

# The Influence of Family Factors on Secondary School Students Completing Compulsory Education

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of family factors on secondary school students' completion of compulsory education in Muslim schools within the Kelaniya Education Zone. Despite the implementation of compulsory education policies in Sri Lanka, student dropout at the secondary level remains a significant concern. The study specifically focuses on how family-related factors such as economic status, parental education, parental motivation, domestic structure, and home environment affect students' educational continuation. A mixed-method research design was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to 56 students and interviews conducted with parents, principals, and community representatives. The findings reveal that family economic hardship is the most significant factor contributing to school dropout, followed by low parental motivation and limited parental education. Additionally, large family size, single-parent conditions, and lack of a supportive home learning environment were identified as major barriers to completing compulsory education. The study concludes that family background plays a critical role in shaping students' educational outcomes. It recommends increasing financial support for disadvantaged families, enhancing parental awareness of the importance of education, and strengthening school–family–community partnerships to improve student retention.

**Keywords:** Family factors, compulsory education, educational dropout, parental involvement, Muslim schools

## INTRODUCTION

Education is recognized as a fundamental human right. Accordingly, education should be provided to all in an equitable and quality-oriented manner (Kirubalan & Sivananthan 2026). It plays a vital role in promoting equality, reducing poverty, and enhancing individual well-being. Globally, ensuring access to quality education for all children remains a major priority, as emphasized by international organizations such as UNESCO (2017). In Sri Lanka, the government has implemented a compulsory education policy requiring students to complete schooling from Grade 1 to Grade 11, aiming to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all (Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka, 2018).

Despite these efforts, a significant number of students fail to complete compulsory education, particularly at the secondary level. This issue is influenced by a range of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Among these, family-related factors have been identified as one of the most critical determinants of students' educational continuation. Family serves as the primary social unit influencing a child's development, shaping attitudes, motivation, and access to educational resources (Epstein, 2001).

Previous studies indicate that parental education, family income, parental involvement, and home environment significantly affect students' academic achievement and retention (Jeyasingham & Gunawardena, 2015; Kumar & Sivasubramaniam, 2018). The contribution of parents to the academic achievement of students is essential. Parents are viewed as considerable resources in a variety of ways (Sivananthan & Wedikandage, (2023). Students from low-income families often face financial constraints that limit their access to educational materials

and increase the likelihood of early school dropout (Tilak, 2002). Similarly, when parents have lower levels of education, they may lack the awareness or ability to support their children's learning effectively.

In addition, cultural and social dynamics within specific communities can further influence educational outcomes. In the Sri Lankan Muslim community, factors such as economic challenges, parental educational background, and social expectations may impact students' continuation in education (Rameez, 2019). For instance, in some cases, early employment or family responsibilities may take precedence over schooling, particularly among economically disadvantaged households.

Theoretical perspectives such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlight the importance of family as part of the child's immediate environment (microsystem), directly influencing educational experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Similarly, Epstein's Parental Involvement Theory emphasizes the critical role of family engagement in improving students' academic outcomes and persistence in education (Epstein, 1995). These frameworks provide a strong basis for understanding how family-related factors contribute to educational completion.

Within this context, the Kelaniya Education Zone presents a unique setting where Muslim schools operate under diverse socio-economic and cultural conditions. Evidence suggests that family poverty, low parental motivation, and inadequate home learning environments are key contributors to student dropout in this area. Therefore, examining the influence of family factors in this specific context is essential for developing targeted interventions to improve student retention.

This study aims to investigate how family-related factors influence secondary school students' completion of compulsory education in Muslim schools within the Kelaniya Education Zone. By identifying the key barriers and supportive conditions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of educational challenges and provides recommendations to enhance student retention and educational equity.

## **Research Problem**

Education is a key factor in developing human capital and promoting social and economic progress. In Sri Lanka, the government has introduced compulsory education policies to ensure that all children complete their basic education. However, despite these efforts, a considerable number of secondary school students fail to complete compulsory education, particularly in certain socio-economic and cultural contexts.

Evidence from the Kelaniya Education Zone indicates that student dropout at the secondary level is still a significant issue, especially among students in Muslim schools. Data from the study reveal that a total of 281 students discontinued their education between 2020 and 2024, highlighting the seriousness of the problem. This situation not only affects individual students' future opportunities but also has broader implications for national educational development and social equity.

The findings further indicate that family-related factors play a crucial role in influencing students' educational continuation. Key issues such as family poverty, low parental education, lack of parental motivation, large family size, and unfavorable home environments have been identified as major contributors to school dropout. In particular, economic hardship alone accounts for a significant proportion of dropout cases, forcing students to leave school due to financial pressures.

Additionally, in some Muslim communities, socio-cultural factors and family responsibilities may further hinder students' ability to continue their education. Limited parental awareness of the importance of education and weak engagement with schools also contribute to reduced student motivation and persistence.

