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Analysing the Impact of Student-Related Factors on the Decline in Academic Performance Among Lower Secondary School Students in Bamako, Mali: Lessons from China's Strict Educational Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the decline in academic performance among lower secondary students in Bamako, Mali, focusing on motivation, discipline, well-being, and socio-economic factors. Comparing with China's disciplined educational model, the research explores adapting such practices within Mali's cultural and resource constraints. Using mixed methods, data from teachers, students, and administrators reveal that socio-economic issues and family support significantly affect performance, followed by motivation and study habits. Findings suggest that integrating structured discipline with emotional and socio-economic support, alongside teacher training, can foster sustainable educational improvements. A balanced, culturally adapted approach is essential for reversing academic decline in Mali.

INTRODUCTION

The academic performance of lower secondary school students in Bamako, Mali, has declined markedly in recent years, reflecting systemic challenges in the country's education system. Contributing factors include socio-economic disparities, inconsistent teaching quality, and diminished student motivation all of which undermine learning outcomes and limit future opportunities (Traoré & Sidibé 2022). In response to this pressing issue, this study looks to China's rigorous educational model, characterized by structured discipline, high expectations, and consistent accountability, as a potential source of adaptable strategies. By examining how China's approach addresses student-related factors such as perseverance, self-regulation, and engagement, this research seeks to identify transferable practices that could be tailored to local contexts to support academic improvement in Bamako.

China's educational system is widely recognized for its emphasis on discipline, routine, and academic rigor, which have contributed to its strong performance in international assessments (Mukhtar *et al.*, 2022). Key elements include a culture of high expectations, teacher-led instruction, and integrated moral and extracurricular education all of which foster resilience and systematic study habits (Fernandez *et al.*, 2026). While not directly transferable, these components offer a valuable framework for rethinking how student-level factors such as motivation, study habits, and socio-economic barriers might be more effectively addressed in Mali's educational settings.

Understanding the interplay between student-related factors and academic performance is essential for designing effective interventions. Research underscores that variables such as self-efficacy, motivation, and family support significantly shape engagement and achievement (Nagar, 2023). A comparative analysis with China's model highlights the role of structured environments and consistent discipline in mitigating some of these challenges (Huang *et al.*, 2023). This study therefore aims to bridge global insights with local realities, offering evidence-based recommendations to counteract academic decline in Bamako.

Problem Statement

Declining academic achievement among lower secondary students in Bamako presents a critical challenge to Mali's educational development. Student-related factors including low motivation, poor study habits, and weak discipline have been identified as key contributors to this trend (Traoré & Sidibé 2022). While systemic issues such as resource limitations and teacher training gaps persist, interventions focused on student behaviour and engagement remain underexplored (Malik *et al.*, 2026). China's strict educational practices, which stress discipline, routine, and accountability, offer a compelling comparative case for rethinking how such factors might be addressed in Mali (Bleck & Guindo, 2013). This study therefore investigates how these practices could inform locally adapted strategies to improve learning outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to:

- Identify and analyse the student-related factors most strongly associated with declining academic performance in Bamako's lower secondary schools.

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• Examine China's strict educational practices to extract transferable principles related to discipline, motivation, and study habits.

• Propose context-sensitive recommendations for integrating these principles into Mali's educational framework to enhance student outcomes.

Research Questions

• Which student-related factors such as motivation, study habits, discipline, and socio-economic background are most closely linked to declining academic performance in Bamako's lower secondary schools?

• In what ways can China's strict educational practices inform the development of targeted interventions to address these factors in the Malian context?

Theoretical Frameworks

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) posits that intrinsic motivation flourishes when three psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the context of declining academic performance in Bamako, this theory helps explain how educational environments that fail to support these needs through rigid teaching methods, lack of student choice, or weak teacher-student connections may undermine motivation and engagement. Conversely, China's strict educational model strongly emphasizes competence through high expectations and mastery-oriented tasks, but often at the expense of autonomy, which may lead to compliance rather than genuine engagement. SDT provides a valuable lens for evaluating which aspects of China's practices could be adapted to support rather than suppress Malian students' psychological needs.

