

Probing Reasons of High Student Dropout Rate in Grade 5-6 at Public Schools of District Thatta, Sindh-Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The research aims at seeking out various reasons behind the high dropout rate of students in Grade 5-6 at public schools of district Thatta during 2010-11. It involves an analysis of a number of possible factors and indicators that are social, political, geographical and economic in nature to gauge their impact on the increasing student dropout tendency in target districts. In this particular instance, 30 schools from district Thatta were conveniently selected; covering each Taluka of the District. The data was collected through implementation of a close ended questionnaire for the teachers alongside which the interviews of the community members and parents were taken while percentage of responses is used to statistically analyze the data. The overall results of the study depict specific reasons behind the tendency of high dropout rates in the target district.

Keywords: Dropout, students, teachers, parents, social & economic conditions

INTRODUCTION

Education has a huge impact on any human society and it can safely be assumed that no society is optimally functional until it is properly educated. In the global perspective, it is an undeniable fact that the progress of a nation is very much dependent on the education of their citizens. On the other hand it is also widely acknowledged that education is amongst the single most important factors contributing to poverty alleviation of deprived and under-privileged communities therefore advocating the fact that education plays an overarching role in all aspects of human life. It is a vital investment for human and economic development. Unfortunately, in recent times, Pakistan's standing on this front has historically been poor, as can be seen in table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Public Sector Spending on Education

Country	Public sector spending (As % of GDP)	Literacy rate in (%)	Country	Public sector spending (As % of GDP)	Literacy rate in (%)
Bangladesh	2.6	55.0	Nepal	3.2	57.9
China	-	93.7	Pakistan	2.1	57.0
India	3.3	-	Srilanka	...	90.6
Indonesia	3.5	-	Thailand	4.5	-
Iran	5.2	-	Vietnam	5.3	92.5
Malaysia	4.7	92.1			

Source: World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO, FBS, Ministry of Education

With public spending on education as a percentage of GDP amongst the lowest in some of the developing nations as shown above, the outcome with regard to literacy levels is not surprising. While literacy rate has shown some gradual improvement over a period of time in the global perspective, Pakistan's indicators on this front continue to rank at the bottom end of international rankings. To reason against this anomaly, Pakistan is a developing country but from an international viewpoint its literacy was previously ranked 142nd in the world (Govt. of Pakistan, 2000) and at present it is ranked 159th amongst the 174 nations of the world.

Within the region, only Bangladesh has a worse outcome on both indicators, spending by the public sector as well as literacy rate. Nepal spends a substantial fraction more than Pakistan on education, while its literacy rate is marginally higher (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2009-10).

To move forward, it can be established that Pakistan presents a paradoxical situation. The country was able to record 5 percent Annual Growth rate over a fairly long period of three decades: between 1960-90, bringing down the incidence of poverty to 18 percent. This happened when Pakistan's social indicators were dismally low in absolute, as well as, in relative terms. In 1990, after such impressive growth performance almost two-thirds of the country's population was illiterate, enrolment ratios were miserably low, the drop-out rates were quite high, gender disparities in access to education were rampant and the quality of higher education was on a declining path. By most indicators, basic schooling investments in Pakistan were low and growing less rapidly than on the average for low income countries. The reasons for Pakistan's low educational status are varied but one important factor is that Pakistan's educational system has been highly fragmented and segmented (Ishtat Hussain, 2005) in all sorts of different boards separately functioning, associations working in isolation, uncoordinated regulatory authorities etc.

In this pre-text., the implementation of the EFA Plan of Action is likely to have a profound impact on the social development of the country. But it is also true that the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) target could catalyze the making of educated citizens potentially capable of spearheading social, economic and political changes required to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The realization of EFA targets would also put the demands on the education system for expansion of facilities at all levels (Chapter 8, National Plan of Action - Pakistan).

