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POLICY PAPER

BREAKING THE SCHOOL DROPOUT TRAP

From Multidimensional Risks to Integrated Public Policy Solutions

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School dropout remains a major challenge for education systems and public policy, with lasting consequences for human capital, labor market integration, social cohesion, and long-term economic growth. Despite sustained efforts to expand access to schooling, many countries continue to experience high dropout rates, particularly at key transition points in lower- and upper-secondary education. Policy responses have often relied on fragmented, sector-specific interventions—addressing education quality, poverty, social norms, or health constraints in isolation—thereby limiting both their effectiveness and sustainability.

This paper conceptualizes school dropout as a systemic phenomenon resulting from the interaction of four interdependent dimensions. Based on a systematic literature review conducted according to PRISMA guidelines and complemented by recent studies published between 2021 and 2025, it proposes a four-pillar analytical framework encompassing: (i) education quality and institutional capacity; (ii) economic constraints and incentive structures; (iii) social norms, governance, and community dynamics; and (iv) health, hygiene, and student well-being. The analysis shows that single-pillar policies generate fragile and short-term effects, whereas integrated and multisectoral strategies produce more sustainable reductions in school dropout. The framework highlights coordination gaps and identifies priority actions for strengthening school retention through coherent human capital policies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

School dropout constitutes one of the most enduring challenges confronting education systems and public policy worldwide. Beyond its immediate educational implications, early school leaving has profound long-term consequences for labor productivity, income inequality, social mobility, and the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Robust academic evidence shows that each additional year of schooling increases individual earnings by around 8–10% on average (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018), while early school leaving significantly raises the risk of unemployment and labor-market marginalization (Heckman et al., 2006). At the societal level, differences in learning outcomes and educational attainment account for a substantial share of long-run productivity and growth gaps across countries (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2008). In particular, the global learning and completion crisis is estimated to generate US$21 trillion in lost lifetime earnings (in present value) for the current cohort of students, equivalent to 17 percent of today's global GDP, reflecting the combined effects of incomplete schooling and low learning outcomes (World Bank, 2022).

Over the past two decades, many low- and middle-income countries have made considerable progress in expanding access to primary and lower-secondary education. Global primary enrollment now exceeds 90%, and lower-secondary enrollment has increased by more than 15 percentage points since 2005 (OECD, 2023). However, increased participation has not been matched by comparable improvements in retention and completion. Globally, upper-secondary completion remains incomplete: only about 60% of adolescents complete upper-secondary education, leaving roughly 40% without this qualification (UNESCO GEM Report, 2024). Data from OECD countries show that even among those who enter upper secondary education, approximately 18–28% do not graduate within two years of the end of the program (OECD, 2023).

Recent research increasingly recognizes that school dropout is rarely the result of a single failure. Rather, it reflects the cumulative and interacting effects of weak learning environments, household economic vulnerability, restrictive social and gender norms, governance failures, and health-related barriers—such as malnutrition, poor adolescent health, and early pregnancy—that constrain students' ability to attend and succeed in school (Finn, 1989; Haberland et al., 2018; Snilstveit et al., 2023). Nevertheless, public policies often continue to address these dimensions in isolation, resulting in fragmented interventions that fail to account for their interdependence.

This policy brief argues that preventing school dropout requires an integrated public policy perspective grounded in a clear analytical framework. By synthesizing academic and institutional evidence, it advances a four-pillar model of school retention and examines how these pillars interact to shape educational trajectories. It further applies this framework to derive policy-relevant insights for the design of coherent and sustainable dropout-prevention strategies.

2. METHODOLOGY: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is based on a systematic literature review conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The objective of the review is not to perform a statistical meta-analysis, but to produce a rigorous, transparent, and policy-relevant synthesis of empirical evidence on the determinants of school dropout and corrective and preventive public policy interventions.