Bioecological Model of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model frames human development as the product of interactions across multiple environmental systems: microsystem (family, classroom), mesosystem (connections between home and school), exosystem (educational policies, teacher training), and macrosystem (cultural values, societal norms). Applying this model to Bamako reveals how student-related factors (microsystem) are deeply shaped by broader structural deficiencies such as inconsistent policies (exosystem) and cultural attitudes toward schooling (macrosystem). In China, strong alignment across these systemsnational policies supporting education, cultural valorisation of academic success, and cohesive home-school partnerships creates a conducive environment for achievement. This model underscores that importing isolated practices without systemic alignment may yield limited results in Mali.

This diagram visually organizes the two theories, their core components, and the insights they provide when comparing educational contexts in Mali and China.

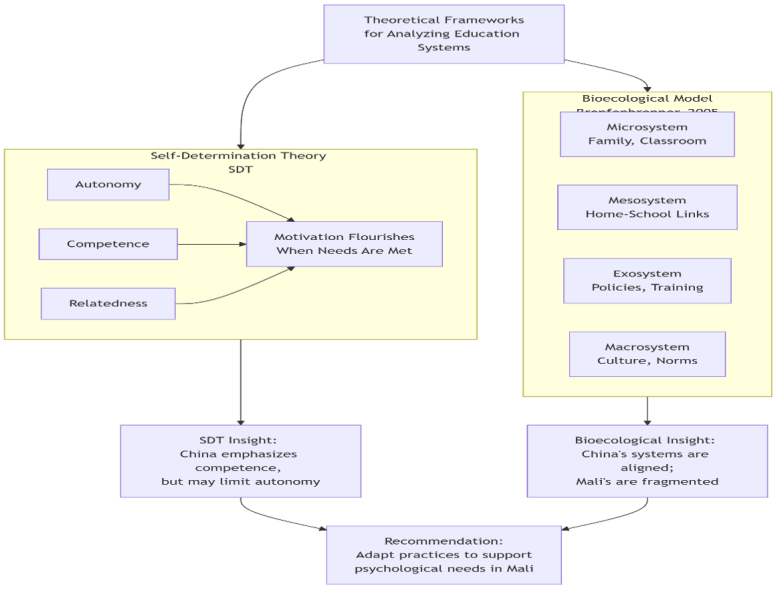

Figure 1: Educational theories vision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student-Related Factors: A Comparative Analysis

Research highlights four key student-level factors influencing academic performance: motivation, study habits, psychological well-being, and socioeconomic background. In Mali, studies tend to examine these factors in isolation, often emphasizing socioeconomic barriers (Chhatwani, 2025). In China, research explores how disciplined environments shape motivation and habits, though sometimes overlooking psychological costs (Wang, 2023; Li & Rohayati, 2024). A synthesized comparison reveals critical gaps: Malian studies rarely investigate interactions between these factors, while Chinese research underestimates the stress effects of high-pressure systems.

Table 1: Synthesis of Student-Related Factors in Mali and China

Factor	Malian Context	Chinese Context	Research Gaps
Motivation	Low, linked to perceived irrelevance	Extrinsic, driven by societal pressure	Lack of studies on fostering intrinsic motivation in Mali
Study Habits	Irregular, unstructured	Highly ritualized, repetition-based	Scarcity of research on routine effectiveness in low-structure settings
Psychological Well-being	Stress from economic insecurity	Stress from performance competition	Few cross-cultural comparisons of stress sources
Socioeconomic Support	Major limiting factor	Mitigated by school support policies	Few intervention models adapted to Malian constraints

Systemic Challenges in Mali vs. Structural Coherence in China

Beyond student-level factors, Mali's educational system faces fragmentation: inconsistent policies, uneven teacher training, and weak school-community links (Walther-Puri, 2025). China exhibits structural coherence: high cultural expectations, stable policies, and strong family-school-government integration (Lei & Tian, 2025; Yar'dua *et al.*, 2026). This contrast suggests that transferring isolated practices (e.g., strict discipline) without systemic alignment may prove ineffective or even detrimental in Mali.