Apparently, besides all the economic and socio-political constraints, efforts are made to enhance the budget allocation for education sector and improve the literacy rate in Pakistan. For making education free and compulsory for all, new schools and colleges are opened, basic facilities are provided and sustainable mechanisms are implemented (Govt. of Pakistan, 2003). However, to meet the demands of the modern world, such efforts may not be good enough. Among the numerous factors affecting the situation of education in the region, the student dropout rate poses a major problem and remains uncontrolled at large. In the year 2003, only half of the children who enrolled in Grade-1 completed primary education (Govt. of Pakistan, 2003).

According to World Bank's study of Educational Indicators, policies to improve school progression and reduce the numbers of children dropping out of school are critical if Universal Primary Education (UPE) is to be achieved. Children are starting primary school in greater numbers than ever before but drop-out rates are significant and lead to low levels of primary school completion in many countries. In Benin (Africa), for example, the primary school completion rate in 2005 was 62 percent, although it increased steadily from 38 percent in 2000. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the primary school completion rate in 2007

was 51 percent, which was the same completion rate for the country in the early 1990s. In Bangladesh, the primary school completion rate has remained around 60 percent since 2000.

As a result of substantial rates of drop out and non-completion of primary school many children are leaving schooling without acquiring the most basic skills. Their brief schooling experience consists frequently of limited learning opportunities in overcrowded classrooms with insufficient learning materials and under-qualified teachers (Alexander, 2008).

Reports do indicate that the number of children enrolled in schools has increased over time. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the children who start primary school are not completing this cycle. There are many factors associated with student dropout rate, some of which pertain to an individual's capacity, such as poor health or malnutrition and motivation. Others emerge from children's household situations such as child labor and poverty, tribal and communal problems etc. School level factors also play a role in increasing pressures to drop out such as teacher's absenteeism, school location and poor quality educational provision. The system of educational provision at the community level results in conditions that can ultimately impact on the likelihood of children being dropped out from school. Therefore, both demand and supply driven factors, are embedded in cultural and contextual realities, which make each circumstance different (Background Paper of Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011, UNESCO).

Hence the key focus of this paper is to explore the reasons of high drop-out rates in the varied rural context of Sindh - Pakistan through targeting a sample of district Thatta.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The literacy rate in Sindh province in Pakistan has been an area of serious concern in recent times. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2010-11, the literacy rate in Sindh was 58.2%. It is clear that a number of factors contribute to this position and one of these factors has been a high dropout rate in lower grades at public schools. According to the 'Statistical Bulletin Annual School Census 2010-11', a high dropout rate of 38.28 has been observed in Grade 5-6 as shown below:

Table 2. Dropout rates of 2010-11 Class Wise (including promotion rates and repetition rates) (Extracted from Dropout Rates, 'Statistical Bulletin Annual School Census 2010-11', SEMIS-RSU Govt. of Sindh)

<i>Class</i>	<i>Promotion Rate</i>	<i>Repetition Rate</i>	<i>Dropout Rate</i>
Class 1-2	68.67%	6.25%	25.08%
Class 2-3	80.63%	3.72%	15.65%
Class 3-4	82.82%	3.02%	14.16%
Class 4-5	82.90%	2.38%	14.71%
Class 5-6	60.05%	1.66%	38.28%

The dropout of students from public schools poses a major hurdle to achieving the Education for All (EFA) targets and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to 'Statistical Bulletin Annual School Census 2010-11', it is also a growing concern to find out that this tendency is the highest in 2010-11 at Sindh as compared to last three years as shown below;

Table 3. Dropout rates of 2007-08 till 2010-11 Class Wise

Class	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Class 1-2	36.23%	36.54%	26.21%	25.08%
Class 2-3	19.33%	12.22%	13.79%	15.65%
Class 3-4	17.04%	9.94%	11.80%	14.16%
Class 4-5	16.26%	9.37%	12.63%	14.71%
Class 5-6	37.29%	37.94%	35.76%	38.28%

