Factors affecting school dropout: Comparative study of rural and urban settings

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Abstract

Education remains the key to development in all countries. Thus, every country is making efforts to promote education for all. However, despite these efforts, the school dropout rate continues to rise. With this in mind, this research is carried out with the aim of analyzing the factors underlying the phenomenon of school dropout in rural and urban areas. Mixed research method was carried out on one hundred and six (106) participants identified using purposive and accidental sampling techniques. Due to the similar characteristics of the population and its unknown size (exact number of students who dropped out in the two municipalities being unknown), it was logical, for statistical reasons, to determine the size of this sample accordingly. Data processing was based on an analytical model inspired by Viau's (1999) theory of motivational dynamics and Ryan and Deci's (1985) theory of self-determination. The results research show that a student's environment necessarily influences his or her school life. School dropout in rural areas, unlike in urban areas, is more influenced by economic factors and those linked to the family circle. The identified specific factors imply policy decisions and interventions tailored to the needs of students in urban and rural communities.

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1. Introduction

Education is the foundation of individual fulfillment for every person and societal transformations. It occupies a very important place in the economic and social development of nations (UNESCO, 2017, as cited in Siabanni, nd). Indeed, international development policies (SDG No. 4), which mainly aim at the development of primary and secondary education, as well as national policies, largely promote Education for All (EFA). Education proves to be an indispensable necessity for every human being. School education plays an important role in the development of societies, and it would be utopian to envisage sustainable development without it. Basic education has become one of the great priorities of development (Raïma, 2022). Voices are raised and efforts are made to promote EFA and to keep children within the educational system. Education in Africa is a major priority for UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). In response, the UIS develops indicators to assist governments, donors, and United Nations partners in better addressing education challenges (UNESCO and UIS, 2019).

Despite the multiple efforts made by national and international institutions to promote the retention of children within the educational system, it is clear that the phenomenon of school dropout continues to persist (Flavier & Méard, 2016 ; Doll et al., 2013 ; Roman et al., 2022 ; Ozdemir et al., 2024 ; Desai et al., 2024; Reese, 2007 ; Muchenje & Goronga, 2020). While many children leave primary school prematurely, with few skills necessary for successful integration into society, others drop out of school before completing the cycle in which they are enrolled (Gbahoui, 2014).

According to Sawadogo (2013), dropout among girls is more concerning due to the high rate observed within their ranks every year. School is often viewed negatively for girls, especially as they transition into adolescence. For parents, school emancipates the young girl, exposes her to sexual risks, and relieves her of domestic chores, it is an identity and reproductive reflex. Keeping girls in school also takes a back seat when the family's daily survival, as is often the case, is at stake. In this regard, UNESCO and UIS (2019) found girls' education as a major priority. Indeed, according to UNESCO and UIS data (2019), 9 million girls aged approximately 6 to 11 years will never go to school, compared to 6 million boys. Their disadvantage starts early; 23% of girls are not enrolled in primary school, compared to 19% of boys. In adolescence, the exclusion rate for girls rises to 36% compared to 32% for

boys. Dropping out of school prevents developing countries from making the most of their resources and mainly affects the most vulnerable groups in society (Yin, 2005). While the governments are making significant efforts to improve their educational system, many obstacles remain, including school dropout, which is among the ills plaguing these systems. This phenomenon is all the more insidious as, by ejecting a significant portion of childrens from the education system prematurely, it causes a huge waste of time and resources, thus drastically reducing the expected performance (Mendiboure, 2010).

Benin is not spared from the phenomenon of school dropout. Indeed, it is a country that has always witnessed this phenomenon despite the colossal efforts made by the State solely to promote schooling and the retention of children within the educational system. At the national level in public education over the past five years (from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019), the dropout rate for girls has been higher every year than for boys. For 2018-2019, it was 22.27% for girls and 20.80% for boys (Statistical Yearbooks, 2014 as cited in Social Watch Benin & RIFONGA Benin, 2020). According to a research report conducted in Benin in 2017, communes classified as rural have the lowest levels of children's schooling life expectancy. These analyses highlight the particularity of the communes of Abomey-Calavi and Cotonou (both urban), where children can expect to spend approximately ten years (10.2 and 10.1 years, respectively) in school, compared to only two years for children in the commune of Kérou (rural commune). In other words, a child from Cotonou or Abomey-Calavi can expect to reach the tenth year of schooling (3rd level of the first cycle of secondary education in case of no repetition), whereas a child from Kérou can only hope to reach the second year of schooling (CP class: preparatory course, primary cycle) (Dansou, 2017). It is therefore undeniable that the risk for children to drop out is higher in rural areas compared to children living in urban areas.

There are multiple factors causing increased school dropout rate, which may vary from one country to another or from one community to another due to the realities that students may experience. For instance, a child's environment significantly influences their retention in the educational system (Yahia et al., 2018; Mackatiani et al., 2022; Farah et al., 2017; Karabo & Natal, 2013; Paul et al., 2021; Buop et al., 2018; Huisman & Smits, 2015; Baalmann et al., 2022). As a result, children living in rural areas are the most vulnerable to the phenomenon of school dropout, and there are several factors underlying this situation, such as distance (Zeragaber et al., 2024; De Saro, 2022; Sharma & Levinson, 2019). In a report by UNESCO -

IIPE Dakar Pole in 2014, Benin reveals that the situation appears relatively more pronounced in rural areas. The number of children aged 6 to 15 years with a school more than 30 minutes away from home is estimated at 31% in rural areas, compared to 21% in urban areas. However, school attendance decreases significantly when the school is more than 30 minutes away from home, especially in rural areas. Indeed, the dropout rate amounts to nearly 13% when the school is more than 30 minutes away from home, compared to 7% when the school is less than 30 minutes from home. In rural areas, there is a transition from a dropout rate of 9% to 16% when the school is located more than 30 minutes away from home (UNESCO, 2014). Thus, depending on whether students are in rural or urban areas, the manifestation of the phenomenon of school dropout differs, and the factors favoring it are more dominant in rural areas.

