

Development of a Strategy for Dropout Control at Primary Level

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Abstract

Dropout at primary school level is a serious problem in Pakistan. Dropout causes substantial wastage of resources. The purpose of the study was to develop a strategy for the control of dropout at primary level in Bannu division. The respondents of the study were 49 educational managers and 200 primary schools teachers. Self developed questionnaire was used for data collection. Percentage was used for data analysis. Unawareness of the parents, poverty of the parents, heavy work load at home, teachers' absenteeism, untrained teachers, failure or repetition of grades and migration of parents are the major causes of dropout at primary level in Bannu Division. The strategy developed for drop out control containing measures related to parents, measures related to teachers and measures related to students..

Keywords: Drop out, primary education, causes, measure, strategy

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Introduction

Education plays a very important role in personality development of an individual. Education builds character of an individual. Education is a basic human right. It is the key to sustainable development, peace and stability within and among the countries and thus indispensable mean for effective participation in societies and economies of the 21st century (The Dakar Framework for Action, 2000).

Primary education is the foundation of the entire educational pyramid. This stage is the mean by which universal literacy can be attained within a community and talent of the gifted children can be located. The primary stage provides the bulk of skilled and literate workers. Educationists consider this stage as a backbone or foundation stone of the educational system. Children enroll in primary schools in great numbers. But unfortunately a significant numbers of learners do not complete primary schooling and leave the school. Dropout ratio is significant at this stage and lead to the minimum level of primary education completion in various countries of the world. As a result of significant dropout rate, a large number of children leaves the school. These children remain deprived of the acquisition of the most essential skills.

Keeping in view the importance of primary education for national and human resource development, Pakistan has laid great emphasis upon the promotion of primary education in all its policies and plans. But despite all these efforts, Pakistan has not achieved this goal till today. Literacy rate and growth of primary in Pakistan is not a satisfactory one. As pointed out by the economic survey of Pakistan (2010-11), the overall literacy rate (10 years and above) which was 57.4 % in 2008-09 has been increased to 57.7% in 2009-10, indicating 0.5% increase over all. (GOP Pakistan, 2010). Many factors are responsible for low literacy rate in Pakistan. One of the major causes of low literacy is the dropout of students at primary level in Pakistan. "A dropout is a pupil who leaves the school for any reason except death before completion of any education programs and without transferring to another school" (Kamal. 2002). According to Attaullah (2000), a dropout is a student, who leaves the school for any reason before the completion of the educational programme and without being transferred to any other school. In other words a dropout is a child who leaves the school before completing the educational stage in which he/she is enrolled. According to Kamal (2002), more than 50% of our children are enrolled in primary schools but they leave the school before completion of two or three years of his/her schooling. This drop out ratio is sometimes 75% in certain areas. The ratio of dropout is worse in rural areas than urban areas of Pakistan. The Education for All, Assessment Report 2000, (UNESCO, 2000) says that in Pakistan the overall male retention rate is higher i.e. 56% than the female i.e. 44 %. The

report by “The Education Compulsory for All” (ECFA 2004), also says that in Pakistan more than 50% of the enrolled children leave school before completion of their primary education, the report further says that during the period of 1996-97 the dropout rate among primary students was recorded as 40% which increased to 54% in 2003-04. Moreover, the dropout rate for girls has been found as higher and is increasing at a rapid speed as compared to male children. It was also revealed by the report that, on average, 51 % of the male, and 59 % of the female children, are dropped out from school prior to reach the 5th grade.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the major causes of dropout at primary level in Bannu Division.
2. To develop a strategy for dropout control at primary level.

Review of Related Literature

Dropout of students is not caused by a single factor rather it is caused by a number of social, cultural, economic and political factors. In most of the research studies about the students' dropout, the researchers have found correlation between family income, child access, retention, temporarily withdrawal and dropout. The studies of Birdsall, *et al* (2005), Brune Forth (2006), Cardoso and Verner (2007) are worth mentioning. According to Porteus *et al* (2000), poor financial status of the family is one of the major contributing factors of a child temporary withdrawal and dropout from school. The study of Brown and Park (2002) found that the withdrawal or dropout of poor children is three times higher than wealthier children. According to Chugh (2004), the performance and stability of child education greatly depend upon the parental income. If a child belongs to poor family, he/she may be asked to do some labour work to earn some money.