The review protocol followed the main PRISMA stages (identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion). Bibliographic searches were conducted in ERIC, PubMed, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. To ensure policy relevance and capture implementation-oriented evidence, grey literature and institutional reports published by UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, and selected national education agencies were systematically reviewed.

The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary and free-text terms related to school dropout, early school leaving, school retention, completion, educational transitions, vulnerable students, and policy interventions, using Boolean operators and database-specific filters. Searches were conducted in both English and French to reflect the linguistic diversity of the evidence base and reduce language bias.

The temporal scope covered publications from 2010 to 2025, with particular emphasis on peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 and 2025, in order to capture recent methodological developments, post-pandemic dynamics and emerging policy responses. Only studies published in peer-reviewed journals or by recognized international organizations were eligible.

2.1. Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria were defined ex ante. Studies were included if they:

(i) explicitly analyzed determinants of school dropout, early school leaving, or school retention;

(ii) evaluated public policies, programs, or institutional mechanisms aimed at reducing dropout or improving persistence; and

(iii) relied on empirical quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods designs, quasi-experimental or experimental approaches, or systematic review methodologies.

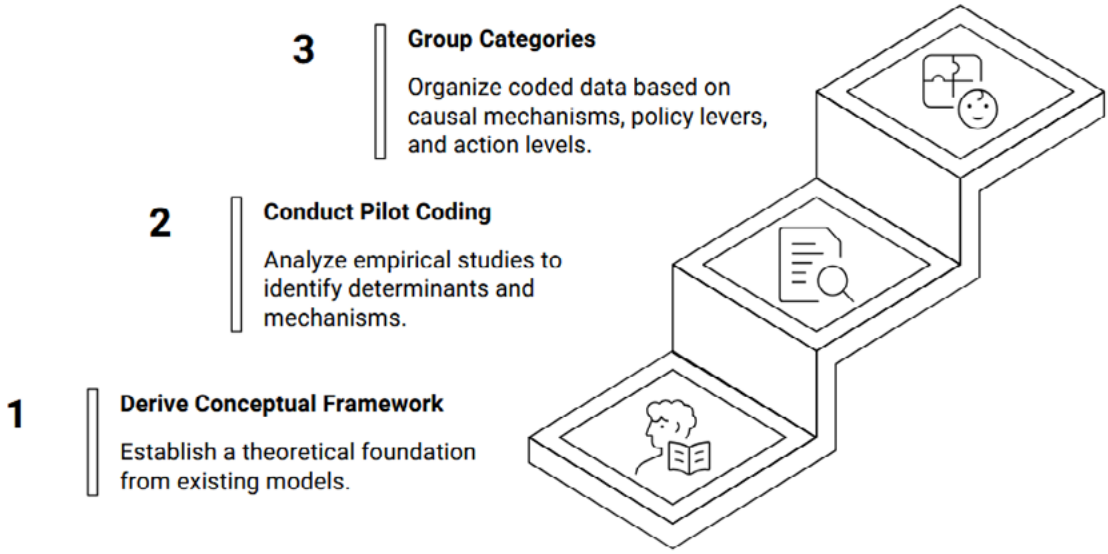
Conceptual articles without an explicit empirical or evaluative component and purely descriptive reports were excluded. After the removal of duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened, followed by a full-text assessment against the inclusion criteria. For each eligible study, a standardized extraction grid was used to collect information on country context, educational level, population, methodological design, outcome indicators, and reported effects on dropout, completion or persistence. The synthesis followed a narrative approach appropriate for heterogeneous and complex interventions (Popay et al., 2006).

2.2. Identification and construction of the analytical pillars

Four analytical pillars were identified through a structured, theory-informed coding procedure combining deductive and inductive approaches (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Development of an analytical framework for identifying the pillars of school dropout



First, an initial conceptual framework was derived from established theoretical and integrative models of school disengagement and early school leaving (Finn, 1989; Haberland et al., 2018; Snilstveit et al., 2023). These models consistently distinguish school-level, household and economic, socio-cultural, and health-related determinants, and were used as an a priori analytical lens.