Critical Analysis of China's Educational Model

Discipline and Rigor: Balancing Perseverance with Well-being

The emphasis on discipline and rigor within China's educational system has been widely documented as a driver of academic perseverance and high performance in international assessments (Yu, 2010). Structured routines, explicit behavioural expectations, and a culture of effort cultivate resilience and time-management skills among students. However, this model has drawn criticism for potentially stifling creativity, critical thinking, and intrinsic motivation (Wu, 2016; BULAN & Felinita III, 2026). Research indicates that excessive academic pressure and punitive discipline can lead to heightened student anxiety, reduced psychological well-being, and superficial learning strategies focused on memorization rather than understanding (Schnell, 2025; Li *et al.*, 2025). This tension underscores the need for a balanced approach that maintains high expectations while fostering a supportive and psychologically safe learning environment.

Teacher-Student Relationships: From Authority to Supportive Guidance

Historically characterized by hierarchical authority, teacher-student relationships in China are gradually evolving toward a more balanced dynamic that integrates respect for authority with emotional support and mentorship (Huang, *et al.*, 2023). Contemporary pedagogical reforms encourage teachers to act as facilitators and motivators rather than solely as disciplinarians (Fang, 2025). Studies show that supportive teacher-student relationships correlate positively with student engagement, self-efficacy, and academic resilience (Jiang *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, challenges persist in fully implementing these relational shifts, particularly in regions with strong traditional norms and large class sizes (Enticosa & Felinita Iii, 2026). This evolving dynamic offers valuable insights for contexts like Mali, where strengthening teacher-student rapport could enhance both discipline and motivation.

Moral and Extracurricular Education: Cultivating Holistic Development

China's educational framework increasingly integrates moral education and structured extracurricular activities into the core curriculum, aiming to develop students' character, social responsibility, and holistic competencies (Lei & Tian, 2025; Abdelkrim *et al.*, 2026). Moral education emphasizes values such as collectivism, respect, and perseverance, while extracurricular programs promote teamwork, leadership, and creativity (Li *et al.*, 2023). Research suggests that such integrated approaches contribute to students' socio-emotional development and long-term academic engagement (He *et al.*, 2023). For educational systems like Mali's, this model highlights the potential of combining academic instruction with character formation and practical skills development. Successful adaptation, however, requires careful localization to align with Malian cultural values, community resources, and educational priorities (OLVIDADO & FELINITA III, 2026).

Research Gaps and This Study's Contribution

Identified gaps are threefold:

- Conceptual: Lack of frameworks integrating individual and systemic factors in Malian research.
- Methodological: Scarce mixed-methods studies comparing stakeholder perceptions with performance data.
- Practical: Few studies operationalizing the transfer of educational practices to low-resource contexts.

This study addresses these gaps by applying a bioecological framework to analyse how China-inspired practices might be adapted to Mali's system, while assessing their impact on student motivation and well-being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design (Creswell & Clark, 2007). to thoroughly investigate how student-related factors contribute to the decline in academic performance among lower secondary school students in Bamako, Mali. The quantitative phase first identifies broad

patterns and relationships, followed by a qualitative phase to deepen understanding and contextualize the findings. This triangulation enhances validity and provides a holistic view of the phenomenon.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Collection

Teacher Surveys: Administered to 100 teachers, assessing their qualifications, teaching methods, perceptions of student discipline, and attitudes toward strict educational models (inspired by Chinese practices).

Standardized Student Assessments: Academic performance data were collected in core subjects (Mathematics, French, Sciences) using standardized tests aligned with the national curriculum. Additionally, a student questionnaire captured data on motivation, study habits, socio-economic status, and access to learning resources.

Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured Interviews: Conducted with a subset of teachers (n=20), students (n=30), and all school administrators (n=4). Interviews explored perceptions of learning challenges, such socioeconomic factors, motivation, study Habits and Psychological factors.

Document Analysis: A thematic document review was performed on teacher training curricula, educational policy documents from Mali, and official publications/reports on Chinese educational reforms (2015–2023). This allowed for a systematic comparison of disciplinary approaches and support structures.

Sampling Techniques

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select four representative schools in Bamako (varying by location and performance level). Within these schools:

Teachers were selected based on ≥2 years of experience at the lower secondary level.

Students were randomly selected from grades 7-9 class lists.

Administrators were included from each participating school.

Sample size

The final achieved sample comprised a total of 304 participants, distributed proportionally across the four purposively selected schools to enable school-level comparison. The detailed composition is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Size and Distribution Across Participating Schools.