Child labour is considered as one of the major cause of students' dropout from school. A substantial research has been done on issue of child labour and the child access to school. The researchers have identified that gender, family income level, family members education level, poverty, rural/urban locations and harvesting seasons are the factors which negatively affect children access to school. Students from the rural location are greatly expected to perform laborious job than the urban children (Ersado, 2005, Admassie 2003). Admassie (2003) talks in this regard that it does not necessarily obstruct child access to school. Admassie admits that this type of child labour builds a lot of pressure on child to manage time for schooling. Those children who perform domestic work along with their schooling are often reported as having shortage of regular attendance in schools or late coming etc. This low attendance from school ultimately results in permanent withdrawal or dropout. Dachi and Garrett (2003) also found that in many countries of the world, child labour is the main cause of students absenteeism,

failure/repetition and more especially of drop out from school. Blunch and Verner (2000); Boyle *et al*, (2002); Colclough *et al*, (2000); Ersado (2005); Kane (2004) show association between child labour and access to school, is also gendered, and generally these are the female children who are most suffered.

Migration of students along with parents is another cause of dropout. Hashim (2005) states that migration of children with parents reduces chance of children to get education. Chugh (2004) reports that children who are living in slum areas or without any permanent habitation, are frequently dropout from schools. The study of Cordova (2006) also explains the constructive correlation between migration and education attainment and retention in school. Research on migration from rural areas to urban areas of child and family, shows that approximately 3/4 children from the migrated families are out of school, as compared to the non-migrant children, but here too the ratio of dropout for the migrated children is found greater than the non migrated children (Batbaatar *et al*, 2006). Porteus *et al* (2000) and Batbaatar *et al* (2006) summarize the difficulties of the migrated children, access to the new schools as these schools requiring documents, for example, school leaving certificate, birth certificate, countersign from the concerned authorities etc, which could considerably delay child access to the new school.

Socio-economic background of parents greatly influences the child access to school and their dropout. The child access to school in the household context may be influenced by a number of factors such as family economic conditions, daily or monthly earnings, and education level of family members. Hunter and May (2003) tried to establish especial correlation between household context and students dropout from school. They found that children from the poor economic households, the orphans, the children of poorly educated parents and other family members were greatly expected to be withdrawn from school. Education level of the parents and guardians also have great influence upon the child access and retention in school. The children of the highly educated parents are more likely to have access to school and also have greater retention rate in school. According to Ersado (2005), it is generally an admitted fact that the educational level of the father and mother is primarily a reliable criterion of the child schooling. A number of research studies for example, Ersado (2005), Connelly and Zheng (2003), Grant and Hallman, (2006), found that the higher educational level of the parents are closely correlated to the access, attendance and lower dropout rate of their children from school. The correlation between parents' educational level and child retention in school are justified by the researcher on various grounds. Some research studies e.g., Juneja, 2001, Pryor and Ampiah (2003) found that the children of the illiterate parents have little access to school and have high dropout rate ration. Ainsworth *et al*, (2005) reports that child access to school in particular is influenced by the mother education level in the household.

The family or parents perception about the importance and advantages of child schooling, greatly affects a child access to school and their dropout ratio. The research studies show that the access, continuation and limit to get education, are often determined by the parents perceived benefits/income from the education of their children. Boyle *et al* (2002) found negligence of poor and uneducated parents about the education of their children. They say that the teachers and community leaders often pointed out this parental factor, by saying that parents have little or no perception of the advantages/benefits of education and that's why a lot of children do not attend school because their families do not consider education as a valuable investment. The lack of interest and support of the parents towards a child's education is highlighted by some researchers for example Pryor and Ampiah, (2003), as a significant element in students' irregular attendance and drop out from the school. Boyle *et al* (2002) also explain that the household consciously take a decision to withdraw and dropout their children from school as they thought that after the accomplishment of their education they would find no job, and their investment on child's education would bring no return to them.

