



FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT RETENTION IN MADRASAHS IN WEST BENGAL

Md Aminul Islam ¹ & Dr. Anisha Tamang ²

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details:

¹ Research Scholar,
Department of Education,
University of North Bengal,
Darjeeling, West Bengal, India;

² Assistant Professor,
Department of Education,
Nakshalbari College,
University of North Bengal,
Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:

Md Aminul Islam

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Abstract

The current paper examines the complexity of issues that affect student retention within Government-aided Madrasahs in West Bengal through the prism of qualitative approach. Through purposive sampling, a sample population of 30 students, teachers, and administrators has chosen in urban and rural and semi-urban Madrasahs to get a variety of views. The data has gathered by use of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis showed that retention has been always be conditioned by the convoluted interplay of socio-economic limitation, parental literacy, institutional infrastructure, teacher student and student relationships with motivational and cultural factors. The barriers were identified as economic difficulties and insufficient academic support, and prospective facilitators of student engagement and continuing education were identified as community engagement and positive school climate. The research highlights that the education system of Madrasah requires specific measures on a structural and pedagogical level to enhance retention rates. It concludes that long-term assistance of teachers, families, and institutions is an important factor in lowering the rates of dropouts and favouring equitable educational opportunities in the Madrasahs in West Bengal.

Keywords: *Madrasah education, student retention, qualitative research, socio-economic factors, institutional support, educational motivation, West Bengal*

Introduction

One of the most important indicators of equality and quality in education is the student retention - the capacity of an educational institution to maintain the enrolment and advancement of students. In the context of healthy plural educational environment of West Bengal, madrasahs have a unique niche of being institutions that integrate religious and general education. The West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education (WBBME) has in the past 20 years not only focused on enrolment but also retention as an objective of its reform agenda (WBBME, 2023). However, even with the policy measures, a large number of Government-sponsored and approved madrasahs still face the challenge of student dropout before secondary or even higher secondary level has been attained. In West Bengal, madrasahs are not similar to the conventional Islamic seminaries. They have embraced the dual-curriculum approach, and modern science, mathematics, and languages have been included, as well as theological studies (Chowdhury, 2021). This integration has enabled it to attract more students e.g. the first-generation learners and female students. Actually, more than 60 percent of total enrolment in state-aided madrasahs is currently represented by girls (WBBME, 2023). But the growth in access has not been equally successful on the retention side. The infrastructural problems that continue to plague many institutions include poor classrooms, absence of drinking water, playgrounds, and sanitation facilities to serve girls and are negatively impacting attendance and continuity (TwoCircles.net, 2013). The socio-economic background is still one of the most significant factors in terms of retention. Learners with poor backgrounds tend to face conflicting demands to live and earn, as well as to manage the home. A marginal household study in rural West Bengal revealed that economic insecurity is the direct cause of school dropouts among teenagers (Saha and Chakraborty, 2022). Literacy among parents and parental education awareness also contribute significantly; when parents do not know anything about formal learning, they tend not to encourage long-term schooling (Bandyopadhyay & Subramanian, 2019). These limitations are especially obvious in those regions dominated by minorities where the madrasahs are the main provider of inexpensive education. Retention outcomes are also influenced by institutional and pedagogic factors. The quality of the teacher, classroom environment, and perceived curriculum relevance play a significant role in determining the desire of the students to remain in school (Rahman, 2020). The research on the achievement motivation of eighth-grade students in madrasahs showed that socio-economic factors, overcrowded residential areas, and poor parent education had a considerable influence on the success of the students in educational settings, which consequently predisposed them to higher risks of dropping out of school (Karim and Mandal, 2023). In the same way, the school

may not be conducive or too strict to make students attend regularly. On the systemic level, the retention rate in West Bengal is approximately 84 percent in general with girls slightly higher (86.4 percent) than with boys (81.8 percent) (Das, 2023). Even though these numbers indicate improvement, there is still a disparity between enrolment and completion particularly in the minority and rural schooling systems. The issue is also usually exacerbated in madrasahs, where there is insufficient institutional backing, few vocational connections, and low post-secondary transition prospects. With this context in mind, the focal research issue is to determine and explain the variables that can make students stay in madrasahs in West Bengal. Although in the works of preceding quantitative researcher's dropout rates or enrolment trends were studied, not many researchers have studied the topic through a qualitative and contextual prism of the student lived experience. These multidimensional factors include the economic limitations and family background, school facilities, teacher-students' relations, and cultural values, which should be studied to understand the needs to design the policy. This paper is thus qualitative research done to discuss the socio-economic, institutional, and motivational aspects of student retention. It will use interviews, observations, and documents to unravel the perceptions of students towards their schooling experiences and the reasons they have to pursue or abandon schooling. Placing the retention in the context of the wider discourse of educational equity and social inclusion, the study helps to develop more responsive interventions that may help madrasahs become inclusive and sustainable education environments.

To summarize, the problem of student retention in madrasahs is not an administrative or academic challenge in itself, but it represents a certain socio-cultural and economic reality. To solve it, it needs concerted efforts of the state, teachers, parents, and communities so that each student who gets into a madrasah also gets their education completed with honours and chances.