Source: Extracted from Comparative Dropout Rates of years 2007-08 to 2010-11 Class Wise, 'Statistical Bulletin Annual School Census 2010-11', SEMIS-RSU Govt. of Sindh)

In this case, among all the districts of Sindh province, district Kashmore and district Thatta have indicated the highest dropout rate as depicted in the following table;

Table 4. Dropout rates of Grade 5-6 of Sindh, 2010-11 (Zarif, 2012)

<i>District</i>	<i>Dropout</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Dropout</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Dropout</i>
Badin	40.15%	Tharparkar	36.53%	Shikarpur	45.11%
Dadu	54.61%	Sanghar	43.24%	Khairpur	31.53%
Hyderabad	20.18%	Karachi	9.60%	Naushero	43.68%
Thatta	<u>59.60%</u>	Jacobabad	48.34%	Benazirabad	41.74%
Mirpurkhas	28.80%	Larkano	38.56%	Sukkur	41.61%
Ghotki	56.60%	Umerkot	39.23%	Jamshoro	39.05%
Matiari	36.26%	T A Yar	30.23%	T M Khan	52.09%
Kashmore	<u>61.02%</u>	Kamber	45.94%	-	-

After completing a research of similar nature focusing the district of Kashmore (Research conducted by the Author and published in HEC recognized "Journal of Research and Reflections in Education", published by University of Education, Lahore), it was important to explore the reasons behind the near same student dropout rate in Thatta, advocating this study.

Table 5. Student dropout rates of District Thatta, 2010-11

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Gr. 1-2</i>	<i>Gr. 2-3</i>	<i>Gr. 3-4</i>	<i>Gr. 4-5</i>	<i>Gr. 5-6</i>	<i>Gr. 6-7</i>
Dropout rates	38.38%	27.04%	24.51%	25.27%	59.60%	11.71%
<i>Grade</i>	<i>Gr. 7-8</i>	<i>Gr. 8-9</i>	<i>Gr. 9-10</i>	<i>Gr. 10-11</i>	<i>Gr. 11-12</i>	
Dropout rates	11.78%	5.89%	6.67%	64.16%	16.16%	

Source: Extracted from Comparative Anne 4, Dropout Rates of Districts of Sindh 2010-11, 'Statistical Bulletin Annual School Census 2010-11', SEMIS-RSU Govt. of Sindh)

According to SEMIS Report (2010-11), in the district of Thatta;

“...The total enrollment at primary level is 139,624; Gender wise 79,336 are boys and 60,258 are girls. Total numbers of teachers at primary level, are 4,612 out of which 3,837 are male and 775 are female teachers...”

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the causes of high dropout rate of students in Grade5-6 at public schools of district Thatta during 2010-11?
2. What are the possible remedies to ensure the continuation of education after Grade 5-6 in public schools at Thatta?
3. How can the Governance of Education at district level be made effective to tackle problems such as student dropout?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- I. To find out the reasons behind high dropout rate in Grade 5-6 in district Thatta.
- II. To analyze the different economic, social, political, geographical, and demographical factors that affect the dropout tendencies in Grade 5-6.
- III. To chalk out remedial measures in order to minimize or nullify the factors which adversely affect the student retention in Grade 5-6.

METHODOLOGY

The research universe in this context is the province of Sindh (Rural) where drop-out rate in Grade 5-6 has been an area of serious concern over the years. More specifically, the population under consideration is the district of Thatta.