Participant Group	Total Sample Size	Distribution per School (4 Schools)
Teachers	100	25
Students	200	50
Administrators	4	1

Note: Schools were selected purposively to ensure diversity in location and performance level.

Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS 26. Descriptive statistics summarized participant characteristics and performance trends. Inferential analyses (correlation, regression) examined relationships between student-related factors (motivation, socio-economic status, discipline) and academic performance.

Qualitative Analysis

Interview transcripts and documents were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) through the following steps:

- Familiarization with data
- Generating initial codes
- Searching for themes
- Reviewing themes
- Defining and naming themes
- Producing the report

The software NVivo 12 supported coding and theme management.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the Malian Ministry of Education and school authorities. Informed consent was secured from all participants (and guardians for minors). Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by using ID codes and secure data storage. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Limitations of the Study

- Generalizability: Findings are limited to Bamako and may not represent all Malian contexts.
- Self-report bias: Reliance on surveys and interviews may reflect social desirability bias.
- Absence of direct observation: Classroom dynamics and teaching interactions were not directly observed.
- Cross-cultural comparison: The analysis of Chinese practices relied on documentary sources rather than fieldwork in China.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Results

Descriptive Analysis of Student-Related Factors

The survey of 100 teachers across four secondary schools in Bamako revealed four primary student-related barriers affecting academic performance (Table 3). Socioeconomic and family-support issues emerged as the most frequently cited obstacle, reported by 58% of teachers. This was followed by motivation and attitude problems (47%), study habits and discipline issues (39%), and psychological well-being concerns (31%).The data reveal a clear inverse relationship between the prevalence of a factor and average academic performance. Classes where teachers reported socioeconomic challenges showed the lowest mean scores (58.2%), followed by motivation issues (47.3%), study habit problems (39.1%), and psychological concerns (31.4%).

Table 3: Prevalence of Student-Related Factors and Associated Academic Performance (N=100 teachers)

Factor	Teachers Reporting (n)	Percentage	Average Student Score	Standard Deviation
Socioeconomic & Family Support	58	58%	58.2%	±12.3
Motivation & Attitudes	47	47%	47.3%	±10.8
Study Habits & Discipline	39	39%	39.1%	±9.5
Psychological Well-being	31	31%	31.4%	±8.7
Note: Average academic scores based on standardized assessments in Mathematics, French, and Sciences (scale: 0-100%).				

Student Questionnaire Results: Self-Reported Challenges

Analysis of 200 student questionnaires provided complementary insights into the lived experiences behind this teacher perception. As shown in Figure 1, the most prevalent self-reported challenge was limited study materials at home (65%), followed closely by family financial pressures affecting attendance (58%).

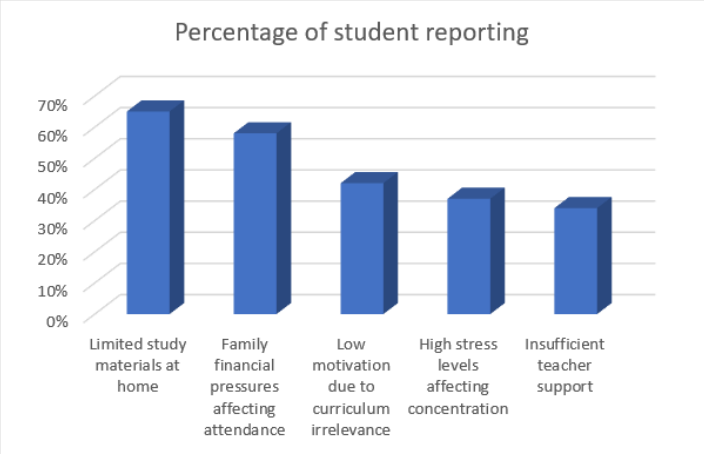

Figure 2: Prevalence of self-reported challenges among secondary school students in Bamako (N=200).

Inferential Statistical Analysis

Correlation Analysis examined relationships between factor prevalence and academic performance across the four schools (Table 4). Pearson correlation coefficients revealed statistically significant negative relationships for all factors.