The two municipalities under study, namely Athiémé and Porto-Novo, are rural and urban communes, respectively. It goes without saying that these municipalities do not experience the same realities regarding school dropout. They all experience the phenomenon of school dropout, but in different forms. It would be useful to study the factors of school dropout in Athiémé and Porto-Novo to understand their impact in both rural and urban municipalities. The choice of this study is based on the principle of inclusive education that is accessible to all without distinction of sex, race, religion, and social status, among others. The outcome of this research could therefore contribute to selecting relevant and precise strategies that can promote the retention of children in school according to the socio-economic characteristics of their living environments.

2. Literature review

2.1. Risk factors for school dropout

Several studies agree that the phenomenon of school dropout is not a one-dimensional problem but a combination of personal, school-related, familial, and environmental risk factors that require a more systemic approach (Blaya, 2010).

Personal/Individual factors. According to Kpoholo (2013), school dropout is related to the perception that students themselves have of school. Indeed, for many students, school is seen as a place with few future prospects. Given that the end of the academic trajectory, although marked by obtaining a title (diploma, certificate), does not guarantee employment

and a better life systematically. It thus appears that school dropout is likely to occur when students begin to show a certain disinterest in school on the pretext that it does not necessarily guarantee a better and successful future. In addition to students' perception of school, absenteeism also proves to be one of the factors that can lead to dropping out. On this subject, Bâ et al. (2020) explain that dropping out is a terminal process whose seeds date back to absenteeism. The absentee student, inevitably, if the trend does not reverse, is doomed to academic failure. This can take two major forms: either the student drops out, or they are excluded (for lack of attendance, poor performance, etc.). The factors that justify chronic absenteeism are practically the same as those that explain school dropout. Because an absentee student, even if present occasionally, drops out. The second level of the process, towards dropping out, is indeed academic failure. Some students accumulate significant delays (sometimes since primary school) associated with repeated failures (repeating grades). This situation is not unrelated to the fact that these students say they like school less, are more likely to be absent from it, and are less involved in their educational journey (they study less, attach little importance to their success, etc.) (Lacroix & Potvin, 2021). It is indeed evident that all these factors combined (delays and repeating grades) inevitably favor school dropout.

Moreover, Anton (2016) also emphasizes personal difficulties (internalized and externalized behavioral disorders, low self-esteem) and unhealthy lifestyle habits (substance abuse) as personal factors. According to a study conducted by Laurier and Yvon (1999), assertiveness more often leads to school dropout. More delinquent youth have difficulties respecting school structures and rules. Even if this training program is a way to make school more acceptable to a clientele of young people who are very unreceptive to academic learning, school remains too restrictive for many of them. The most offensive towards the environment and who have assertiveness skills leave school.

Family factors. The low level of education of parents also emerges as one of the determining factors in children's school dropout. Indeed, the less educated parents are, the more likely children are to drop out quickly. In this regard, Blaya (2010) argues that the level of education of parents, despite attempts to democratize public education and the measures of positive discrimination that may be taken, still influences the academic success of children. This reflects the influence that children receive from their parents. It is also natural for children to tend to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors. Thus, social factors are even more

numerous and complex. In this regard, two of them are often advanced: the cultural capital of the child, generally evaluated by the level of education of the parent(s) (a distinction between educated parents and non-educated parents is established), and the socio-professional category to which the parent(s) belongs (Bâ et al., 2020).

Anton (2016) emphasizes the precariousness of the socio-economic context, the fragility of the family fabric (single-parent families, blended families, large families), and the inadequacy of the relationship with schooling (lack of parental involvement with low support, little encouragement with low academic expectations or, conversely, inadequate investment). In the same vein, Bâ et al. (2020) argue that social factors go beyond the socio-professional category of the parent(s). Corollary effects such as the type of housing, available means of information, family structure, are often put forward to justify school dropout. Likewise, factors related to illness, marriage (especially for girls), difficulty for some to obtain a birth certificate, are also factors in academic failure. According to the report by INSAE conducted in 2014, the reasons for the school dropout of young people in Benin essentially boil down to economic reasons and the absence of schools near the place of residence. The reasons that lead students to leave the educational system without obtaining the end-of-cycle diploma thus vary according to the students and/or according to the environments, and sometimes this can be independent of the student's will. Furthermore, the economic situation of families also triggers school dropout. In this regard, Bâ et al. (2020) explain that children from low-income families, even if this can be a source of motivation, are more exposed to school dropout.