Table 6. Sample details for study keeping in view Grade 5-6

S#	Talukas / Towns	No. of Schools	No. of Teachers	Parents	Community members
1	Ghorabari	03	06	03	03
2	Jati	03	06	03	03
3	MirpurBathoro	03	06	03	03
4	MirpurSakro	03	06	03	03
5	Shah Bandar	03	06	03	03
6	Sajawal	03	06	03	03
7	Thatta*	06	12	06	06
8	Kharo Chan	03	06	03	03
9	Keti Bandar	03	06	03	03
<i>Total</i>	<i>09</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>30</i>

*Six schools were purposively selected from Thatta (main city)

In the past year, the district Thatta depicted the second highest drop-out rate of students in Grade 5-6 (Refer to Table 4). Through the convenient-random sampling technique, a sample of 30 Schools was selected from the 09Talukas/Towns of District Thatta. Furthermore, using purposive sampling, 60 Class teachers were selected for the study and the relevant data was gathered using a research tool (close-ended questionnaire). In addition to that, the selection of

30 parents was based on snowball sampling technique. Lastly, the sample of 30 community members was selected using convenient-random sampling for this study. The information from parents and community members was obtained through interviews as most of them were illiterate. The detail of selected sample is given in table 6.

The data gathered from the teachers and the information collected from parents and community members was analyzed using the percentage method.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 7. Responses of teachers regarding reasons behind dropout of students

Sr. No.	Statement	Percentage (%)				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Many people of the community are not aware of the existence of the school in their vicinity.	8	13	2	25	52
2	Children do not attend school due to parent's lack of interest.	75	6	2	7	10
3	Children are not allowed to attend school because of the caste differences.	24	15	12	33	16
4	Children go to work and earn a living instead of coming to school.	65	20	1	10	4
5	Children stay back home and help their parents and family in work.	45	15	7	20	13
6	Children are not sent to school due to serious financial problems at home.	68	21	1	8	2
7	Parents do not send children to school for reasons of early age marriages.	12	18	21	19	30
8	Parents send their children to Madrassah instead of school.	44	23	3	20	10
9	Parents feel that the school is not safe for their children.	23	14	5	38	20
10	Parents feel that the school is very far from their home.	40	28	3	11	18
11	Children are not sent to school due to lack of facilities in schools (drinking water, toilets, electricity, desks etc.)	80	12	2	4	2
12	Children are not sent to school because of the unavailability of books, copies and other learning material.	72	16	5	4	3
13	Parents think that teachers treat children harshly at school.	29	18	23	19	11
14	Parents believe that children are given too much homework from school.	21	11	8	25	35
15	Parents do not send children to schools because they think that	8	20	15	22	35

	there is no attention given to physical development of their children at schools.					
16	Parents believe that failure in exam means that it is meaningless for children to continue school.	29	21	10	23	17
17	Parents believe that their children will adapt bad habits/attitudes from schools.	31	23	9	16	21
18	Parents believe that education is not necessary for their children.	63	23	1	7	6
19	Children are too weak or too sick to attend schools.	15	21	1	23	40
20	Children are least interested in education.	60	15	5	12	8

Findings of Teachers' Perspective

1. 80% of the teachers complained that the children are not sent to school due to lack of basic facilities in schools such as drinking water, toilets, electricity, desks etc.
2. 75% teachers said that children do not attend school simply because of parents' lack of interest.
3. 72% teachers think that children drop-out of schools due to unavailability of text books, copies and relevant learning material.
4. 29% teachers think that parents believe if their children fail in exams then it is useless and irrelevant for them to continue studies.
5. 63% teachers feel that parents consider education useless for their children.
6. 60% of the teachers pointed out that children are not interested to continue schools and are least interested in education.
7. 65% teachers also emphasized that the children could not attend schools simply because they had to go for work and earn a living.
8. 45% teachers stated that children have to stay at their homes and help their parents and families at work, hence drop-out of schools.
9. 68% teachers stated that children do not attend school due to serious financial problems
10. 44% teachers highlighted that a number of children are sent to Madrassahs to acquire religious education and hence many of them drop-out of schools.

Findings of Parents' and Community Members' Perspective

1. 65% parents and community members think that the building is there but the teachers are least interested in coming to schools.
2. 78% parents and community members said that basic facilities are not there in the schools.
3. 72% parents and community members highlighted that they face serious financial pressures and hence cannot afford to send their children to schools.