Table 4: Correlation Between Student-Related Factors and Academic Performance

Factor	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance (p)	Strength of Relationship
Socioeconomic Support	-.72	<.001	Strong negative
Motivation	-.65	<.001	Strong negative
Study Habits	-.58	<.01	Moderate negative
Psychological Well-being	-.51	<.05	Moderate negative

Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of these factors on academic performance. The regression model explained 74% of the variance in student scores ($R^2 = .74$, $F(4,95) = 18.23$, $p < .001$).

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Academic Performance

Predictor	Standardized Beta (β)	t-value	Significance (p)	Variance Explained (ΔR^2)
Socioeconomic Factors	-.61	-5.82	<.001	52%
Motivation	-.42	-3.91	<.01	18%
Study Habits	-.28	-2.67	<.05	8%
Psychological Well-being	-.19	-1.84	.068	4%

The analysis confirms that socioeconomic factors are the strongest predictor of academic performance, accounting for over half of the explained variance. Motivation contributes substantially as a secondary predictor, while study habits and psychological well-being show smaller but still meaningful effects.

These quantitative findings establish a clear empirical foundation for understanding the multi-layered challenges facing Bamako's secondary students, while highlighting socioeconomic constraints as the primary target for intervention efforts.

Qualitative Results

Student-Related Factors in Bamako: Voices from the Ground

The qualitative findings provide a textured, human-centered understanding of the quantitative trends, revealing the lived realities behind the statistics. Through the voices of students, parents, and teachers, four interconnected themes emerged, painting a complex picture of the challenges facing learners in Bamako.

Motivation and Engagement: The Quest for Relevance

Student narratives consistently highlighted a search for meaning in their academic work. As one student articulated, "When I see that what I'm doing can help achieve my goals, I feel more engaged" (Student 14). This sentiment underscores a dominant theme: motivation in this context appears heavily dependent on perceived utility rather than intrinsic curiosity or joy in learning. Several students expressed disengagement when they couldn't connect classroom content to their personal aspirations or immediate environment, suggesting that curricula perceived as abstract or disconnected fail to inspire sustained effort.

Study Habits and Time Management: The Cycle of Cramming

Parents provided crucial insights into the domestic challenges of academic life. A common refrain described a cycle of procrastination and panic: "Poor time management leads to last-minute cramming and decreased understanding" (Parent 22). This observation aligns with teachers' reports of sporadic study patterns. The qualitative data suggest this is not merely a lack of discipline but often a consequence of competing domestic responsibilities, limited quiet study spaces at home, and an absence of structured guidance in developing metacognitive skills like planning and self-monitoring.

Psychological Factors: The Weight of Stress

The emotional landscape of students emerged as a significant, yet often overlooked, barrier. Expressions of being overwhelmed were frequent, with one student confessing, "I often feel overwhelmed with stress, especially during deadlines" (Student 08). This stress was not solely academic; it was compounded by socioeconomic anxieties and, for some, the pressure to be a "first-generation success." The data reveal that this emotional burden acts as a cognitive tax, reducing mental bandwidth for focused learning and problem-solving, thereby creating a vicious cycle where anxiety about performance further undermines that very performance.

Socioeconomic Influences: Navigating Scarcity and Drawing on Resilience

The socioeconomic dimension was the most palpably felt factor in the interviews. Students were acutely aware of material constraints: "My family's financial situation impacts my educational opportunities" (Student 31), citing examples like inability to afford supplementary materials or the need to work after school. However, within this narrative of constraint emerged a powerful counter-narrative of resilience fuelled by non-material support. As another student noted, "Family support helps me stay focused despite hardships" (Student 19). This highlights a critical distinction: while financial capital is scarce, social and emotional capital within families can serve as a vital protective factor, motivating students to persevere against the odds.

Synthesis and Pathways for Intervention: Drawing on the Chinese Model for Malian Solutions

By cross-referencing the empirical diagnostics of challenges in Bamako (Sections 4.1 & 4.2.1) it is possible to outline pathways for targeted interventions. The goal is not to import a system, but to adapt its structuring principles to address the specific vulnerabilities identified in the Malian context. The following table summarizes this hybrid design approach.