Lacroix and Potvin (2021) highlight the material realities and those related to the level of education of families as factors associated with the phenomenon of school dropout. The experience of a precarious socio-economic situation in the family and the associated conditions (poor housing, risky behaviors, inequalities in health, etc.), represent risk factors strongly linked to school dropout. Parents whose socio-economic status is precarious are more likely to have low education, and this latter variable also has a relationship with dropout. Low-educated parents may be less able to support and help their child academically (homework and lessons), especially as the child progresses in their educational journey or encounters obstacles within it. Furthermore, these parents are sometimes less demanding in terms of schooling. For example, they may exercise less academic supervision and have low expectations regarding learning tasks. The quality of the family atmosphere and relationships between members is

also associated with school dropout. Low levels of cohesion and support among family members, as well as a lack of parental supervision over the child's activities, are components of the risk or experience of dropout. At-risk students perceive less support from family members and report difficulties in communicating with their parents. Furthermore, the level of education of parents also impacts children's school life. Thus, according to Kouassi (2016), some parents with a secondary level of education may adopt a form of indifference towards the school institution and neglect towards the children or at least their learning.

School factors. School factors primarily involve the quality of the school climate (the atmosphere within the institution and/or classroom), the quality of teacher-student relationships (perception of teachers as unresponsive, unhelpful, lacking clarity in rules and ethics), tracking into specialized classes resulting in student stigmatization, marginalization, and feeling abnormal, forced tracking (a choice imposed on the child), and boredom at school (Anton, 2016). Similarly, Vaillancourt (1998) emphasizes that the main reasons for school dropout are related to the school itself: it is the perceived dissatisfaction with school that encourages dropout. The school environment plays a crucial role in academic failure. Indeed, the size of the institution, the type of institution, the student-teacher ratio, the supervision exercised by the school, the types of pedagogical activities conducted, the path followed, the pedagogical resignation of teachers, the negative classroom climate, and poor student-teacher relationships, are all factors highlighted to justify the role of the school in school dropout (Bâ et al., 2020).

According to Lacroix and Potvin (2021), classroom climate, teacher-student relationships, and school climate are three factors closely related to the phenomenon of school dropout. Indeed, the atmosphere in a classroom is a factor in whether students drop out or not. The socio-educational climate of the school refers to the school climate (relational, educational, safety, justice, and belonging), the problems present at the school (violence, discipline issues, drug accessibility), and educational practices (supervision and recognition systems, teaching quality). The quality of this climate, dependent on interactions between school staff and students, positively or negatively influences students' adaptation. It is recognized that a good socio-educational climate promotes educational success, while a poor climate contributes to increased difficulties experienced by students (Lacroix & Potvin, 2021). Guigue (2003) argues that children primarily attribute the reasons for their dropout to school-

related issues such as boredom, failure, lack of interest and motivation in studies, and a lack of future prospects, even if there are concomitant difficulties such as family, personal, and social problems.

2.2. Theoretical framework

The present research builds upon two different theories: Viau's Motivational Dynamics Theory (1999) and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). The aim is to first present each of these theories and then to construct the modeling of this research.

Viau's Motivational Dynamics Theory (1999). Viau's theory (1999) posits that the student's perception of the value of the activity, as well as the perception of their competence and the controllability of the task, influence their motivation and thus their engagement or disengagement in the pedagogical activity. According to Viau (1994), the perception of the value of an activity is defined as the judgment that a student makes about the interest and usefulness of the activity based on the goals they pursue. The student's motivation is a dynamic phenomenon driven by the interaction between their perceptions and factors related to their school, family, and societal environment. He initially correlated the main determinants and indicators that were most relevant to consider, as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1

The motivational dynamics regarding an activity according to Viau (2014)
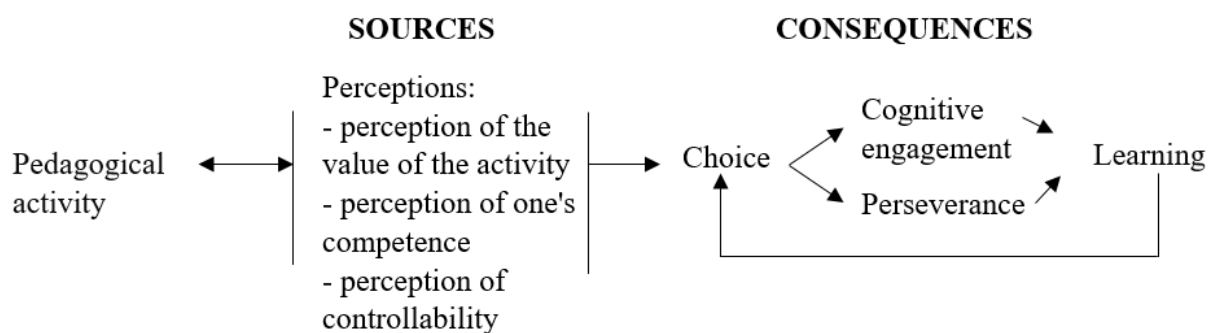

This model seeks to describe the motivational dynamics that drive a student when engaging in a pedagogical activity. This dynamic primarily originates from the perceptions that a student has of the pedagogical activity proposed to them. Three perceptions are mainly considered: the perception that the student has of the value of this pedagogical activity, the perception of their competence to accomplish it, and the perception of the control they have

over its progression. The perception of the value of an activity is the judgment that a student makes about its usefulness and interest in achieving the goals they pursue (Eccles et al., 1998, as cited in Viau, 2002). The perception of competence is a self-perception by which a student, before undertaking an activity with a high degree of uncertainty regarding its success, evaluates their abilities to perform it adequately (Pajares, 1996, as cited in Viau, 2002). The perception of controllability is defined as the perception that a student has of the degree of control they can exert over the progress and consequences of a pedagogical activity (Deci et al., 1991, as cited in Viau, 2002).

Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000). The self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (1985) relates to personality development and self-motivated behavior change. The theory aims to identify and explain the types of motivations that drive an individual to engage in a particular activity; it refers to autonomous motivation and regulated motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), motivation is considered self-determined if it reflects the actor's ability to feel responsible for their choices rather than being determined by internal or external constraints. This theory also suggests that each person is viewed as an active organism who continuously and naturally seeks to enhance their human potential through the discovery of new thoughts, mastery of new skills, and fulfillment of their needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000 as cited in Rebah & Dabove, 2017).

Deci and Ryan (2002) conceptualize three major types of motivation organized along a continuum: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Each form of motivation is associated with a varying degree of self-determination (Dupont, 2010). Intrinsic motivation is characterized by a perceived locus of internal causality. This type of motivation implies that the individual engages in an activity because they find pleasure and satisfaction in it (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002 as cited in Dupont, 2010). Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to engaging in an activity not because of the pleasure it brings, but often for external reasons or instrumental motives (e.g., punishment, reward, social pressure, obtaining approval from a third party). According to Deci and Ryan (2002) as cited in Information Network for Educational Success (RIRE, 2019), amotivation is defined as the absence of motivation. It represents the lowest level of self-determination.

From these theoretical foundations, the reference system is developed as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2

Research modeling
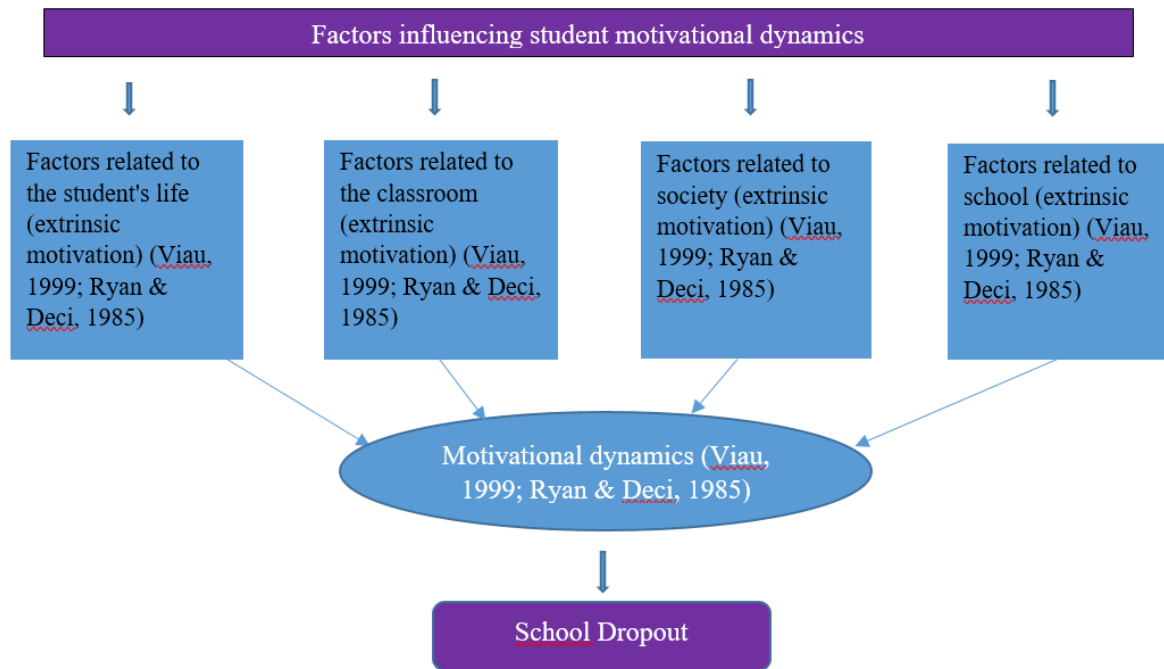
3. Methodology

This study is based on mixed surveys conducted in two municipalities of Benin, one rural (Athiémé) and the other urban (Porto-Novo). Each of these municipalities has both enrolled students and others who have dropped out of school due to socio-economic reasons. Considering the environment, most parents of these students are illiterate in the village as well as in the city. Data collection took place between March and May 2023. The target of this study is heterogeneous, consisting of three target groups: dropout students (at the secondary level), parents of students (at least one child dropped out), and administrative staff.

Due to the impossibility of surveying the entire target population, sampling was conducted. Two techniques were used for sampling: reasoned choice and accidental choice. The reasoned choice technique, used for dropout students, only considered those who had dropped out of secondary school within the past five years. It was assumed that students who had dropped out more than five years ago might not have recent information about the dropout phenomenon and that their circumstances may have changed significantly, potentially

providing outdated information. The reasoned choice technique was also used for parents of students, considering only those with at least one child who had dropped out. The accidental choice technique was used for administrative staff, selecting only those who belonged to the mentioned categories and were available during data collection.

The sample of this research comprised 106 individuals, specifically 48 students per municipality, 3 parents of students, and 2 administrative staff in each of the two municipalities. Due to the similar characteristics and unknown size of the population (exact number of dropout students in the two municipalities being unknown), it was judicious, for statistical logic reasons, to determine the sample size to be 106 individuals in total. The summary of the sample is presented in table 1.

