



Attitude toward education and dropout intention among secondary school students in West Bengal: A theory of planned behaviour approach

Luthfor Ali¹, Dr. Ankhi Goon²

¹ Adamas University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

² Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Adamas University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Abstract

The present study examines the psychological determinants of dropout intention among secondary school students in West Bengal using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). A quantitative cross-sectional design was adopted, and data were collected from 800 secondary school students selected through stratified random sampling from North and South 24 Parganas districts. Standardized instruments were used to measure attitude toward education, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and dropout intention. Multiple regression analysis revealed that the TPB model significantly predicted dropout intention, $F(3, 796) = 202.00, p < .001$, explaining 43.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .433$). Attitude toward education ($\beta = .313, p < .001$) and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .490, p < .001$) emerged as significant predictors, whereas subjective norms did not show a statistically significant effect ($\beta = .008, p = .784$). The findings indicate that students' personal evaluation of education and perceived control over continuing schooling play a decisive role in shaping dropout intention. The study highlights the importance of psychological and motivational interventions for reducing secondary school dropout in West Bengal.

Keywords: Dropout intention; attitude toward education; perceived behavioral control; theory of planned behaviour; secondary school students

Introduction

School dropout at the secondary level remains a persistent educational challenge in India, particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged regions. Despite policy initiatives such as the Right to Education Act (2009) and the National Education Policy (2020), dropout rates continue to undermine educational equity and long-term human capital development. In West Bengal, districts such as North and South 24 Parganas report substantial dropout due to poverty, parental illiteracy, early labour participation, and low academic engagement.

Recent research suggests that dropout is not merely a structural outcome but also a behavioral decision influenced by students' beliefs, motivation, and perceived agency. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) offers a robust framework for understanding such decisions by emphasizing the role of attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping behavioral intention. However, empirical applications of TPB to secondary school dropout in the Indian context remain limited. The present study addresses this gap by applying TPB to examine the psychological predictors of dropout intention among secondary school students in West Bengal.

Review of Related Literature

1. School Dropout as a Behavioral Phenomenon

School dropout has increasingly been conceptualized as a multidimensional behavioral process rather than a single event. International and Indian studies highlight the role of motivation, engagement, and perceived relevance of education in shaping students' decisions to continue or discontinue schooling. Behavioral intention has emerged as a strong predictor of actual dropout behaviour.

2. Attitude toward Education and Dropout Intention

Attitude toward education reflects students' beliefs about the value and usefulness of schooling. Positive attitudes are

associated with higher engagement and persistence, while negative attitudes increase the likelihood of withdrawal. Empirical studies in India have shown that unfavorable school experiences and low perceived returns from education significantly weaken students' commitment to schooling.

3. Subjective Norms and Educational Continuity

Subjective norms refer to perceived social pressure from parents, teachers, and peers regarding school continuation. In collectivist societies, social expectations often play an important role in educational decision-making. However, evidence on the predictive power of subjective norms for dropout intention remains mixed, particularly once students become emotionally disengaged.

4. Perceived Behavioral Control and Dropout Intention

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) captures students' perceptions of their ability to remain in school despite constraints such as financial hardship, academic difficulty, and family responsibilities. Research consistently indicates that lower perceived control is associated with stronger dropout intention, especially in economically vulnerable contexts.

Objectives and Hypotheses

1. Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between attitude toward education and dropout intention.
2. To assess the influence of subjective norms on dropout intention.
3. To evaluate the role of perceived behavioral control in predicting dropout intention.
4. To determine the combined predictive power of TPB constructs on dropout intention.

2. Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between attitude toward education and dropout intention.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between subjective norms and dropout intention.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and dropout intention.

H₀₄: Attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control do not significantly predict dropout intention.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed to examine predictors of dropout intention within the TPB framework.

2. Population and Sample

The population comprised secondary school students enrolled in Grades IX and X in North and South 24 Parganas districts of West Bengal. A sample of 800 students (400 boys and 400 girls) was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure gender and regional representation.

3. Instruments

A structured questionnaire was administered consisting of four standardized scales: Attitude toward Education, Subjective Norms, Perceived Behavioral Control, and Dropout Intention. All items were measured on five-point Likert scales. Reliability analysis indicated satisfactory internal consistency for most constructs.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Jamovi software. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression were employed. Diagnostic tests confirmed that regression assumptions were largely satisfied.

Results

The multiple regression model predicting dropout intention from attitude toward education, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control was statistically significant, $F(3, 796) = 202.00, p < .001$. The model explained 43.3% of the variance in dropout intention ($R^2 = .433$).

Attitude toward education significantly predicted dropout intention ($\beta = .313, p < .001$), indicating that students' evaluations of education strongly influence their intention to discontinue schooling. Perceived behavioral control emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .490, p < .001$). Subjective norms did not show a statistically significant effect ($\beta = .008, p = .784$).