Student dropout is also closely associated with poor health condition of a child. Various research studies for example Alderman *et al* (2001) have inquired at the child health, schooling access and the intellectual growth but some of them openly undertook the matter associated to health condition and drop out. According to Hunt, (2007) , the health issues are frequently associated to some other supplementary factors and poverty is the one of the most important among those. The late enrolment, which in turn, often associated with high dropout, is closely connected to health and under nutrition. Filmer (2005) explained that children with some sort of disabilities had little chances of access to school, even if they got access, their retention rate had been recorded very poor. Peters (2003) also indicates that 'the huge number of children with special needs who get access, have soft injury. Such types of children probably represent a notable proportion of dropped out children and class repeaters.

Gender disparity in many research studies, is considered as important factor contributing to students dropout in many communities. The studies of Admassie, (2003) Boyle *et al* (2002), Rose and Al Samarrai (2001), indicate the preferential attitude of various family circles regarding the schooling of male child above female child, and the girls' schooling is considered unimportant and thus the dropout of girls greatly expected than boys. The ILO/IPEC (2004) study report says that most of the households tend to withdraw girls earlier from school than boys. The fact is that girl's education is not considered so much optimistic in future for the households due to obvious reason i.e. the girls will leave the parental family after marriage and thus will bring all the returns of schooling to the new family instead of her parent's family.

The geographical i.e. the rural/urban location of children also affect their access to school. Birdsall *et al* (2005) says in many cases lack of educational access in general and dropout ratio more especially, greater in rural areas as compared to metropolitan and semi-urban location. The children of the socially disadvantaged groups are often neglected in access to education and they are more often dropout from schools if they ever have a chance to get admission in school. Research shows that in some situation a number of socially disadvantaged groups in any society may be noticed as lacking access to education and retention as compared to other children in the society. For instance, the problem of access to education of these deprived groups in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia are highlighted by Birdsall *et al* (2005). Sedwal and Kamat's research (2008) report that the censuses of dropout of the scheduled cast children in India are multifaceted including financial weakness, reduced standards of the existing school system and types of societal exploitation.

Long distance from school also contributes to dropout. Various researches have explored that remoteness to school at primary level is considered as one of the important factor in child access to schooling and subsequently to their dropout as well. The studies of Boyle *et al* (2002), Mfum-Mensah (2002), Nekatibeb (2002), Porteus *et al* (2000) and Colclough *et al* (2000), are worth mentioning here. They all agreed on a single point that long distance from school greatly affects access to schooling and dropout ration especially in the rural areas.

The lack of availability of the resources and the required facilities such as audio visual aids, seating desks, text books, blackboard and other physical facilities for example school building, class-rooms, electricity, drinking water, wash room facility in school cause drop out from school. The study of Molteno *et al* (2000) have tried to establish relationship between the school resources/facilities and students dropout. They found that the non-existence of facilities like seating desks for students, blackboard and textbooks etc greatly influence a child decision to drop out from school. Lafraniere (2005) highlighted the existence and importance of separate wash room facility for female students. Most of the Pakistani schools especially in public sector are lacking the required resources and facilities. The study of Lloyd *et al* (2005) identified the lack of resources and facilities in schools, especially in the government schools in Pakistan.

In most of the countries including Pakistan the ratio of teacher's absenteeism is very high which indirectly results in students' dropout from school. Various research studies such as the study of Alcazar *et al* (2006), Banerjee and Duflo, (2006) shows that teachers' absenteeism ratio is often noted as very high. Alcazar *et al* (2006) explored that the teachers' absenteeism ratio is very high in the socially disadvantaged and poor rural