Second, a pilot open-coding phase was conducted on a purposive subsample of highly cited and recent empirical studies (2021–2025). All reported determinants, mechanisms, and intervention components were coded line-by-line, generating a large set of first-order categories (for example, teacher practices, school leadership, learning materials, household income shocks, conditional cash transfers, transport subsidies, gender norms, early marriage, community engagement, school governance, adolescent health, menstrual hygiene management, school feeding, and psychosocial support).

Third, these first-order categories were iteratively grouped using constant comparison, based on:

(i) the similarity of underlying causal mechanisms,

(ii) their proximity to identifiable public policy levers, and

(iii) the level at which action is primarily exerted (school, household, community, or system).

A cluster was retained as a pillar when three conditions were met simultaneously:

(i) it appeared consistently across multiple geographical contexts and methodological designs;

(ii) it captured a distinct causal mechanism rather than a different manifestation of another domain; and

(iii) it corresponded to a recognizable policy and governance domain.

This process led to the identification of four analytical pillars:

(1) education quality and institutional capacity;

(2) economic constraints and incentive structures;

(3) social norms, governance and community dynamics; and

(4) health, hygiene and student well-being.

Importantly, the pillars were not treated as independent categories. During the coding process, cross-coding was systematically allowed when a determinant or intervention affected more than one pillar (for example, school feeding programs addressing both household economic constraints and student health, or girls' empowerment programs combining social norms and school participation outcomes). This approach made it possible to analyze the cumulative and mutually reinforcing mechanisms underlying dropout and retention rather than isolated drivers.

3. PILLAR I – EDUCATION QUALITY AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

The first pillar of the framework concerns education quality and institutional capacity, which are consistently identified as central determinants of school retention. When education systems fail to deliver meaningful learning outcomes, students and households perceive diminishing returns to continued schooling—weakening effort, attendance, and persistence—and ultimately increasing the likelihood of disengagement and dropout (Snilstveit et al., 2023). This "returns-to-schooling" mechanism is reinforced by recent empirical work showing that learning deficits and schools' inability to address them are tightly coupled with later absenteeism and grade repetition—two proximate predictors of dropout in many systems (Kaffenberger et al., 2023).

A substantial body of academic evidence highlights the role of teaching quality and pedagogical practices in shaping retention. Student-centered pedagogy, formative assessment, and structured learning recovery approaches (e.g., targeted remediation aligned with the curriculum) improve academic performance and strengthen students' sense of competence and belonging—channels that reduce dropout risks (Contreras-Villalobos et al., 2023; Hilal et al., 2024; Shabbar, 2025). Recent tutoring research is especially relevant here: meta-analytic evidence suggests that well-designed tutoring can generate meaningful learning gains, but also cautions that effects are heterogeneous and strongly conditioned by implementation features (such as dosage, tutor skill, and integration with classroom instruction), with important implications for scale and institutional feasibility (Kraft et al., 2024). Complementing this, recent randomized studies of online or hybrid tutoring models in secondary education show sizeable learning impacts among disadvantaged students, while also documenting variation in "non-test" outcomes (e.g., engagement and soft skills), which are among the mediating factors most plausibly associated with persistence and retention (Carlana & La Ferrara, 2025).

Conversely, persistent institutional constraints—overcrowded classrooms, weak instructional leadership, teacher absenteeism, and limited instructional time—undermine learning and motivation and can accelerate disengagement, especially in disadvantaged schools. Recent quasi-experimental evidence continues to associate teacher absence with measurable reductions in student achievement, suggesting an indirect but material pathway to increased dropout risk through accumulated learning loss and reduced perceived school quality (Borgen et al., 2024).