Table 1

Sample size of the research

Target categories	Source	Sampling technique	Size
Students	Athiémé	Purposive sampling	48
	Porto-Novo		48
Parents of students	Athiémé	Purposive sampling	3
	Porto-Novo		3
Administrative staff	Athiémé	Random sampling	2
	Porto-Novo		2
Total			**106**

Since the collected data are of different natures, the methods for their processing have rightly been different. Students who have experienced school dropout and meet the criteria to be part of the sample were targeted and each received a paper survey questionnaire which they completed. Those who had difficulties in French were assisted by the interviewer. Since the research was conducted in two different municipalities, the survey was conducted municipality by municipality, starting with Athiémé. Due to the similar characteristics of the population and its unknown size (exact number of students who dropped out in the two municipalities being unknown), it was logical, for statistical reasons, to determine the size of this sample to be ninety-six (96) students in total. The survey questionnaire contained questions related to the research objectives. The collected data were entered into IBM SPSS version 26 software where they were subsequently processed.

The semi-structured interviews conducted in the context of this research allowed, through semi-open questions, to gather information on the manifestation of the phenomenon of secondary school student dropout from parents of students and administrative staff. The interview guide addressed to parents of students was not the same as that addressed to administrative staff. The questions addressed to parents of students, on one hand, relate to family realities that may contribute to secondary school student dropout. On the other hand, it elicited the opinions of the interviewed parents on the strategies implemented to keep students in school. As for the interview questions addressed to administrative staff, it essentially allowed gathering information from them about their opinions on strategies to keep students in school and the responsibilities of parents and the government in the dropout of these students. The recordings made using the TECNO SPARK 8C version 11 phone were transcribed using Word 2016 software. They were transcribed following the themes that composed the different interview guides. It was agreed with the respondents that complete anonymity would be respected in the use of their statements for presenting the research results. Moreover, their identification would not provide any additional information for the research. Therefore, instead of their names, their initials (e.g., Vital Gbaguidi = V.G.) were used.

4. Findings and Discussion

For the collection of quantitative data, a total of ninety-six (96) individuals were surveyed with their demographic characteristics presented in table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics of the sample dropout students

Variables	Frequencies (n)	Percentages (%)
Municipalities		
Athiémé	48	50
Porto-Novo	48	50
Sex		
Male	47	49
Female	49	51
Age		
10-14	04	4,2
15-19	65	67.7
20-24	19	19.8
25-29	08	8.3
Total	**96**	**100**

Ninety-six (96) participants, 48 from each of the two municipalities, comprise the sample of this research. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the majority (51%) of the sample is female, compared to 49% who are male. The age group experiencing the phenomenon of school dropout the most in the two municipalities under study is between 15-19 years old (67.7%). It then becomes apparent that the most vulnerable group to school dropout is the youth, a group often considered the future of the nation. This observation underscores the significance of the school dropout phenomenon.

4.1. Factors affecting school dropout in the municipalities

Table 3 shows the cost of breakfast in FCFA received by the surveyed students in the two municipalities of the study.

Table 3

Cost of breakfast of the surveyed students in the two municipalities

Cost/ Residence	Nothing	25f-50f	75f-100f	125f-150f	175f-200f	200f and more	Total
Athiémé	1	22	14	10	0	1	48
Porto-Novo	0	1	22	16	7	2	48
Total	**1**	**23**	**36**	**26**	**7**	**3**	**96**

According to table 3, there is a disparity observed in the breakfast of the surveyed students from the rural (Athiémé) and urban (Porto-Novo) areas. Results show that 22 out of the 48 students from the rural area have a breakfast costing between 25f-50f, compared to only 1 student in the urban area. This observation may be due to the cost of living, which is not the same in both areas.

Table 4

*Number of times the students ate on daily average in rural and urban areas*

Frequency/ Residence	Once	Two to three times	Four times and more	Total
Athiémé	7	27	14	48
Porto-Novo	2	46	0	48
Total	9	73	14	96

Results presented in table 4 show that 46 out of 48 students, which is 95.84%, surveyed residing in the urban municipality of Porto-Novo ate on average two to three times a day when they were still in the educational system, while only 27 out of 48 students, which is 56.25%, residing in the rural municipality of Athiémé ate on average two to three times a day. An individual's living environment influences their living conditions, particularly those related to their food survival.

Figure 3 describes the distance from the place of residence to the school in kilometers.

