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A Thematic Analysis of the Voices of Dropouts

Abstract

Pakistan is facing many critical challenges today, but most important among them is our education which should be improved and expanded. Over the years, the ratio of dropouts becomes a very common problem. However, the slight emphasis has been put upon towards the attitude of dropouts. The purpose of this study was to document the voices of dropouts. Thematic analysis of the semi structured video recorded interviews of 108 dropout children explored the factors such as psychological and cultural constraints, demographic changes, and socioeconomic disparities have been identified as the major causes of dropped out. If we improve or overcome major problems such as poverty, distance, teachers' behaviour, subject problems, language barriers, and sexual harassment we can decrease the rate of dropouts.

Key words:

Thematic Analysis, Dropouts, Voices, Qualitative

Introduction

Education plays an important part in the growth of a person's potential and also in the socio-economic development of any society through improving human capital. Education empowers individuals by imparting essential information, desirable attitude, and modern skills to analyze the situation and cope with it. The improvement in health, protection of rights, and informed decisions affect the social, economic, and political life of an individual which cannot be possible without the right kind of education.

We can say that education acts as the foundation of any society in the sense of economic, social, psychological, cultural, and demographic development of that society. The deficiency of educated people stops further development of society. Educated people enhance the development of society by discovering new inventions. Education generates leaders in the next generation and becomes the main source to make strong families and society. Henceforth, to receive an education is the main source to achieve success in all communities. It helps individuals to move forward and gain success in life. Knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and preparation for the next life in children can only be generated with the help of learning experiences.

Brown (2011) supported the above said human rights by explaining that education is the birthright of every child so there is an emergency of education in the world and this emergency is caused by some terrible human and socioeconomic consequences. A media campaign is not the only way to show an emergency. He told that at the beginning of the 21st century, in the world primary aged out of school

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children were 67 million. However, other children are in schools, but receiving an abysmal quality of education due to those classrooms which are overcrowded, without textbooks, and taught by untrained teachers. Their children have gained that type of education which is without understanding, proficiencies, and abilities. They have found only access to education but have no learning.

UNESCO (2012), explained that Pakistan has some drawbacks in education as compared to global education; in 2010, out of school children were 5.1 million, i.e. 1 in 12 of the children in the world are out of school in which 3 million are the girls. From 1999 to 2010, the net enrollment ratio at the primary level exceeded only from 58% to 74%. However, the girls’ enrolment ratio is 14% less than the boys’ enrollment ratio. Pakistan is the 3rd largest country in the world in the number of illiterate people, i.e. 49.5 million people are illiterate that would be increased by 51 million illiterate people in 2015. The Education Development Index shows that Pakistan ranks 113 out of 120 countries. This is all due to low (GNP) allocation for education that was 2.6 percent in 1999 and reduced to 2.3 percent in 2010. The same is the situation in education equalities as ¼ of 7 to 16 years old population were out of school in 2007. This condition is most horrible in female education, e.g. out of three girls, one is in school in District Sawat.

Here in figure 1 researcher highlighted the international comparison of children out of schools. According to Policy Paper 04 on Education for All Global Monitoring Report (2012a), after Nigeria, Pakistan is the second world's largest country without school children.