Discussion

The findings provide partial support for the Theory of Planned Behavior in explaining dropout intention among secondary school students in West Bengal. Attitude toward education and perceived behavioral control significantly influenced dropout intention, while subjective norms did not exert a meaningful effect.

The strong role of attitude underscores the importance of students' internal valuation of education in shaping persistence decisions. Perceived behavioral control emerged as the most powerful determinant, highlighting the role of perceived agency amid financial and academic constraints.

The limited influence of subjective norms suggests that social pressure alone may be insufficient to prevent dropout once disengagement sets in.

Implications of the Study

1. Theoretical Implications

The study validates the applicability of TPB in the Indian secondary education context and demonstrates that psychological constructs explain a substantial proportion of variance in dropout intention.

2. Practical Implications

Educational interventions should prioritize strengthening positive attitudes toward education and enhancing students' perceived control through academic support, counselling, and targeted financial assistance.

Limitations and Future Research

The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and the study is geographically restricted to two districts of West Bengal. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs, incorporate additional contextual variables, and apply structural equation modelling to explore mediation pathways.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that dropout intention among secondary school students in West Bengal is strongly influenced by attitude toward education and perceived behavioral control. By framing dropout as a planned behavioral outcome, the findings emphasize the need for psychological and motivational interventions alongside structural reforms. The Theory of Planned Behaviour offers a valuable framework for understanding and addressing secondary school dropout in developing educational contexts.

References

- Adegboyega S. Economic hardship and school dropout among adolescents in Nigeria. *African Education Review*,2020;17(3):45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2020.1753932>
- Ajzen I. The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*,1991;50(2):179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Ajzen I. Perceived behavioral control, self-efficacy, locus of control, and the theory of planned behavior. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*,2002;32(4):665–683. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2002.tb00236.x>
- Ajzen I. Reflections on the theory of planned behavior. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*,2019;1(1):12–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.156>
- Ajzen I. The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*,2020;2(4):314–324. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195>
- Alam S, Ahmed R. School dropout determinants in rural India. *Journal of Education and Social Policy*,2020;7(2):34–48.
- Armitage CJ, Conner M. Efficacy of the theory of planned behaviour: A meta-analytic review. *British Journal of Social Psychology*,2001;40(4):471–499. <https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164939>

8. Banerjee S. Motivational determinants of school dropout among adolescents in India. *Asian Journal of Education and Development*,2021:5(2):101–112.
9. Bhattacharya P. Psychological factors influencing school dropout in eastern India. *Journal of Educational Psychology Research*,2023:12(1):55–72.
10. Bronfenbrenner U. *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press, 1979.
11. Chen H, Liu L. Application of the theory of planned behavior to predict persistence in school. *Educational Psychology*,2019:39(5):588–602.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2018.1543852>
12. Coleman JS. Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*,1988:94:95–120. <https://doi.org/10.1086/228943>
13. De Witte K, Cabus S, Thyssen G, Groot W, van den Brink HM. A critical review of the literature on school dropout. *Educational Research Review*,2013:10:13–28. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.002>
14. Eccles JS, Wigfield A. From expectancy–value theory to situated expectancy–value theory. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*,2020:61:101859. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101859>
15. Fan X, Chen M. Parental involvement and academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*,2019:31(4):1033–1069. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-018-9452-7>
16. Fishbein M, Ajzen I. *Predicting and changing behavior: The reasoned action approach*. Psychology Press, 2010.
17. Garg R, Kumar S, Singh P. Determinants of school dropouts in India: A survival analysis approach. *Indian Journal of Human Development*,2023:17(2):112–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09737030231157844>
18. Ghasemian S, Jamshidi F, Ghaffari M. Applications of the theory of planned behavior in education. *Frontiers in Psychology*,2024:15:1017011. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1017011>
19. Ghosh S, Chatterjee B. Secondary school dropout in West Bengal: A district-level analysis. *Indian Educational Review*,2020:57(2):75–88.
20. Hagger MS, Chan DK, Cheung SF. The theory of planned behavior and education persistence. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*,2022:92(3):1020–1037. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12463>
21. Henry KL, Knight KE, Thornberry TP. School disengagement as a predictor of dropout. *Journal of School Health*,2012:82(7):317–324. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2012.00705.x>
22. Lee VE, Burkam DT. Dropping out of high school: The role of school organization and structure. *American Educational Research Journal*,2003:40(2):353–393. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312040002353>
23. Mih C, Mih V. Academic motivation and dropout intention: A TPB perspective. *Educational Studies*,2021:47(6):632–648. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2020.1719187>
24. Montano DE, Kasprzyk D. Theory of reasoned action and planned behavior. In: Glanz K, Rimer BK, Viswanath K, editors. *Health behavior: Theory, research, and practice*. 5th ed. Jossey-Bass,2015:95–124.
25. Rumberger RW. *Dropping out: Why students drop out of high school and what can be done about it*. Harvard University, 2011.