communities. They argue that these communities are usually unable to have any check or control upon the teachers to make them accountable. Ghuman and Lloyd (2007) found the shortage and absence of teachers especially female teachers, and this could affect girls retention in school particularly in rural areas of Pakistan. The World Bank (2004) surveyed in the rural areas of Pakistan, the male teacher absenteeism was found as 14% whereas female teachers' absenteeism was 32%. There are various reasons of teacher absenteeism. The research by Alcazar *et al* (2006), Ghuman and Lloyd (2007), in Pakistan and Peru, found that if the teacher is serving in his parental and domicile district where the school is located, the absenteeism ratio is found as lower especially for female teachers. Pleasant school environment is necessary for educational attainment and successful school completion. Numerous research studies have discussed the safety issues in school and also highlighted the importance of the friendly school environment. Some studies for example Boyle *et al* (2002), Hunt (2007) have established direct linkage between corporal punishment by the teachers and students dropout. The corporal punishment by the teachers and sexual harassment can be seen in many countries (Hunt (2007), Humphreys 2006). Boyle *et al* (2002) talk that physical punishment and terrorization influence child's enthusiasm negatively to go to school. Liu (2004) found that oral exploitation of students by the teachers also disappoint students from school which result in their dropout from school. At present since last two or three decades, the special focus is upon sexual harassment and gender violence in schools. Leach *et al* (2003) found that most of the students leave schools because of harsh treatment by the teachers.

Frequent repetition of grades/classes by a student is also considered as an important cause of dropout from school. A number of research studies have tried to establish an association between the grade repetition and dropout, and also to assess the pros and cons of repetition and promotion from one class to another. Kane (2004) reports that a child repeats a particular grade more than once it could be problematic and the repeater eventually be dropped out from school. Various Studies such as Hunter and May (2003), Grant and Hallman (2006), Grissom and Shepherd (2003) found that the grade repetition is detrimental to child schooling. It increases the possibility of drop out. Low educational achievement and dropout are closely related. It has been confirmed by some research studies like Boyle *et al*, (2002) and the study of Hunter and May (2003) that students of low learning attainment are greatly expected to drop out from school as compared to students of higher educational attainment.

Frequent absenteeism of students from school is ultimately results in their dropout from school. Grant and Hallman (2006) found that students' absenteeism often results in temporary withdrawal from school. The study further says that these temporary withdrawals in most of the cases often turn in permanent withdrawals or dropout from school. It is concluded that various factors are responsible for drop out of children from school.

Methods of the Study

Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of these two category of respondents:

- All district level education managers (EDO's, DO's, DDO's, ADO's,) of Elementary & Secondary Education Department in Bannu Division, i.e. District Bannu and District Lakki Marwat. The total strength of district level managers was 49.
- All primary school teachers in Bannu Division. The total strength of the population was 5098 primary school teachers.

Sample of the Study

All 49 district level education managers were included in the sample. While stratified random sampling technique was employed for selection of teachers from population. Sample size of the study was justified on John Curry sample size formula. The formula cut –off is:

Population size	Sample size
10-100	100%
101-1000	10%
1001-5000	5%
5001-10000	3%
10000+	1%

Dr John curry, professor of educational research, North Texas state university

Data Collection Instrument

Questionnaire was used for data collection. Thirty (30) dropout causes along with three (3) possible solutions for each cause were included in the questionnaire. The respondents were asked to select any ten (10) major dropout causes (in the opinions of the respondents) on priority order with a possible suggested remedy/solution according to their own choice. For this purpose, the researcher personally visited the sampled institutions and administered the questionnaire to the respondents.

Data Analysis Technique

Percentage was used for data analysis.

Findings

Table 1

Causes of Dropout in Views of Education Managers and Primary School Teachers

S.N	Causes of dropout	Teachers	Education managers	Total	%age
1	Unawareness of the parents about the importance of education	142	40	182	73.09
2	Poverty of the parents	140	41	181	72.69
3	Heavy work load at home	132	34	166	66.67
4	Teachers absenteeism	120	39	159	63.86
5	Unskilled teachers	115	38	153	61.45
6	Frequent absenteeism of students	128	16	144	57.83
7	Shortage of teachers	112	17	129	51.81
8	Failure or repetition of grades	111	15	126	50.60
9	Corporal punishment by the teacher	84	29	113	45.38
10	Migration of parents	85	13	98	39.36

Total respondents =249

Table 1 shows that unawareness of the parents about the importance of education is the major cause of students dropout at primary level with value of 73.09%, followed by poverty of the parents (72.69%), Heavy work load at home (66.67%), teachers absenteeism (63.86%), unskilled teachers (61.45%), frequent absenteeism of students (57.83%), shortage of teachers(51.81%), failure or repetition of grades (50.60%), corporal punishment by the teacher (45.38%), Migration of parents in search of livelihood (38.55%).