Institutional capacity also encompasses infrastructure, accessibility, and support mechanisms. The "access" dimension (distance to school, safety of routes, and adequacy of facilities) remains a robust predictor of dropout in many low-resource and rural contexts (Banda, 2025), but recent work emphasizes that infrastructure effects are strongest when paired with school-level support and systematic identification of at-risk students (Walker, 2025). In parallel, a growing academic literature on early warning systems—particularly in settings where administrative and learning data can be linked—highlights the promise of predictive and rule-based tools to flag at-risk learners earlier, while stressing that impacts depend on whether alerts trigger timely, human-delivered support (e.g., counselling, tutoring, and family outreach) rather than remaining purely informational (Carballo-Mendívil et al., 2025).

Finally, second-chance education (SCE) represents a critical institutional response for students who have already dropped out. Recent academic syntheses from Europe conceptualize SCE not merely as remediation, but as a compensatory pathway that must rebuild learner identity, belonging, and future orientation—key conditions for sustained re-engagement (Renta-Davids et al., 2025). Evidence from both European and low- and middle-income contexts converges in showing that re-entry and persistence are strongest when programs combine supportive pedagogies with credible progression routes and formal recognition (e.g., vocational bridges and certification), rather than operating as isolated "catch-up" initiatives (Portela-Pruaño et al., 2022). Systematic reviews further demonstrate that impacts are substantially reinforced when second-chance models integrate vocational training, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment—particularly for girls—together with life-skills and socio-emotional learning components that strengthen resilience and perceived returns to schooling (Haberland et al., 2018; Misunas & Amin, 2022), while complementary evidence suggests that digital literacy and technology-supported learning can further enhance engagement and learning opportunities (Szili et al., 2022).

4. PILLAR II – ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS AND INCENTIVE STRUCTURES

The second pillar focuses on economic constraints and incentive structures that shape household schooling decisions. Poverty, income volatility, and exposure to economic shocks remain among the most powerful predictors of school dropout, particularly at the secondary level, where direct schooling costs and opportunity costs increase and families weigh present earnings against future returns (World Bank, 2023). Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs have been widely adopted to address these constraints. A robust body of evidence confirms that such programs improve enrollment and attendance in the short term by alleviating liquidity constraints and altering household incentives (Baird et al., 2011). In Morocco, programs such as Tayssir illustrate the potential of financial support to reduce dropout among vulnerable households, although their effects on learning remain mixed in the absence of complementary quality improvements (Gazeaud & Ricard, 2024; IPA, 2026). More broadly, qualitative evidence from Zambia suggests that economic support can influence schooling-related decisions among adolescent girls by easing financial pressures and reshaping perceived trade-offs (Milimo et al., 2021).

However, recent literature highlights important limitations to relying on financial incentives in isolation. Without parallel improvements in education quality and credible post-school opportunities, cash transfers alone do not guarantee sustained retention or improved learning outcomes (Gazeaud & Ricard, 2024). When schooling fails to translate into employable skills, households may continue to withdraw students despite ongoing financial support.

Vocational training and entrepreneurship programs can enhance the perceived value of schooling, but their effectiveness depends on alignment with labor market demand, access to capital and credit, and institutional support structures that facilitate transitions to employment or self-employment (World Bank, 2023). These findings underscore the need to combine economic incentives with institutional reforms rather than treating them as substitutes, ensuring that financial support is embedded within a holistic strategy that also strengthens learning quality and pathways to economic opportunity.

5. PILLAR III – SOCIAL NORMS, GOVERNANCE, AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

The third pillar focuses on social norms, governance arrangements, and community dynamics that condition how households interpret and respond to both economic incentives and institutional reforms. A large and consistent body of academic evidence shows that norms surrounding child labor, early marriage, and gender roles strongly shape educational trajectories, particularly for adolescents in low-income and socially constrained contexts. Child labor and domestic responsibilities continue to compete directly with schooling, especially at the secondary level, where opportunity costs rise and social expectations become more binding (Dammert et al., 2018; Edmonds & Shrestha, 2014). In parallel, social norms related to marriage and gendered life-course expectations remain powerful drivers of school exit among girls, operating both through early marriage and reduced parental investment in post-primary education (Field & Ambrus, 2008). Gender-restrictive norms and low community acceptance of girls' schooling continue to mediate the effectiveness of otherwise well-designed education and social protection programs (Buchmann et al., 2008).