Figure 3

*Distance in kilometers from home to school*
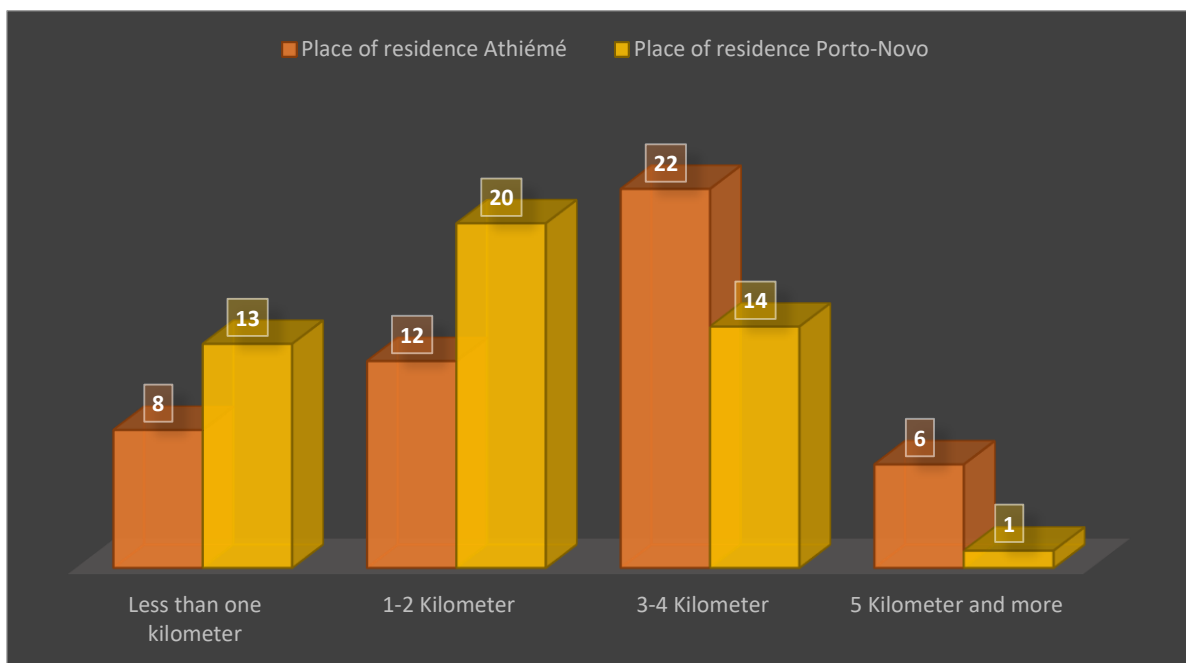
The number of kilometers traveled by students to reach their respective schools varies depending on the environment. In summary, 22 out of 48 students from the rural area (Athiémé) cover a distance between 3-4 kilometers before reaching school. In contrast, only 14 out of 48 students from the urban area (Porto-Novo) travel this distance. The urban environment therefore has the advantage over the rural environment of having schools closer to students' homes. These results corroborate the UNESCO (2014) report that school attendance decreases significantly when the school is more than 30 minutes away from home, especially in rural areas. The dropout rate reaches nearly 13% when the school is more than a 30-minute walk from home, compared to 7% when the school is less than 30 minutes away. In

rural areas, the dropout rate increases from 9% to 16% when the school is located more than 30 minutes away from home.

Figure 4

Perceptions of surveyed individuals on the usefulness or otherwise of school
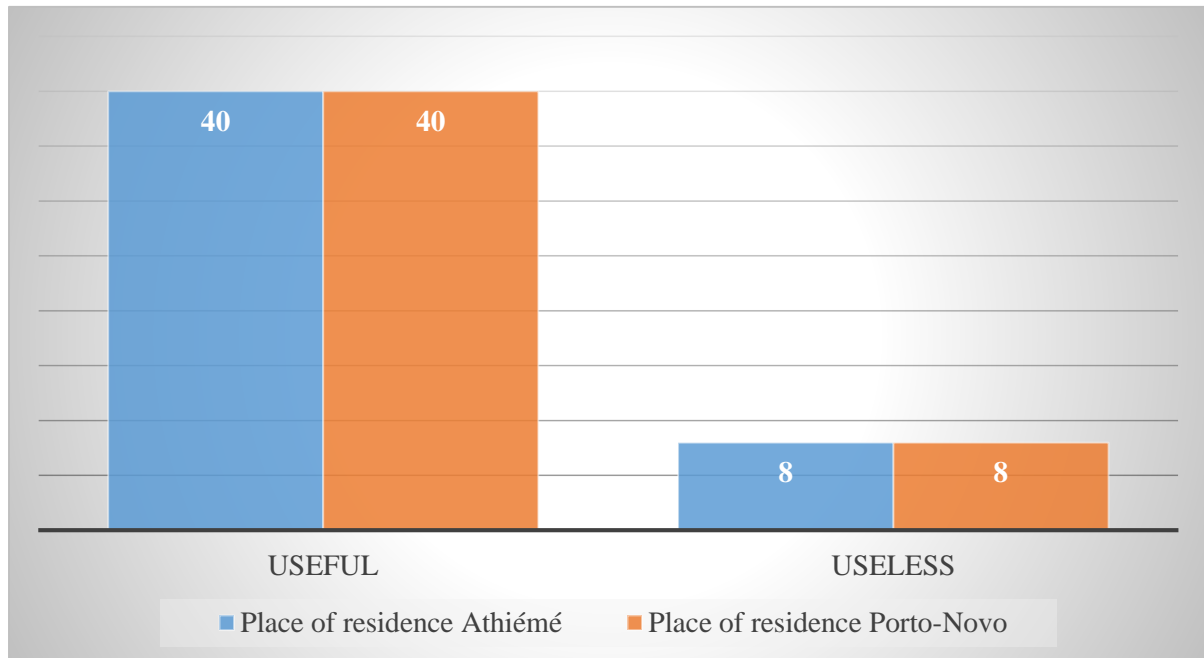
According to figure 4, 40 out of 48 students from both rural and urban areas find school useful. This perception they have of school therefore influences their motivation. It is in this very sense that Viau (2002) explained through the theory of motivational dynamics that the perception of the value of an activity is the judgment that a student makes about its usefulness and interest in achieving the goals he or she pursues (Eccles et al., 1998 as cited in Viau, 2002). This perception influences the student's intrinsic motivation in that he or she derives a certain satisfaction and/or pleasure from it. This observation is supported by Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory. Accordingly, intrinsic motivation is inherent in activities that are performed for the interest they present in themselves and for the satisfaction and pleasure that result from them. Thus, the better a student perceives school, the more motivated he or she will be to stay there. On the other hand, when a student begins to have a certain representation of school, a representation according to which school does not necessarily guarantee a better future, the risk for him or her to leave the educational system becomes greater.