Therefore, the core problem addressed in this study is the failure of a considerable number of secondary school students in Muslim schools within the Kelaniya Education Zone to complete compulsory education, largely due to the influence of family-related factors. Identifying and understanding these factors is essential in order to develop effective strategies to improve student retention and ensure successful completion of compulsory education.

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## Objectives of the Study

- To identify the influence of family economic factors on students completing compulsory education.
- To examine the impact of parental motivation and support on students' continuation in education.
- To analyze how family construction affects students' completion of compulsory education.
- To assess the influence of the home environment on students' educational continuation.
- To propose suitable measures and recommendations to support students in completing compulsory education.

## Research Questions

- What is the influence of family economic factors on secondary school students completing compulsory education?
- How does parental motivation and support affect students' continuation in compulsory education?
- To what extent does household structure influence students' completion of compulsory education?
- How does the home environment impact students' educational continuation?
- What measures can be taken to support secondary school students in completing compulsory education?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of family factors on students' educational continuation has been widely discussed in educational research. Family is considered the most immediate and influential social environment that shapes students' attitudes, motivation, and access to educational opportunities. This study is grounded in established theoretical frameworks and empirical findings that explain how family-related variables affect students' completion of compulsory education.

### Theoretical Foundations

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of how different environmental systems influence a child's development. According to this theory, the family, as part of the microsystem, has a direct and powerful impact on students' educational experiences. Interactions between family and school (mesosystem), parental work conditions (exosystem), and cultural values (macrosystem) collectively shape students' educational outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Similarly, Epstein's Parental Involvement Theory highlights the importance of collaboration between family, school, and community. The theory identifies different types of parental involvement such as parenting, communication, and support for learning at home, which significantly contributes to students' academic success and retention (Epstein, 1995).

In addition, the Expectancy-Value Theory explains that students' motivation to continue education depends on their expectations of success and the value they place on education. These perceptions are largely influenced by family background, including parental attitudes and socio-economic conditions (Eccles et al., 1983).

### Parental Education and Educational Outcomes

Parental education is a key determinant of students' academic success and continuation in education. Parents with higher levels of education are more likely to understand the importance of schooling, provide academic guidance, and create a supportive learning environment. Conversely, low parental education limits parents'

ability to assist their children and reduces awareness of educational opportunities, increasing the likelihood of school dropout (Jeyasingham & Gunawardena, 2015; Kumar & Sivasubramaniam, 2018).

### **Family Economic Status**

Family economic conditions play a crucial role in students' educational participation. Financial constraints can limit access to essential educational resources such as books, transportation, and school-related expenses. Students from low-income families are often compelled to engage in income-generating activities, which interferes with their education and may lead to early dropout. Poverty has been consistently identified as a major barrier to completing compulsory education (Tilak, 2002).

### **Parental Motivation and Involvement**

Parental motivation and involvement are critical in sustaining students' interest in education. When parents actively engage in their children's learning process through encouragement, supervision, and communication with schools, students are more likely to remain committed to their studies. However, lack of parental interest and low educational awareness can reduce student motivation and increase dropout rates (Epstein, 2001). Extrinsic motivation such as tangible rewards, competition, parental involvement, and so on, increases student engagement (Athirathan, 2024).

### **Family Structure and Home Environment**

Domestic structure, including factors such as family size and single-parent households, significantly influences students' educational outcomes. Large families often face resource limitations, which may reduce the attention given to each child's education. Similarly, single-parent families may experience economic and emotional challenges that affect students' academic progress. Furthermore, a lack of a conducive home environment, such as absence of proper study space or academic support, negatively impacts students' ability to continue their education.

### **Socio-Cultural Factors**

Socio-cultural influences also play an important role in shaping educational participation. In the Sri Lankan Muslim context, factors such as cultural norms, gender expectations, and family responsibilities can influence students' educational decisions. In some cases, early marriage and social expectations may discourage continued education, particularly among female students (Rameez, 2019; Fazeeha, 2014).

### **Research Gap**

Although many studies have examined the relationship between family factors and education, there is limited research focusing specifically on Muslim schools in the Kelaniya Education Zone. This gap highlights the need for context-specific studies to better understand how family-related factors influence students' completion of compulsory education in this setting.

The literature clearly demonstrates that family factors including parental education, economic status, parental involvement, domestic structure, and socio-cultural influences play a significant role in determining students' educational continuation. Understanding these factors is essential for developing effective strategies to reduce dropout rates and ensure successful completion of compulsory education.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the influence of family factors on students' completion of compulsory education. The mixed-method approach enabled the researcher to analyze statistical data while also exploring participants' experiences and perspectives in depth.

The study was conducted in the Kelaniya Education Zone in Sri Lanka, focusing specifically on Muslim schools. The research targeted secondary school students (Grades 6–11), as this stage represents a critical period for completing compulsory education. A total of 126 people were selected as samples, including Principal 6, Teachers 30, Students 56, Parents 28, SDC members 6. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews.

Quantitative data should be analyzed using descriptive statistical methods and qualitative data should be analyzed using content analysis methods. To ensure the reliability of the findings, multiple data collection methods (triangulation) were used. The use of both primary and secondary data sources further strengthened the accuracy and credibility of the study. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were ensured.