4. 65% parents and community members said that teachers had strong influences and linkages and did not come to schools at all.
5. 63% parents and community members said that floods and other such calamities have devastated their lives and even many of the schools, forcing mass migrations and influencing people to be reluctant in sending their children to schools.
6. 62% parents and community members said that the schools are not in working condition and some of the schools have even been transformed into barns for keeping animals.
7. 57% parents and community members said that the infrastructure of schools was not at all acceptable.
8. 57% parents and community members think that it takes many years for their children to complete primary education and due to a number of other reasons such as family pressures, social backgrounds, marriages etc. they have to leave the schools.
9. 41% parents and community members said that there is no attention given to the physical development and growth of children in schools.
10. 37% parents and senior community members argue that after spending so much time in schools, children still do not learn any practical skills which can help them in their daily lives. The children usually tend to rote memorize things which is useless especially in their scenario.
11. 35% parents and community members said that there was a dearth of fruitful activities in the schools to attract the children while at the same time the conduct of teacher also scares the children away.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the data collected by the teachers the prime reasons for high drop-out rates in target area are due to lack of basic facilities at public schools, unavailability of books and learning material, poverty and economic issues of families, the parents' lack of interest in sending the children to schools along with parents' concern for their children's activities.

The teachers also highlighted a range of significant reasons for the high drop-out rates such as many parents consider education as useless while many parents perceive that it is useless for their children to continue schooling if they fail in exams. The teachers also revealed that a number of children dropped-out because they were simply not interested in acquiring education.

The data gathered from the teachers also suggests that a number of children were not allowed to attend schools because they either had to work full time to earn a living or had to stay at home to help their families in their work.

On the other hand, by probing the parents and community members, it was revealed that they very firmly believed that there was a clear lack of basic facilities at the public schools and that if their children were to spend such a long time at schools then the schools should have all the basic facilities such as proper infrastructure, clean drinking water, proper toilets, electricity and a viable environment for teaching and learning. On top of that, another peculiar finding was the migratory trends in the communities. Teachers and community members said that due to the floods and storm threats people had migrated in large numbers to highlands or even left Thatta at all in some cases. This also had an adverse on the student

enrollment of the schools which were already worse off as many schools were destroyed and damaged in floods etc.

Furthermore, it was also obvious that the parents and community members believed that in many cases, teachers are least bothered to come to schools. They also thought that schooling is very time consuming and that their children, as they age, have to attend to social and economic issues, family and tribal issues, get married and other such concerns. Another reason for high dropout rates include little or no attention given to the holistic development of children which is why parents and community members believed that their children were becoming physically, socially and cognitively weak if they continued to go to schools.

Another category of responses of parents and community members depicted that the schools were not in proper working condition. Many parents and community members thought that there was a lack of fruitful activities at schools to attract children and to top that, the teachers' conduct did not help the cause of retaining children in schools or persuading the parents and community members for the same. It was also discovered that some of the teachers had influential linkages and back grounds on the basis of which they were literally unchecked and were indulged in their own agenda.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Ensure the Presence of Teachers at Schools

Government must ensure the presence of teachers at schools in school hours. For this purpose involvement of parents and community members is vital. Furthermore, accountability standards should be improved on the whole with effective implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at grassroots level. The parents and community members should report anomalies to District Govt. officials and monitoring / supervision teams.

Better Conduct of Teachers

Teacher's conduct and relationship with students, parents and community members play a dynamic role in a school's success and learning processes of children. It is one of the most essential areas through which teachers can not only attract students to schools but also make the teaching-learning a fun experience for the children. Hence, counseling of teachers is perhaps an important requirement to groom them professionally for improving their conduct in general and making them the persuasive and inspirational personality which they ought to be.

