of basic school materials	Families prioritize income-generating activities over schooling
School-Level Challenges	Inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and limited support systems	Overcrowded classrooms reduce student engagement
Policy Implementation Gaps	Weak enforcement and limited monitoring of education policies	Policies exist but are inconsistently applied at the local level
Community Engagement	Role of parents, local leaders, and traditional systems	Community norms and local governance encourage school attendance
Motivational Factors	Career orientation and perceived value of education	Students remain engaged when education is linked to future opportunities

Source: Interviews with key informants, 2026.

The results highlight several critical points for discussion. First, socioeconomic barriers remain the most dominant factor influencing school dropout. Informants stressed that poverty forces many families to prioritize immediate economic survival over long-term educational benefits, which aligns with broader findings on structural inequality and dropout. Second, school-level challenges contribute significantly to student disengagement. Poor infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient teaching resources create an environment that discourages sustained participation. These conditions weaken students' academic performance and sense of belonging.

Third, gaps in policy implementation limit the effectiveness of existing educational reforms. Although national policies aimed at improving access and retention are in place, their impact is reduced by inconsistent enforcement and lack of monitoring at the local level. Informants emphasized that stronger coordination between policymakers and local stakeholders is necessary to ensure that policies translate into practice. Fourth, community engagement emerges as a powerful and contextually relevant solution. The involvement of parents, community leaders, and local governance systems fosters accountability and reinforces the value of education. Community-driven initiatives not only support students but also bridge the gap between formal policy and everyday practice.

1. The persistence of socioeconomic inequality as a primary driver of dropout

Community involvement emerges as a sustainable and context-sensitive solution to reducing school dropout, particularly in settings such as Madagascar where social structures and local traditions strongly influence educational participation. Findings from this study show that when communities actively engage in education, they create supportive environments that reinforce school attendance and student persistence. This perspective is consistent with research emphasizing that dropout prevention is more effective when it extends beyond the classroom and incorporates family and community participation (Eslamian et al., 2023).

In Madagascar, community-based mechanisms play a crucial role in shaping educational outcomes. Local governance systems such as the Dina function as informal regulatory frameworks that promote social accountability and encourage adherence to shared norms, including the importance of schooling (Sulla et al., 2025). These systems help bridge the gap between formal education policies and everyday practices by embedding educational expectations within community values. Community participation also fosters a sense of collective responsibility, where parents, leaders, and local stakeholders contribute actively to student success and monitor school attendance (Emynorane et al., 2026).

Community involvement further enhances student motivation by making education more relevant to local realities. When families and community members are engaged, students are more likely to perceive education as valuable and connected to future opportunities. Integrating career orientation into education systems strengthens this connection and supports long-term engagement (Ratna et al., 2026). In addition, linking education with local economic activities, such as tourism development, can provide practical incentives for students to remain in school (Eric et al., 2025).

Effective community involvement requires alignment with formal policy frameworks to achieve lasting impact. Isolated community efforts may have limited reach without institutional support and resources (Janssen et al., 2013). A coordinated approach that integrates community practices with national education policies can en-

hance both effectiveness and sustainability. Strengthening these linkages allows community-driven initiatives to contribute meaningfully to reducing school dropout and promoting inclusive educational outcomes in Madagascar.

2. The critical role of school environment in shaping student engagement

The school environment plays a critical role in shaping student engagement and persistence, particularly in contexts where educational resources are limited. Evidence from this study indicates that inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient teaching materials significantly contribute to student disengagement. These conditions not only hinder effective teaching and learning but also create an environment in which students feel undervalued and unsupported. Research has long emphasized that students' connection to school is a key determinant of their willingness to remain enrolled, and negative school conditions can accelerate the process of withdrawal (Finn, 1989).

Overcrowded classrooms and limited instructional resources reduce the quality of learning and limit opportunities for meaningful interaction between teachers and students. When teachers are responsible for large numbers of learners, individualized attention becomes difficult, and struggling students are more likely to fall behind academically. Academic difficulties, in turn, are strongly associated with increased dropout risk, as students may lose confidence in their abilities and become disengaged from school activities (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000). Similarly, insufficient materials and poorly maintained facilities can diminish students' motivation by signaling a lack of investment in their education, which negatively affects their sense of belonging (Appleton et al., 2008).

The physical and social aspects of the school environment are closely interconnected in influencing student engagement. A supportive and well-resourced environment fosters positive relationships, encourages participation, and enhances students' emotional attachment to school. In contrast, environments characterized by neglect and resource scarcity can lead to behavioral issues and decreased academic performance, both of which are predictors of dropout (Fortin et al., 1999). Early identification of at-risk students through supportive school systems, such as monitoring attendance and academic progress, can help mitigate these challenges and keep students on track (Balfanz et al., 2007).

Improving school environments is therefore essential for sustaining student motivation and preventing early withdrawal. Investments in infrastructure, teaching resources, and teacher support systems can create more engaging and inclusive learning spaces. Such improvements should be complemented by policies that prioritize equitable resource distribution and strengthen school-level capacity. Creating a positive school climate not only enhances academic outcomes but also reinforces students'

sense of belonging, which is fundamental to long-term educational persistence and success.