## **FINDING**

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that family-related factors, have a significant influence on secondary school students' completion of compulsory education in Muslim schools within the Kelaniya Education Zone. Both quantitative and qualitative data highlight key factors contributing to students' discontinuation of education.

### **Family Economic Status**

The results indicate that family poverty is the most influential factor affecting students' educational continuation. Out of the total 281 dropout cases analyzed between 2020 and 2024, 92 students (32.74%) discontinued their education due to economic hardship. Financial difficulties limit students' access to basic educational resources such as books, transportation, and other school-related expenses. In many cases, students are compelled to engage in income-generating activities to support their families, which leads to school dropout.

This finding aligns with previous studies that identify poverty as a major barrier to educational access and retention. It highlights the need for targeted financial assistance programs to support economically disadvantaged families.

### **Parental Education**

The study reveals that low parental education is another key factor, affecting 68 students (24.20%). Parents with limited educational backgrounds often lack awareness of the importance of education and are less able to provide academic guidance to their children. This lack of support reduces students' motivation and ability to succeed in school. The findings confirm that parental education plays a crucial role in shaping students' educational outcomes, as children of educated parents are more likely to complete their schooling.

### **Parental Motivation and Involvement**

The results show that lack of parental motivation significantly contributes to student dropout, affecting 74 students (26.33%). When parents do not actively encourage or prioritize education, students tend to lose interest and motivation to continue schooling. Limited communication between parents and schools further weakens students' academic engagement. Qualitative data from interviews also indicate that in some families, education is not considered a priority, which negatively impacts students' attitudes toward learning. This supports the view that parental involvement is essential for sustaining students' educational participation.

### **Family Structure**

Family structure, including large families and single-parent households, was identified as another important factor influencing educational continuation. Large families often face financial and resource constraints,

resulting in reduced attention and support for individual children. Similarly, students from single-parent families may experience economic and emotional challenges that hinder their educational progress.

### **Home Environment**

The study findings highlight that an unsupportive home environment is a significant barrier to education. Many students lack a proper space or conditions for studying at home. This includes overcrowded living conditions and absence of academic support, which negatively affect students' ability to concentrate and perform well in school.

### **Other Contributing Factors**

In addition to the major family factors, the study identifies other contributing issues such as early marriage, family responsibilities, and family conflicts, which account for 16.73% of dropout cases. These factors are particularly relevant in certain socio-cultural contexts, where family obligations may take precedence over education.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study confirm that family factors are central to understanding students' educational continuation. Among all factors, economic hardship emerges as the most dominant, followed by parental motivation and parental education. These factors are interconnected, as poverty often limits parental education and reduces their ability to support their children academically.

The results also reflect the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, where the family (microsystem) directly influences students' educational experiences. Similarly, Epstein's Parental Involvement Theory is supported by the finding that active parental engagement enhances student retention, while lack of involvement contributes to dropout.

Furthermore, the socio-cultural context of Muslim communities in the study area plays a role in shaping educational outcomes. Cultural expectations and family responsibilities sometimes conflict with educational goals, particularly for vulnerable groups. Overall, the study emphasizes that improving students' completion of compulsory education requires addressing family-related challenges through economic support, parental awareness programs, and stronger collaboration between schools and communities.

The results clearly show that family-related factors especially poverty, parental education, parental motivation, family structure, and home environment have a direct and significant impact on students' completion of compulsory education. Addressing these issues is essential for reducing dropout rates and improving educational outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study found that family factors significantly influence secondary school students' completion of compulsory education in Muslim schools in the Kelaniya Education Zone. Economic hardship emerged as the most critical factor, followed by low parental education, lack of parental motivation, family structure, and an unsupportive home environment. These factors are interconnected and contribute to student's dropout. The findings support key educational theories highlighting the importance of family influence and parental involvement. Overall, improving student retention requires addressing family-related challenges through financial support, increased parental awareness, and stronger collaboration between schools and communities.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Targeted financial support such as scholarships, subsidies, and transport assistance should be provided for low-income families through government and zonal education programs. At the same time, parental awareness programs within Muslim communities need to be strengthened to emphasize the importance of completing compulsory education. School-parent collaboration can be enhanced by organizing regular meetings,

workshops, and community engagement initiatives that foster shared responsibility for students' learning. Sivananathan (2021) mentioned, parents should systematically discuss with students about their learning problems, their academic progress, and other educational needs.

Additionally, community-based support systems—including mosque committees, NGOs, and school development societies—should be introduced to monitor and assist students who are at risk of dropping out. Improving home learning conditions is also essential, which can be achieved by providing study materials and establishing after-school support programs in schools or community centers. Furthermore, promoting gender-sensitive education policies will help reduce early marriage and ensure equal educational opportunities, particularly for girls. Finally, implementing vocational guidance and counseling services in schools can motivate students and reduce dropout rates caused by economic pressures.

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