Table 6: Proposal for Hybrid Interventions, Inspired by Chinese Principles and Adapted to Malian Challenges

Malian Challenge (Identified)	Relevant Chinese Principle/Practice	Proposed Targeted Intervention (Context-Adapted)	Primary Objective
1. Study Habits & Time Management (Cramming, lack of space/structure at home).	Discipline and highly structured learning environment; importance of homework and repetition.	Creation of "Supervised Study Units" (SSUs) in schools or community centers after class. These units would provide a quiet space, basic resources, and guidance from a tutor (senior teacher or advanced student) for completing homework and revision according to a fixed schedule.	Break the "cramming" cycle by externalizing and structuring study time. Mitigate the lack of material support and study space at home.

2. Motivation & Perceived Relevance (Curriculum perceived as abstract, weak link to aspirations).	Culture of accountability and goal-oriented effort (e.g., Gaokao); extreme valuation of education as a social elevator.	"Project and Career Pathway Mentorship" Program linking students to local professional mentors. Focus would be on the practical application of skills (e.g., math for small business, French for law) in micro-projects, clarifying the link between studies and concrete opportunities.	Re-engage students by highlighting utility. Strengthen instrumental motivation and ground learning in Malian reality.
3. Socioeconomic Support as Primary Factor (Lack of materials, financial pressure).	Strong involvement of the "family unit" as a pillar of academic support, even in the absence of material wealth.	Awareness and training campaigns targeting parents ("Parent Schools"). Rather than demanding financial resources, these campaigns would train parents to provide non-material support: discussion space, verbal encouragement, attendance monitoring, valuing effort. This activates the social and emotional capital identified as a resilience factor.	Transform family support from passive (worry) to active (psychosocial support practices). Mitigate the impact of material constraints by strengthening the motivational pillar.
4. Psychological Well-being & Stress (Pressure, feeling overwhelmed).	Clear and predictable framework reducing anxiety about the unknown; culture of perseverance in the face of difficulty.	Integration of "Stress and Goal Management" modules into the timetable, led by trained counselors or teachers. Based not on simple discussion, but on structured methods (weekly goal planning, breathing techniques, revision routines). This frames difficulty as a normal step and provides tools to manage it.	Demystify stress, normalize it, and provide a practical "toolbox" for management. Shift from a state of passive anxiety to an active strategy.
5. Teacher Authority & Expectations (Need for respect and classroom structure).	Clarity of roles and high expectations for both teachers and students.	Participatory development of a "Shared Code of Conduct and Respect" for the school, co-written by teachers, students, and parents. This code, displayed and regularly referenced, transparently defines rights, responsibilities, and sanctions, inspired by the Chinese model of clarity but grounded in collective buy-in rather than an imposed decree.	Restore a climate of mutual respect and predictability. Strengthen teacher authority by legitimizing it through a common social contract.

These interventions illustrate the process of creative adaptation called for by administrators. They borrow from the Chinese model its structural rigor, its focus on effort, and its systemic valuation of education, but reincarnate them in socio-culturally viable forms for Bamako. They avoid the pitfall of pure imposition (memorization, passivity) in favour of guided empowerment and community support.

Discussion

This study sought to identify the student-related factors driving academic decline in Bamako and to explore how principles from a globally recognized strict educational model could inform contextually viable solutions. The findings, derived from a sequential mixed-methods design, reveal a hierarchy of interconnected challenges dominated by socioeconomic constraints, but significantly mediated by motivational, behavioural, and psychological factors. The synthesis of these findings (Section 4.2.2) moves beyond diagnosis to propose a framework for creative adaptation. This discussion interprets the empirical evidence through the theoretical lenses of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Bioecological Model, positioning the proposed interventions as a critical response to the dual need for structural support and pedagogical renewal.

The Hierarchy of Challenges: Socioeconomic Primacy and Psychological Mediation

The quantitative data provide a clear, empirical hierarchy of obstacles. The robust statistical evidence confirming socioeconomic factors as the strongest predictor ($\beta = -.61$, accounting for 52% of the explained variance) unequivocally establishes material deprivation as the foundational barrier. This aligns with and quantifies existing Malian literature (Chhatwani, 2025). Viewed through the Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), this is a crisis of alignment across systems: the

microsystemic lack of books or food is a direct product of exosystemic policy failures (inadequate social support, under-resourced schools) and macrosystemic conditions of poverty (Serrano & Felinita Iii, 2026).