Furthermore, so-called family factors are not to be neglected in the phenomenon of school dropout. The family circle plays a major role in the academic follow-up of children. The way in which it plays a role in their academic follow-up is also the way in which it has a great responsibility in keeping students in the educational system. These family factors include the type of family (monogamous or polygamous) from which the student comes (table 5), and the profession of the parents (figure 5).
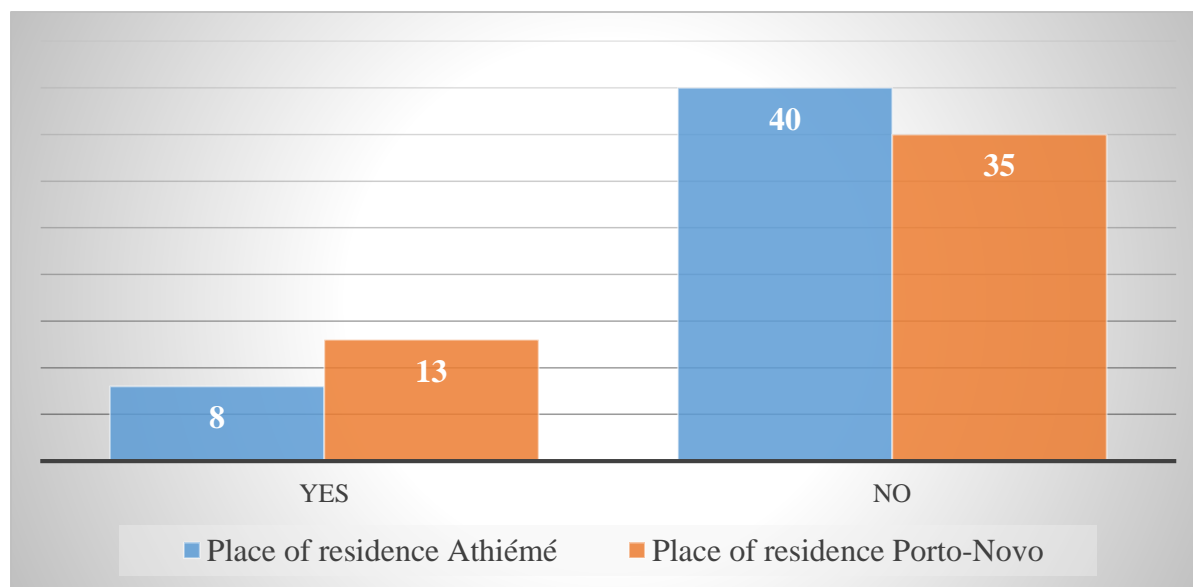
Table 5

Type of family from which the surveyed students come

Type of family/ Residence	Monogamous	Polygamous	Total
Athiémé	20	28	48
Porto-Novo	30	18	48
Total	50	46	96

**Figure 5**

Parents' profession of surveyed students

As shown in table 5, 58.33% of the 48 students from the rural area come from a polygamous family, while 62.5% of the 48 students from the urban area come from a

monogamous family. Additionally, according to figure 5, it is observed that 83.33% of students in rural areas and 72.91% in urban areas report that they do not have parents with a salaried profession. This indicates the low economic condition of these families inevitably influencing the students' school life. This observation is congruent with Bâ et al. (2020) that children from low-income families, although this may be a source of motivation, are more exposed to school dropout, and Anton (2016) that the precariousness of the socioeconomic context, the fragility of the family structure (single-parent families, blended families, large families), and the inadequacy of the relationship with schooling (lack of parental involvement with weak support, little encouragement, low academic expectations, or on the contrary, inadequate investment) affect students' academic outcome. All these factors combined lead many students to drop out of the educational system prematurely. However, it should be noted that these factors vary from one environment to another, as indicated by the reasons in figure 6.