Beyond household norms, community engagement and parental involvement play a critical role in sustaining school participation. Rigorous impact evaluations indicate that programs combining parental engagement, community mobilization, and peer support with material or service-based assistance outperform stand-alone information or sensitization campaigns. In particular, multi-component community interventions that address both demand-side constraints (beliefs, aspirations, and perceived returns to education) and practical barriers (school costs, safety, and psychosocial support) have been shown to improve attendance and reduce dropout risks (Oliveira et al., 2025). Community-anchored mentoring and parent–school partnership models generate stronger and more durable effects when they are integrated into broader social and education policies, rather than implemented as isolated community projects (Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

Finally, governance quality and institutional coordination critically shape the effectiveness and sustainability of community-level interventions. Fragmented responsibilities across education, social protection, and child protection agencies, weak enforcement of compulsory schooling regulations, and limited local administrative capacity systematically undermine implementation fidelity and follow-up support (Unesco, 2021). By contrast, integrated community-based models—such as those developed by CAMFED (Campaign for Female Education)—illustrate how aligning schooling support, social protection mechanisms, and local governance structures can generate durable improvements in school participation and retention among highly marginalized girls. Longitudinal and mixed-methods evaluations show that these models operate through reinforcing mechanisms at multiple levels: household economic security, community norms around girls' education, school-level support structures, and local institutional ownership (Ojong, 2025). Together, these findings highlight that social norms and community engagement cannot be treated as peripheral complements to economic and institutional reforms, but rather constitute a

central governance layer through which education policies are translated into sustained schooling outcomes.

6. PILLAR IV – HEALTH, HYGIENE, AND STUDENT WELL-BEING

Pillar IV positions student health, nutrition, and hygiene as foundational conditions for school participation, learning continuity, and retention, rather than as peripheral or complementary areas of intervention. A large body of evidence shows that poor physical health, chronic malnutrition, and exposure to preventable infections reduce attendance, impair attention and executive functioning, and weaken learning trajectories—thereby increasing the risk of grade repetition and early school leaving (Desalegn et al., 2021).

Among the most consistently effective interventions are school-based health and nutrition programs, including school feeding, deworming, and basic preventive health services. These interventions have been shown to improve enrollment, attendance, and learning outcomes, particularly among children from socio-economically disadvantaged households, and are widely recognized as cost-effective investments in human capital (Snilstveit et al., 2023). Nutrition and parasite-control programs are also associated with improvements in cognitive functioning and classroom engagement, reinforcing their relevance for both school participation and learning quality (Ekeleme et al., 2025).

In parallel, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in schools play a critical role in shaping attendance patterns and students' school experience. Inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of safe drinking water, and poor hygiene conditions are linked to higher absenteeism, increased illness-related school disruption, and reduced participation—effects that are particularly pronounced in low-resource settings and among adolescent girls (McMichael, 2019).

Despite the strength of the empirical evidence, school health and WASH interventions remain insufficiently integrated into mainstream education policy. Recent global policy analyses emphasize that embedding school health, nutrition, and WASH within national education sector strategies—through formal coordination among education, health, and social protection systems—is essential to strengthen implementation fidelity, enhance system resilience, and sustain long-term improvements in school retention and learning outcomes (UNICEF, 2024).

7. INTEGRATING THE FOUR PILLARS

Dropout is not solely a problem of access, but rather the outcome of interacting constraints that span multiple policy domains.