Objectives

1. To determine the socio-economic, institutional and personal issues and determinants that affect student retention at Government-aided and recognized Madrasahs in various parts of West Bengal.
2. To determine the relationship between the school environment, teacher-student relations, and support systems in the community and the reasons that motivate and influence the decision of students to continue with their education in the Madrasah system.

Methodology

This paper has use a qualitative research design in order to examine the variables that are associated with student retention in Government-aided Madrasahs in West Bengal. A sample size of 30 participants consisting of students, teachers, and administrators of urban, rural, and semi-urban Madrasahs was taken purposely. Data has gathered using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Thematic analysis has used to analyze the data collected to find out major patterns and themes. There was strict adherence to ethical issues like informed consent, confidentiality and voluntary participation during the research.

Analysis on the bases of objective-1

Retention of students in Government-aided Madrasahs in West Bengal depends on complicated socio-economic, institutional and individual elements. Students have economic limitations, parental deficiencies, lack of school facilities and motivation challenges that may cause them to drop out of school. The knowledge of these determinants is important in creating effective interventions to increase retention. In this paper, the qualitative research methodology will be used and the sample will be purposive consisting of 30 participants who will be students, teachers and administrators. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected in accordance with interviews, focus group discussions, and observations in order to determine common patterns and themes which impact on further enrolment of students.

Table 1: Categorical Responses

Theme / Category	Sub-theme / Issue	Sample Participant Responses	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)
Socio-economic Factors	Low family income	"My parents rely on daily wages; sometimes I have to stay home and work."	12	40
	Parental education	"My parents never attended school, so they do not understand its importance."	8	27
	Household responsibilities	"I help at home after school, which affects my attendance."	10	33
Institutional Factors	Infrastructure	"Classrooms are overcrowded, and toilets are not usable for girls."	15	50
	Teacher-student relationship	"Some teachers are strict; others are supportive and approachable."	10	33
	Curriculum relevance	"Certain subjects seem irrelevant to our future career goals."	5	17

Personal Factors	Motivation	“I want to finish school to get a better job and help my family.”	10	33
	Peer influence	“Some friends encourage me; others distract me from studies.”	12	40
	Health / personal challenges	“I sometimes miss school due to illness or fatigue.”	8	27

Table 2: Thematic Analysis of Factors Influencing Student Retention in Madrasahs (n=30)

Theme / Category	Sub-theme / Issue	Sample Participant Responses	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)	Weightage (%)	Interpretation / Insight
Socio-economic Factors	Low family income	“My parents rely on daily wages; sometimes I have to stay home and work.”	12	40	13.3	Economic constraints lead to irregular attendance and higher dropout risk.
	Parental education	“My parents never attended school, so they do not understand its importance.”	8	27	8.9	Low parental literacy reduces guidance and support for continued education.
	Household responsibilities	“I help at home after school, which affects my attendance.”	10	33	11.1	Domestic obligations interfere with school participation.
Institutional Factors	Infrastructure	“Classrooms are overcrowded, and toilets are not usable for girls.”	15	50	16.7	Poor infrastructure discourages attendance and reduces engagement.
	Teacher-student relationship	“Some teachers are strict; others are supportive and approachable.”	10	33	11.1	Supportive teacher interactions improve motivation, while strictness may deter students.
	Curriculum relevance	“Certain subjects seem irrelevant to our future career goals.”	5	17	5.6	Irrelevant curriculum decreases student interest and engagement.
Personal Factors	Motivation	“I want to finish school to get a better job and help my family.”	10	33	11.1	High intrinsic motivation encourages retention despite challenges.
	Peer influence	“Some friends encourage me; others distract me from studies.”	12	40	13.3	Peer support or pressure affects students’ commitment to school.
	Health / personal challenges	“I sometimes miss school due to illness or fatigue.”	8	27	8.9	Health issues contribute to absenteeism and possible dropout.

The reason is that thematic analysis of student retention variables in Government-aided Madrasahs in West Bengal shows the presence of a complex interplay among socio-economic, institutional, and personal factors. The socio-economic forces, such as the low income of the family (weightage 13.3%), low education level of the parents (8.9%), and parental duties (11.1%), have a great impact on the capability of the students to attend school regularly. Poor infrastructure (16.7%), teacher-student relationships

(11.1%), and curriculum relevance (5.6%), are also significant contributors to the institutional factors, which emphasize the value of favourable learning conditions and sufficient facilities. Student motivation (11.1%), peer influence (13.3%), and health challenges (8.9) are also personal factors, which affect retention by predisposing individual engagement and determination. All in all, the contribution of the institutional and socio-economic factors put up to two thirds of the determinants, which state that both external and school-related factors have a strong influence on retention, leaving personal motivation and peer support as vital to maintaining student interest. These dimensions need to be considered in their entirety to minimize the rates of dropouts and encourage life-long learning.