On the basis of the findings, the following factors were identified as the major causes of students' dropout at primary level.

1. Unawareness of the parents about the importance of education
2. Poverty of the parents
3. Heavy work load at home
4. Teachers' absenteeism
5. Unskilled and untrained teachers
6. Frequent absenteeism of students
7. Failure or repetition of grades
8. Shortage of teachers
9. Corporal punishment by the teachers
10. Migration of parents

Development of a Strategy for Dropout Control

Dropout is a universal phenomenon at all levels in education system of Pakistan. But it is more serious at primary level. It is a big social problem that has long lasting effects not only on the life of the individuals but on the society as a whole. Dropout is not merely a single problem that impacts an individual rather it is a problem that has many facets and negatively affect the whole community. Here in this study, unawareness of the parents about the importance of education, poverty of the parents, heavy work load at home, teachers absenteeism, unskilled teachers, frequent absenteeism of students, lack of commitment of the teachers to their profession, shortage of teachers, failure or repetition of grades, corporal punishment by the teachers, were found the major causes of students dropout at primary level in Bannu division, Pakistan.

In order to address the above mentioned drop out causes at primary level, the researcher has developed a strategy for its control. The strategy contained various measures. These are discussed in detail below.

Measures Related to Parents' Problems

In Pakistan, majority of the students at primary level come from lower middle and lower classes. Majority members of these families are illiterate and unaware from the importance and value of education. Poverty makes a main hurdle in their way to send as well as to retain their children in school. When students of poor families grow up, they are engaged in earnings activities to support their families, and as a result they are dropped from school prior to complete their 5th grade education in primary school.

In order to overcome parents' related problems, the following measures are suggested in this strategy:

Poverty Alleviation Program

For poverty alleviation, the government should take the following measures:

1. It should provide interest free loans to the parents of students of poor families for the promotion of their agriculture in the rural areas and for establishment of small business in the urban areas. Skill development programs may be introduced for this purpose.
2. The government should provide free notes books, school bags along with relevant stationery and uniform to the students in order to cope with the problem of poverty as a hurdle in retention of students in schools. The donor agencies and organizations may be encouraged in this regard to help the poor students.
3. Monthly and special stipends should be provided to poor students in order to lessen the financial burden of the poor families.

Awareness of the Parents about the Importance of Education

The parents should be made aware about the importance and value of education to enroll and retain their children in school. Parents should be convinced to relieve their children from domestic work during school hours. The parents should also be made aware and informed about the adverse effects of students' dropout from school. For this purpose, the following measures should be taken:

1. The government should launch motivational campaign through print and electronic media to create awareness among public about the importance of education.
2. The Parents Teachers Council (PTC) should be utilized to play its role in creating awareness among parents about the importance of education. The Parents Teachers Council (PTC) should motivate and convince parents to send their children to school.
3. Religious scholars, social workers and community leaders should play their role to create awareness among parents about the importance of education. They should motivate and mobilize parents to send their children to school.
4. The government should do legislation for compulsory primary education.

Measures for the Improvement of Teachers' Related Factors

In teachers related factors, teachers' absenteeism, corporal punishment, lack of skills and training, lack of commitment of teachers to their profession, shortage of teachers, are considered some of the major causes of students' dropout. In order to overcome these problems, the following suggestions are given in the strategy for the improvement of teachers' related factors.