Provision of Basic Facilities

It may be made sure by the district Govt. officials that all the necessary infrastructure requirements are met and that the basic facilities such as clean drinking water, utilities, toilet facilities, seating arrangements etc. are met. This implies the procurement, maintenance, and renovation of the resources.

Schools Should Be Made Academically Functional

A school does not only just imply a building where there is a gathering of individuals. A school should be academically made functional and sound. This means that the teaching-learning processes in the schools, curricular and co-curricular activities and all the academic, administrative and academic-administrative tasks and processes should reflect the essence of an academically sound institution.

Resolution of Financial Problems of the Communities

In an overall comparison, the communities in Thatta are not very well-off. Infact, in many cases, the people are well below the poverty line and cannot afford to feed, shelter or even clothe their children and family members in a proper manner. Hence, for such people, sending children to school seems to be a luxury which they obviously forgo. Therefore, there is a strict need to provide means of employment to these people and enlighten them through regressive campaigns of advocacy and community mobilization for sending their children to school and playing a positive role.

Monitoring and Supervision of Schools

Another important area of improvement is the monitoring and evaluation processes of public schools. Neutral and unbiased monitoring and evaluation of academic and administrative processes on regular basis against the set standards and benchmarks would motivate the stakeholders to go for school improvement and effective management of processes.

Schools as A Place of Interest

Introducing student-centered learning and effective pedagogies at classroom level, using activity based teaching-learning and fun active methodologies can transform the image of schools into a place of interest and fun learning.

Promote Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Models of Education

Various successful models of PPP can be referenced and implemented for improving Thatta's situation. The role of development sector along with technical leaders and funding agencies can become a source of revival of the system itself.

Prevention of Schools From Floods, Storms Etc.

The Disaster Management Authorities should liaise with the Education Department to chalk out a school safety program as a proactive measure and a relocation program as a reactive measure to secure the schools against the devastation of floods and storms. The ideal remedy is obviously to prevent floods in the first place but a collaborative planning and active coordination of both departments can also minimize the damage.

Balance of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes in Curriculum

Identification and understanding of the needs of children according to their socio-economic context is very important. In this regard, the schools in focus should reform their curriculum to cater the needs of the children.

Awareness Regarding Importance of Education

There is a dire need to revive the perception of parents and community members in rural areas regarding the current education system of public sector. Community mobilization and sharing of facts and findings by Government at grassroots on frequent basis can improve the current situation.

Eliminate Irrelevant Influences from Schools

Our public sector schools are famous for being under the influence of powerful entities. This influence is having adverse effects, especially in rural contexts. All such negative influences should be expelled out of the education system on prompt basis.

Teachers Training Programs

Introduction of innovative teacher-training programs encompassing content, pedagogical focus and activity centered strategies (such as cascable models) for the teachers of public

schools of rural areas on frequent basis accompanied by practical exposure can greatly motivate the teachers.

Awareness of Action Research and Implementation

Teachers and relevant stakeholders of public schools in rural areas should be oriented with action research methodologies and implementations in order to resolve such issues in a systematic manner.

Formation of District Wise Standing Committees for Research Management in Education Department

A focal group of Govt. officials should be assigned the responsibility of facilitation of researchers at grassroots level especially keeping in view the demographical realities and dynamics of the region such as the caste system prevalent in the rural areas which hinders the research work as experienced in this effort.

Sharing of Information with Parents and Community Members at Grassroots Level

Keeping in view the data compilations such as annual assessment reports and census reports, it is suggested that a committee or focal group of locals should be assembled with whom the findings can be shared and the reasons can be discussed.

Conduction of a Similar Research on Large Scale

Different reports and Government surveys such as Economic Survey of Pakistan 2009-2011 suggest that the dropout rate of children in Grade 5-6 in Sindh province has been on the higher side as compared to the other provinces. In this regard, the Government or any Educational Institution should carry out a large scale research to find out the reasons behind such trends while involving other stakeholders such as students and core administrative staff of school as well in order to meet the requirements of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

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