Crucially, however, the study reveals that this primary factor does not operate in isolation. The significant roles of motivation (ΔR^2 = 18%) and study habits (ΔR^2 = 8%) demonstrate powerful mediating pathways. The qualitative narratives give depth to these statistics, illustrating how socioeconomic stress erodes cognitive bandwidth and how a curriculum perceived as irrelevant (reported by 42% of students) severs the link between effort and personal aspiration. From an SDT perspective (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the prevalent "motivation of perceived utility" signals an environment where the core psychological needs are undernourished: autonomy is stifled by a disconnected curriculum, competence is undermined by poor metacognitive strategies, and relatedness is weakened by insufficient teacher support (reported by 34% of students). This creates a scenario of passive attendance rather than engaged learning.

From Diagnosis to Design: The Logic of Creative Adaptation

The core contribution of this research lies in Section 4.2.2, which transitions from analytical findings to prescriptive design. The proposed interventions in Table 5 are not arbitrary suggestions but are theory-informed hypotheses derived from the triangulation of quantitative diagnostics and qualitative lived experiences. They embody "creative adaptation" (Phillips & Ochs, 2003) by extracting universal principles from the Chinese model such as structured environments, high expectations, systemic effort, and family-school alignment while deliberately discarding its context-specific rigidities and potential for excessive pressure (Wu, 2016; Schnell, 2025).

Each proposed intervention is engineered as a bioecological bridge (Bronfenbrenner, 2005):

-Supervised Study Units (SSUs) address the microsystem (chaotic study habits) by modifying the physical and temporal environment, requiring mesosystemic collaboration (school-community partnership) and minimal exosystemic resource allocation.

• Parent Schools directly target the mesosystem, aiming to transform the home-school link. They leverage the Chinese principle of deep family engagement (Lei & Tian, 2025) but innovate by focusing on non-material support, activating the social and emotional capital identified as a key resilience factor in Malian families (Chhatwani, 2025).

• The Mentorship Program and Stress Management Modules are direct applications of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), designed to foster autonomy (through goal-linked projects), competence (through stress-management tools), and relatedness (through mentor connections).

• The Shared Code of Conduct operationalizes the need for clarity and respect through a participatory process, enhancing legitimacy and moving from imposed authority to an autonomy-supportive social contract (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

This framework consciously avoids the common pitfall of seeking a "best practice" transplant (Steiner-Khamsi, 2014). Instead, it engages in principled pragmatism, asking not "What does China do?" but "What underlying principle in the Chinese system addresses a specific vulnerability we have identified, and what would a Malian incarnation of that principle look like?"

Limitations and Implications for Systemic Reform

The study's limitations its focus on Bamako and reliance on self-reported and documentary data necessitate caution in generalizing findings and underline that the interventions are theoretical constructs awaiting empirical testing.

The implications, however, are clear and actionable. For Malian policymakers, the findings argue compellingly against siloed interventions. An effective strategy must be dual-pronged: simultaneously addressing the macro/exosystemic socioeconomic barriers (through material support policies) and the micro/mesosystemic pedagogical and motivational barriers (through programs like those proposed). The study provides a blueprint for this integrated approach.

For educators and school leaders, it underscores that discipline and structure are most effective when coupled with psychological support and relevance. The "Parent School" model, in particular, highlights a critical, underutilized lever for change: empowering families as active partners in non-material ways.

For comparative education, this study offers a methodological template for moving beyond descriptive policy borrowing. It demonstrates how deep local diagnostics, when filtered through robust theoretical frameworks, can guide the selective and intelligent adaptation of foreign models, contributing to the development of truly context-sensitive educational innovations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the decline in academic performance in Bamako is decisively linked to a syndemic of socioeconomic barriers, demotivating learning environments, and underdeveloped self-regulatory skills. China's educational model, while not a blueprint, offers a valuable reference point for its demonstration of systemic coherence and cultural prioritization of academic effort. The ultimate contribution of this study is to chart a middle path. It rejects both the paralysis induced by overwhelming socioeconomic challenges and the fantasy of a quick fix from a foreign system. Instead, it provides a framework for contextually intelligent innovation designing interventions that are locally grounded yet globally informed, structurally supportive yet psychologically attuned, offering a plausible pathway to reignite the academic aspirations of Bamako's youth.

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