Teachers' Absenteeism

To control teachers' absenteeism in schools, the following measures should be adopted:

1. Strict rules and regulations should be formulated and enacted by the government to control teachers' absenteeism and other delinquencies on the part of teachers.
2. There should be proper educational supervision to implement rules and regulations in true spirit to control teachers' absenteeism in schools. For this purpose, honest and committed supervisory staff should be appointed.
3. The village community should also take the notice of teachers' absenteeism. Their voices should be given more value and weight in the transfer and promotion of teachers.

Corporal Punishment by the Teachers

Students are dropped from school because of the harsh attitude of teachers and the use of physical punishment by the teachers. To avoid this curse the following measures should be taken:

1. The teacher should avoid the use of physical punishment and harsh attitude in the class. He should be kind and affectionate. He should create friendly environment so that pupils may trust him/her and discuss their problems openly.
2. The teachers should be trained to apply latest teaching skills in classroom to avoid corporal punishment.
3. There should be legal ban on physical punishment in true spirit to avoid corporal punishment by the teachers.

Lack of Commitment of Teachers to the Teaching Profession

Qualified, devoted and enthusiastic teachers can provide quality education. They can easily motivate children for learning and thus become able to retain them in school to complete their education at primary level. But in Pakistan, it has been observed that people adopt teaching profession as a last resort after trying out all other options. That's why we do not have committed teachers. This lack of commitment by the teachers often results in students' dropout in primary schools.

In order to overcome this problem, the following measures are suggested:

1. The appointment and recruitment of teachers should not be based on their academic and professional qualification only but commitment, devotion and tendency should also be taken into consideration.
2. The system of reward and punishment should be introduced. The teachers who retain more than 90% students up to 5th grade, should be awarded with an annual increment while those who fail shall be deprived of it.
3. As efficiency of the personnel in any organization is proportional to their social and economic status, therefore professional pride should be enhanced through the advancement of socio-economic status of teachers. Therefore it is recommended that some sort of social authority should be vested in teachers. Pay scales of primary school teacher should be upgraded.

Teachers Training

Untrained and unskilled teachers also result in students' dropout at primary level. It is essential that only qualified and competent persons should be appointed as teachers. Due importance should be given to the training of teachers to develop and enhance teaching skills of teachers. For this purpose, the following measures are suggested:

1. The prevalent teachers training program should be reformed. Teachers should be trained to use latest teaching skills and methods.
2. Professional development of the in-service teachers should be increased through in-service teachers' trainings and periodical refresher courses.
3. Teaching kits and teaching guides should be provided to all primary schools.

Shortage of Teachers

In Pakistan more than 80% of primary schools consisted of two class rooms and two teachers to teach all the six classes. Students- teachers' ratio has been fixed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government as 40-1. But in practice, it has been observed that in majority schools this ratio is very high and in some schools it reaches to 80-1. Apart from the high students – teachers' ratio there are 6 to 7 subjects for each class at primary level. Due to high students – teachers' ratio, it is very difficult for teachers to create creative environment for students to learn, and to maintain discipline in the class. This shortage of teachers ultimately results in students' dropout from school. In order to overcome these problems, the following measures are suggested:

1. The government should appoint/recruit new teachers to resolve the problem of teachers' shortage.

Measures to Level out the Students' Related Factors

Students Absenteeism

Those children who often remain absent from school, due to one or other reasons such as household duties, looking after of small kids etc ultimately are dropped from school. In order to resolve the problem of students' absenteeism, the following measures are suggested:

1. The teachers should make frequent contacts with parents to discuss the issue of students' absenteeism with them.
2. The school timings and vacations should be scheduled, keeping in view the cropping and harvesting seasons in rural areas.
3. Double shift program should be introduced in schools to provide maximum opportunities to children of agrarian and low income families.

Failure or Repetition of Grades

Failure or repetition of grades also leads to students' dropout in primary schools. In order to address this problem, the following measures are put in place in the strategy:

1. There should be no failure at primary level in schools. Students should be automatically promoted to upper classes at the end of every academic year.
2. Special attention should be given by the teachers to academically poor students in the class in order to overcome their learning deficiencies.

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