3. The gap between policy design and local implementation

The gap between policy design and local implementation remains a critical challenge in efforts to reduce school dropouts. Although many countries, including Madagascar, have established policies aimed at improving access to education and student retention, their effectiveness is often constrained by weak enforcement and limited monitoring mechanisms. Policies may be well formulated at the national level, yet their translation into practice at the local level is frequently inconsistent. This disconnect reduces the potential impact of interventions and limits progress toward improving school completion rates (Rumberger, 2011).

One key issue lies in the lack of coordination between national authorities and local stakeholders. Education policies are often developed in centralized systems without sufficient consideration of local realities, including cultural norms, economic conditions, and institutional capacity. As a result, implementation at community and school levels may not fully align with policy objectives. Effective dropout prevention requires active collaboration among policymakers, school administrators, teachers, and community leaders to ensure that policies are adapted to local contexts and needs (Lehr et al., 2003). Without such coordination, even well-designed policies may fail to produce meaningful outcomes.

Another major limitation is the absence of strong accountability and monitoring systems. In many cases, there are insufficient mechanisms to track policy implementation, evaluate progress, and address challenges in real time. This lack of oversight can lead to uneven application of policies across regions and schools, particularly in rural or underserved areas. Strengthening monitoring systems, including the use of data-driven approaches and regular evaluation, is essential for ensuring that policies are implemented effectively and consistently. Evidence-based interventions are more likely to succeed when they are supported by systematic monitoring and continuous feedback (Wilson et al., 2011).

Bridging the gap between policy design and implementation requires a more integrated and participatory approach. Engaging local stakeholders in both the development and execution of policies can enhance relevance, ownership, and sustainability. Community involvement can also strengthen accountability by creating shared responsibility for educational outcomes. Aligning national frameworks with local practices ensures that policies are not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable. Addressing this gap is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of dropout reduction strategies and achieving long-term improvements in educational access and retention.

4. Community involvement as a sustainable and context-sensitive solution

Community involvement represents a sustainable and context-sensitive approach to reducing school dropout, particularly in contexts where social cohesion and local traditions strongly influence educational participation. The findings of this study demonstrate that active participation from parents, community leaders, and local governance systems plays a crucial role in supporting students and reinforcing school attendance. When communities are engaged, education is no longer viewed solely as a responsibility of schools but as a shared commitment, which strengthens accountability and encourages consistent student participation (Eslamian et al., 2023).

Parents and families play a central role in shaping students' attitudes toward education. Their involvement in monitoring attendance, supporting learning at home, and communicating with schools contributes significantly to student persistence. At the same time, community leaders and local authorities help establish norms and expectations that prioritize education. In Madagascar, traditional governance structures such as the Dina system provide a culturally grounded mechanism for promoting social responsibility and adherence to community rules, including those related to schooling (Sulla et al., 2025). These structures create a supportive environment where education is valued and protected.

Community-based approaches also enhance the relevance of education by connecting it to local realities and future opportunities. When communities participate in educational processes, they help align school activities with local economic and social contexts, making learning more meaningful for students. This relevance increases motivation and reduces the likelihood of dropout. Community engagement has also been shown to strengthen school success by fostering collaboration among stakeholders and building trust between schools and families (Emynorane et al., 2026). Such collaboration creates a network of support that extends beyond the classroom.

Integrating community involvement into formal policy frameworks is essential for achieving long-term impact. Policies that recognize and support local participation can enhance both effectiveness and sustainability. Aligning national education strategies with community practices ensures that interventions are culturally appropriate and practically applicable. Strengthening these connections between policy and community action can significantly improve efforts to reduce school dropout and promote inclusive educational outcomes in Madagascar.

Conclusion

Reducing school dropout in Madagascar requires an integrated and context-sensitive approach that combines effective policy implementation with strong community engagement. The findings of this study demonstrate that dropout is driven by interconnected factors, including socioeconomic constraints, weak school environments, and gaps between policy design and local implementation. Addressing these challenges

demands coordinated efforts that not only improve school infrastructure and teaching resources but also strengthen accountability mechanisms and ensure that policies are effectively translated into practice. Community involvement emerges as a particularly powerful strategy, as it reinforces the value of education, supports student engagement, and bridges the gap between formal systems and local realities. Based on these findings, it is recommended that policymakers prioritize inclusive and participatory approaches by actively involving parents, community leaders, and local governance structures in educational planning and monitoring. Investments in school environments, teacher support, and contextually relevant programs such as career orientation should also be strengthened to enhance student motivation and retention. In addition, establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems can improve policy effectiveness and ensure consistent implementation across regions. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of combined policy and community interventions, as well as comparative studies across different regions of Madagascar to better understand contextual variations. Further investigation into the role of cultural practices and local governance systems in shaping educational outcomes would also provide valuable insights for developing more sustainable and locally grounded dropout reduction strategies.

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