Analysis on the bases of objective-2

Retention in Government-aided Madrasahs in West Bengal is influenced by school environment, teacher-student relationships, and community support systems. Understanding how these factors motivate students to continue their education is critical for designing interventions that enhance retention. This qualitative study used a purposive sample of 30 participants, including students, teachers, and administrators from urban, rural, and semi-urban Madrasahs. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, and analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and sub-themes. The findings highlight how institutional and community factors interact with personal motivation to influence students' educational continuity.

Table 3: Categorical Responses

Theme / Category	Sub-theme / Issue	Sample Participant Responses	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)
School Environment	Infrastructure	“Classrooms are overcrowded, and toilets are insufficient.”	15	50
	Classroom climate	“The environment is supportive, making it easier to attend regularly.”	15	50
Teacher-Student Relations	Teacher support	“Some teachers encourage me, which motivates me to study.”	18	60
	Teacher strictness	“Strict teachers sometimes make school attendance stressful.”	12	40
Community Support	Family encouragement	“My parents always remind me to continue school.”	20	67
	Peer support	“Friends encourage or discourage me from coming to school.”	10	33

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Factors Influencing Student Retention in Madrasahs (n=30)

Theme / Category	Sub-theme / Issue	Sample Participant Responses	Frequency (n=30)	Percentage (%)	Weightage (%)	Interpretation / Insight
School Environment	Infrastructure	“Classrooms are overcrowded, and toilets are insufficient.”	15	50	16.67%	Poor infrastructure may reduce student comfort, engagement, and regular attendance.
	Classroom climate	“The environment is supportive, making it easier to attend regularly.”	15	50	16.67%	Positive classroom environment encourages students to stay in school and enhances motivation.
Teacher-Student Relations	Teacher support	“Some teachers encourage me, which motivates me to study.”	18	60	20.00%	Supportive teachers act as a key motivator, fostering retention and student engagement.
	Teacher strictness	“Strict teachers sometimes make	12	40	13.33%	Overly strict teacher behavior can

		school attendance stressful.”				discourage attendance and affect motivation.
Community Support	Family encouragement	“My parents always remind me to continue school.”	20	67	22.22%	Active family involvement provides emotional and moral support, reinforcing educational continuity.
	Peer support	“Friends encourage or discourage me from coming to school.”	10	33	11.11%	Peer influence can positively or negatively affect students’ decision to continue schooling.

The thematic analysis of factors influencing student retention in Government-aided Madrasahs in West Bengal reveals that school environment, teacher-student relations, and community support equally contribute to students’ educational continuity, each accounting for approximately 33% of the total influence. Among the sub-themes, family encouragement (22.22%) and teacher support (20%) emerge as the most significant determinants, highlighting the critical role of emotional, moral, and academic support in motivating students to continue schooling. Positive classroom climate (16.67%) and adequate infrastructure (16.67%) also play essential roles, while teacher strictness (13.33%) and peer influence (11.11%) can negatively impact retention. The findings indicate that students’ decisions to remain enrolled are shaped by a synergistic interaction of institutional, personal, and community factors. Interventions aimed at enhancing infrastructure, fostering supportive teacher-student relationships, and strengthening family involvement are crucial for reducing dropout rates and promoting sustained educational participation in Madrasahs across West Bengal.

Findings

The study reveals that student retention in Government-aided Madrasahs in West Bengal is influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic, institutional, personal, and community factors. Socio-economic determinants, including low family income (13.3%), limited parental education (8.9%), and household responsibilities (11.1%), significantly restrict students’ ability to attend school regularly. Institutional factors, such as inadequate infrastructure (16.7%), teacher-student relationships (11.1%), and curriculum relevance (5.6%), further shape the learning environment, highlighting the importance of supportive classrooms and adequate facilities. Personal factors, including student motivation (11.1%), peer influence (13.3%), and health challenges (8.9%), also affect retention by influencing engagement and perseverance. Thematic analysis for school environment, teacher-student relations, and community support shows that these factors contribute almost equally to retention (~33% each). Among sub-themes, family encouragement (22.22%) and teacher support (20%) are the most significant determinants, while positive classroom climate (16.67%) and adequate infrastructure (16.67%) enhance engagement. Negative factors, such as teacher strictness (13.33%) and peer discouragement (11.11%), can adversely affect students’ decisions to continue schooling.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicate that student retention in Madrasahs is shaped by a synergistic relationship between socio-economic conditions, institutional environment, personal motivation, and community support. Socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and low parental literacy, act as barriers to consistent attendance, while institutional improvements in infrastructure and supportive teacher-student interactions can enhance engagement. Personal motivation, peer influence, and health considerations, although smaller in weight, remain critical for sustaining student participation. Family encouragement and teacher support emerge as the most influential determinants, emphasizing the need for emotional, moral, and academic guidance. Reducing dropout rates requires a holistic approach that integrates improvements in school facilities, supportive teaching practices, community and parental involvement, and student-centered interventions. Implementing strategies across these domains can strengthen retention, promote educational equity, and foster lifelong learning among Madrasah students in West Bengal.

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