From the perspective of **Pillar I – education quality and institutional capacity**, evidence indicates that uneven learning outcomes and limited school-level support mechanisms continue to undermine retention. National and international assessments highlight persistent gaps in foundational skills, particularly in mathematics and language, which reduce students' ability to cope with the increased academic demands of secondary education (OECD, 2023). Grade repetition, insufficient remediation, and weak early identification of learning difficulties contribute to cumulative disengagement. While recent reforms have emphasized teacher training and curriculum modernization, implementation

capacity remains uneven across regions, underscoring the need for stronger school-level institutional support to prevent early academic failure from leading to dropout.

At the same time, **Pillar II – economic constraints and incentive structures** continues to exert a strong influence on household schooling decisions. Poverty, income volatility, and exposure to economic shocks shape the opportunity costs of schooling, particularly at the secondary level, where direct and indirect costs increase (Flug et al., 1998). Social protection instruments such as conditional cash transfers have demonstrated positive effects on enrollment and attendance, especially in the early grades. However, evidence suggests that their impact on sustained retention weakens when schooling does not deliver clear learning gains or credible economic returns (Baird et al., 2011; Milimo et al., 2021). This interaction highlights the interdependence between economic incentives and education quality, and the limits of financial interventions when implemented in isolation.

Pillar III – social norms, governance, and community dynamics further mediates the effectiveness of education and economic policies. In certain contexts, norms related to early entry into work, household responsibilities, or limited expectations of upward mobility continue to influence dropout decisions, particularly when reinforced by economic vulnerability (Oliveira et al., 2025). Community engagement and parental involvement initiatives can mitigate these dynamics, but their effectiveness depends on local governance capacity and institutional coordination. Fragmented responsibilities across ministries and administrative levels often weaken implementation and accountability, reducing the sustainability of dropout-prevention efforts. International experience suggests that durable progress requires governance arrangements that align education, social protection, and local development objectives (Ojong, 2025).

Finally, **Pillar IV – health, hygiene, and student well-being** remains insufficiently integrated into education policy, despite its demonstrated importance for attendance and learning. Preventable health conditions, malnutrition, and inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure contribute to absenteeism and learning disruption, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas (UNICEF, 2024). While school health and WASH initiatives exist, they are often treated as complementary rather than foundational components of education strategies. Stronger institutional integration between the education and health sectors could help reduce absenteeism and reinforce the effectiveness of interventions under the other pillars.

8. POLICY SYNTHESIS MATRIX

The Policy Synthesis Matrix (Table 1) presented below constitutes a central contribution of this paper. Rather than serving as a descriptive summary, the matrix functions as a decision-support tool designed to help policymakers translate the four-pillar analytical framework into coherent and operational public policy responses. By explicitly linking structural risks to policy instruments and expected outcomes, the matrix clarifies how dropout prevention can be addressed through coordinated interventions rather than isolated programs.