Figure 6

Reasons for dropping out
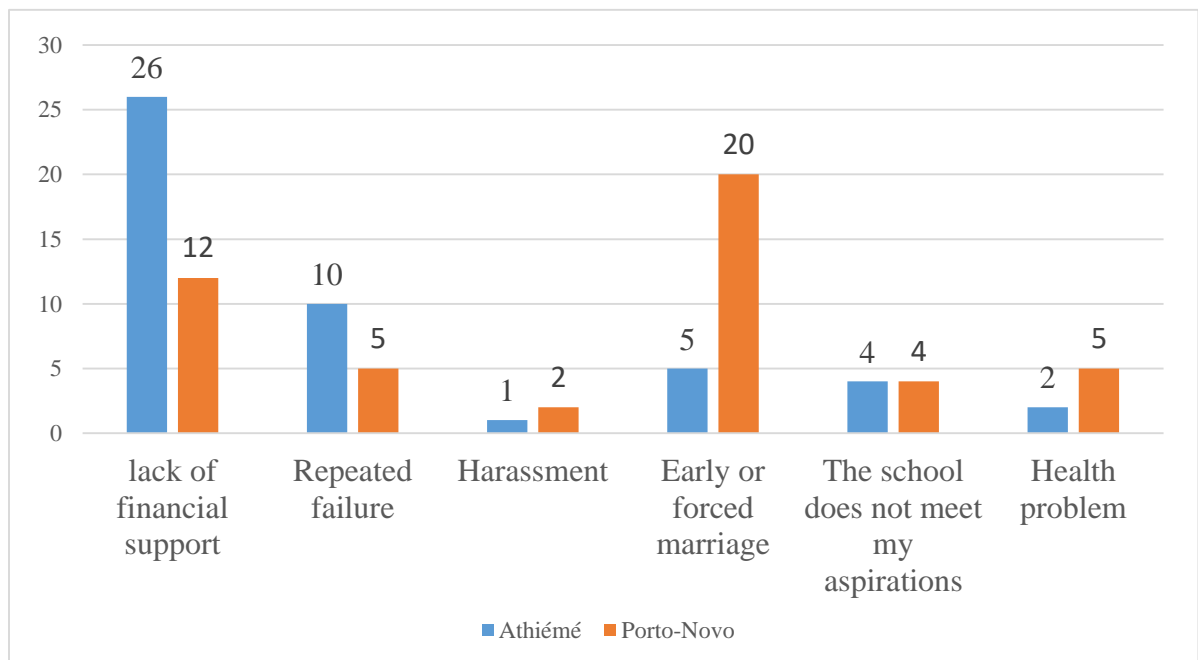
Based on the results, 26 out of 48 respondents from the rural area dropped out of school due to lack of financial support. However, early marriage is revealed as the determinant associated with school dropout for 20 out of 48 respondents in the urban area. In the same vein, one of the parents interviewed confided:

"Today there are several reasons. The first reason is that the education system is not a good system. We can say specifically in Benin, there is laziness that disturbs the children. They can no longer bear school as students. They can no longer learn as they should. So it happens that they want to leave the classes to go into apprenticeship. Now, there are also some who drop out because they don't have support. They don't have support from their parents, and they have to manage on their own first before getting any support. All of this causes others to leave the classes" (J. S., Athiémé, Field data, June 2023).

This is also explained by Bâ et al. (2020) that corollary effects such as the type of housing, available information resources, family structure, and marriage (especially for girls) are often cited to justify school dropout.

4.2. Strategies for maintaining student retention

It is no longer to be demonstrated that the Beninese government is increasingly interested in keeping students in school. Apart from the free schooling for girls in recent years, projects are being implemented to promote the retention of children in the educational system. For example, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Government, Houngbedji (2022), highlights in the minutes of the council of ministers that school kits were distributed to adolescent girls through the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project (SWEDD). The objective of this initiative was to increase the school retention rate of girls. This project aims to reach thirty thousand adolescent girls in the seventy-seven communes of Benin and will help alleviate the burden of parents who, at the beginning of the school year, struggle to fulfill this duty, often detrimental to the academic progress of children. Continuing to support that the government is truly working for the retention of children in school, an administrative official confides:

"The State comes to the aid of girls for their breakfast through the SWEDD project. Thus, it provides what seems to be 450f for primary school girls and 600f for secondary school girls. This is effective in certain communes, the urban communes" (B. G., Field data, Porto-Novo, June 2023).

It is therefore clearly noticeable that commendable efforts are being made by the government to maintain students in the educational system. However, it is noticeable through the observations and statements from the participants that weaknesses are associated with the strategies implemented by the government for student retention in school. It is observed that

only girls and adolescents benefit from these strategies. While the situation suggests that the phenomenon of school dropout concerns mainly girls, the cases of school boys are not given proper emphasis. It is also noticed that some areas are left behind, particularly the rural areas. This is reflected in the statement of an administrative official who says:

> *"This is effective in certain communes, the urban communes" (C. E., Athiémé, Field data, June 2023).*

These observations reveal that there is still much effort to be made to promote better and equitable retention of students in the educational system in Benin.

5. Conclusion

This mixed method research, focusing on students who have already left the educational system, has shed light on the true determinants associated with school dropout phenomenon in the municipalities of Athiémé and Porto-Novo in Benin. It became evident that the school dropout phenomenon manifests differently depending on whether it occurs in rural or urban environments. Similarly, the student's living environment, including societal and familial factors, significantly influences academic life. Furthermore, the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed a link between the perception of the value of educational activities and students' intrinsic motivation (Viau, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 1985). It was observed that students with a positive perception of school are more motivated to remain enrolled and are less likely to leave the educational system without completing their academic cycle.

The gathered data indicated commendable efforts by the government to retain students in school. Acknowledging the prevalence of school dropout each year, the government has implemented measures to curb the phenomenon. However, the results of this research also highlight weaknesses in the strategies employed, suggesting a need for improvement to ensure fair and effective support, regardless of gender or socioeconomic background. This research entails identifying specific factors contributing to school dropout rates in each context (urban/rural), facilitating the informing of policy decisions aimed at addressing these factors, and designing targeted interventions tailored to the needs of students in urban and rural communities. Furthermore, this research highlights disparities in educational opportunities

between urban and rural areas, thereby leading to efforts to improve access to quality education for all students, regardless of their geographical location.

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