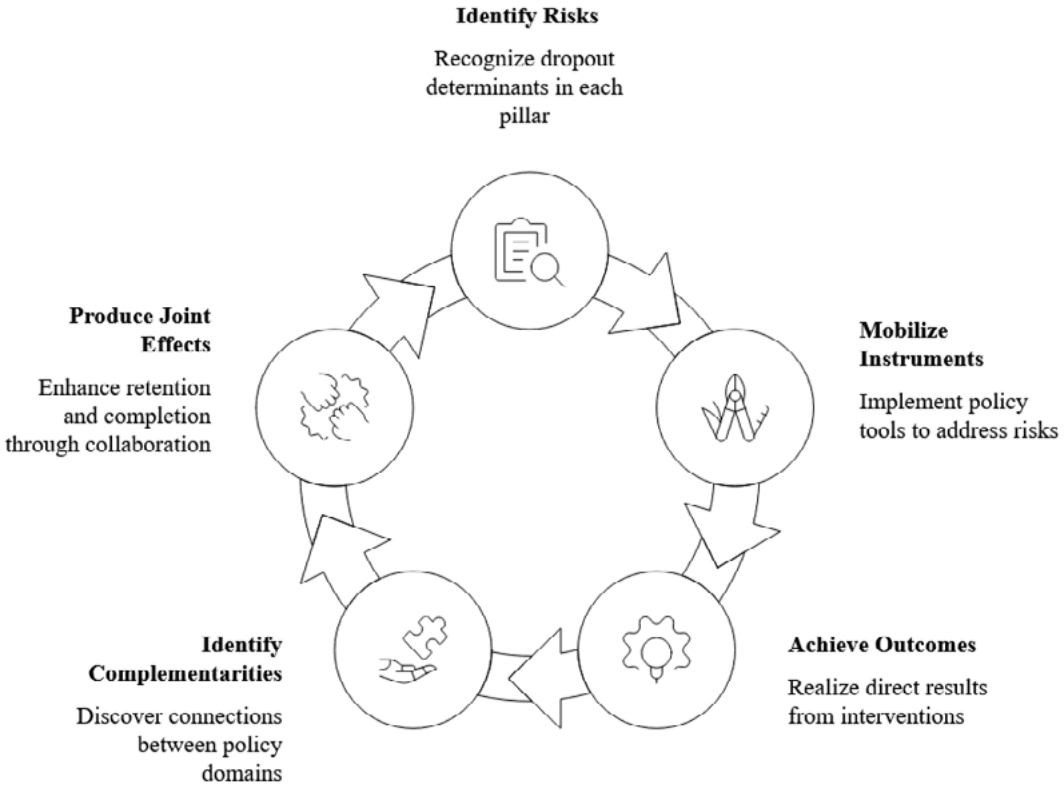
The matrix addresses a recurrent limitation of education policy frameworks: although the determinants of school dropout are well documented, they are rarely structured in a way that makes cross-sector complementarities and sequencing effects operationally visible to decision-makers.

Each row of the matrix corresponds to one policy pillar and identifies (i) the main risks driving dropout within that domain, (ii) the core policy instruments mobilized to address those risks, and (iii) the expected direct outcomes of these instruments. Crucially, the

matrix is not designed to be read vertically as a catalogue of sector-specific interventions, but rather horizontally and relationally, reflecting an integrated policy logic. To reinforce this integrated interpretation, the matrix explicitly identifies—for each pillar—the main complementarities with other policy domains and the channels through which joint effects on retention and completion are produced. This integrated logic is further operationalized through the policy matrix cycle (Figure 2), which visualizes the iterative coordination process linking risk identification, instrument mobilization, outcome monitoring, and the systematic identification of cross-pillar complementarities.

Figure 2.

Policy Matrix Cycle



For example, improvements in teaching quality and learning support under Pillar I increase the perceived and actual returns to schooling, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of financial incentives and social protection instruments under Pillar II. Similarly, health, nutrition, and WASH interventions under Pillar IV improve attendance and cognitive readiness, which can amplify the impact of pedagogical reforms and remediation strategies under Pillar I, while also reducing the risk that economic support alone merely postpones dropout.

The matrix therefore functions as a coordination tool rather than a sectoral planning device. It helps align education reform, social protection, health policy, and local governance within a unified human capital strategy, by making visible the areas in which policy effects depend on simultaneous action across pillars. It also facilitates monitoring and evaluation by clarifying whether combinations of instruments are producing improvements in retention and completion, rather than isolated gains in access or enrollment.

Table 1.

Policy Synthesis Matrix

Pillar	Key Risks Driving Dropout	Core Policy Instruments	Direct Expected Outcomes	Key Complementarities with Other Pillars
Pillar I – Education Quality and Institutional Capacity	Low learning outcomes, grade repetition, weak student engagement, and limited school-level support	Teacher training and professional development; curriculum reform; targeted remediation; early warning systems; second-chance education pathways	Improved learning outcomes; higher engagement; reduced repetition; increased retention and completion	Enhances the effectiveness of economic incentives (Pillar II) by increasing the perceived and actual returns to schooling. Requires health and nutrition support (Pillar IV) to translate pedagogical improvements into learning gains.
Pillar II – Economic Constraints and Incentive Structures	Poverty, income volatility, opportunity costs of schooling, weak perceived economic returns	Conditional and unconditional cash transfers; school feeding programs and transport subsidies; vocational and skills pathways; school-to-work linkages	Increased attendance; reduced dropout at transition points; stronger perceived returns to education	Produces durable effects only when learning quality and progression improve (Pillar I). More effective when community norms and family engagement support continued schooling, especially for girls and vulnerable groups (Pillar III).
Pillar III – Social Norms, Governance, and Community Dynamics	Child labor, early entry into work, weak parental engagement, fragmented governance	Community engagement and parental involvement programs; behavior-change communication; strengthened local governance and inter-ministerial coordination	Sustained enrollment; shifts in norms supportive of schooling; improved implementation capacity	Strengthens take-up and compliance of financial and social protection instruments (Pillar II). Improves identification and follow-up of at-risk students, enabling early intervention under education quality systems (Pillar I) and school health services (Pillar IV).
Pillar IV – Health, Hygiene, and Student Well-Being	Illness-related absenteeism, malnutrition, and inadequate WASH infrastructure	School health services; nutrition and feeding programs; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) investments	Reduced absenteeism; improved cognitive performance; safer, more supportive learning environments	Amplifies the impact of pedagogical reforms and remediation (Pillar I) by improving learning readiness and attention. Increases the effectiveness of economic support (Pillar II) by reducing health-related shocks that undermine attendance and continuity.

The synthesis matrix reinforces the central argument of this paper: school dropout is not the result of isolated failures but rather the outcome of interacting constraints across multiple policy domains. Addressing one set of risks while neglecting others is unlikely to produce durable results. Instead, the matrix encourages policymakers to adopt an integrated approach that recognizes complementarities, anticipates trade-offs, and coordinates interventions strategically.

By making explicit the links between risks, instruments, and outcomes, the matrix provides a concrete tool for operationalizing the four-pillar framework. It is intended to support strategic planning, policy coordination, and evidence-informed decision-making, particularly in contexts such as Morocco, where dropout prevention is inseparable from broader challenges of human capital development, social inclusion, and territorial equity.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that school dropout is a multidimensional public policy challenge that cannot be effectively addressed through fragmented interventions. By explicitly articulating a four-pillar framework and grounding it in recent empirical evidence, the paper demonstrates that durable reductions in dropout require integrated public policy responses that align education quality reforms, economic incentives, social governance mechanisms, and health interventions. Strengthening policy coherence, cross-sector coordination, and institutional capacity is therefore central to improving school retention and supporting long-term human capital development.

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ABOUT
THE POLICY CENTER FOR THE NEW SOUTH

The Policy Center for the New South (PCNS) is a Moroccan think tank aiming to contribute to the improvement of economic and social public policies that challenge Morocco and the rest of Africa as integral parts of the global South.

The PCNS pleads for an open, accountable, and enterprising "new South" that defines its own narratives and mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, as part of a forward-looking relationship with the rest of the world. Through its analytical endeavours, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give the floor to experts from the South. This stance is focused on dialogue and partnership and aims to cultivate African expertise and excellence needed for the accurate analysis of African and global challenges and the suggestion of appropriate solutions.

As such, the PCNS brings together researchers, publishes their work and capitalizes on a network of renowned partners, representative of different regions of the world. The PCNS hosts a series of gatherings of different formats and scales throughout the year, the most important being the annual international conferences the “Atlantic Dialogues”, the “African Peace and Security Annual Conference" (APSACO), and the “Africa Economic Symposium” (AES).

Finally, the think tank is developing a community of young leaders through the Atlantic Dialogues Emerging Leaders program (ADEL) a space for cooperation and networking between a new generation of decision-makers from the government, business, and civil society sectors. Through this initiative, which already counts more than 490 members, the Policy Center for the New South contributes to intergenerational dialogue and the emergence of tomorrow’s leaders.

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