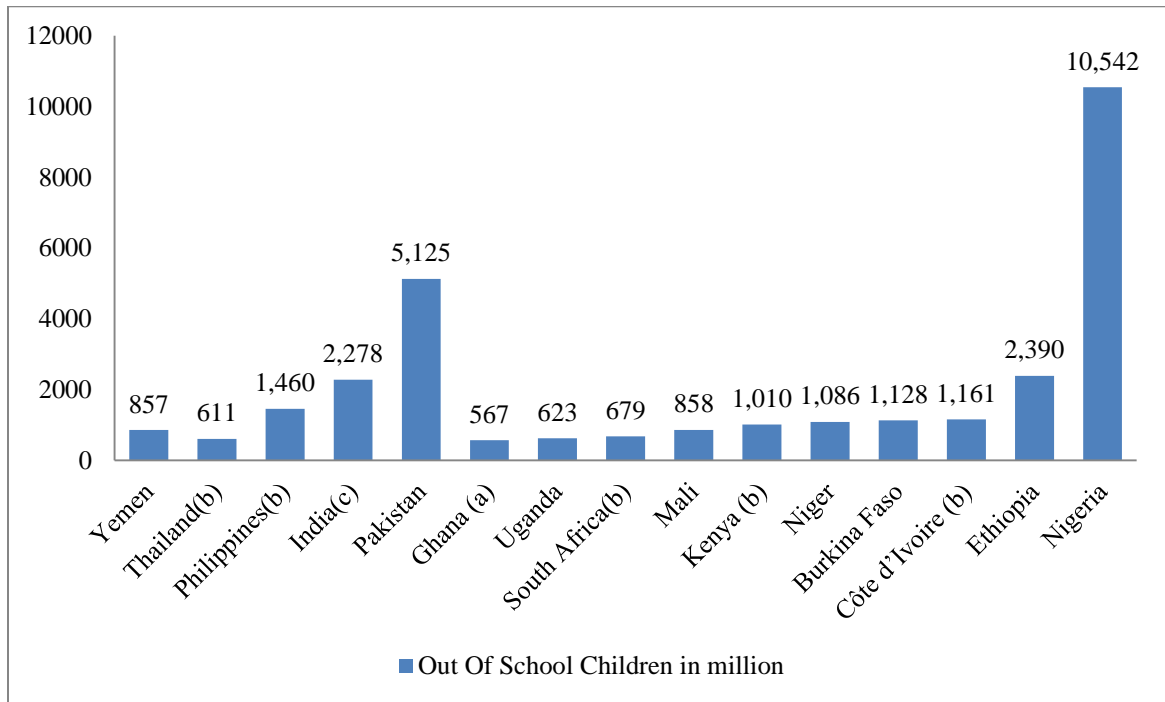


Figure 1: Countries with more than 0.5 M Out of School Children, 2010.

India and Ethiopia have more than two million out of school children but Ethiopia has 0.1M out of school children greater than India. Philippines, Kenya, Niger, Burkina Faso and, cote d'Ivoire have more than 1 M Out of School Children but, the Philippines has a greater number of out of school children than all of them. Yemen, Thailand, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa and, Mali have out of school children more than 0.5 M but, Mali has a greater number of out of school children than these countries.

Pakistan has the highest dropout rate in the world and also there is a low enrollment ratio in this country. The Nation (2014, February 28) showed that 21 percent of children are still out of school. Pakistan’s government is working hard to enhance the number of students at the primary level.

A universal agenda was setting for the accomplishment of MGDs (Millennium Development Goals) in a report entitled “A Life of Dignity for All” presented by the United Nations Secretary-General (UN, 2013). Rena (2009) explained that improved educational and welfare programs become helpful and they also reduce child labour.

For the achievement of aims and objectives which were recognized in Million Development Goals for 2015-16, a National Plan of Action for MDGs Acceleration Framework (MAF) 2013-16 was designed (Ministry of Education, 2013). The main objective of this plan was to increase the primary enrolment ratio to 91% by 2015-16. For this purpose, the main focus was not only upon the retention of existing students by cash stipends and other quality measures but also upon the increase in enrollment of 5.06 million new students with the cost of Rs. 189 billion over the three years. The minimum expectation of this plan was to enroll 5.1 million children by 2015-16.

UN (2014) showed that the main reasons for children either dropping out or not attending schools are poverty, gender, and location. Children who have never attended school and who dropouts face many hurdles to their education. Mpyangu et al. (2014) said that firstly Uganda was introduced UPE (Universal Primary Education) in African countries. As many reforms were introduced in Uganda such as more additional schools were built, teachers trained and tuition fees abolished. But, out of 20 school-aged children, one has never enrolled in school, and it also has the highest rate of dropout at the primary level in the world.

UNICEF (2012b) in the Liberia country study expressed any demand side, supply-side, and governance side barriers to being out of school. The demand-side consists of Socio-Cultural and economic factors while the supply side is related to schools related factors.

The armed conflict in Sri Lanka had caused a serious disturbance in people’s lives, school closure, less teacher’s deployment, and less teacher attendance, irregular school attendance, low performance and drop out, and also children being recruited as child soldiers by rebel groups. Some other factors are negative attitudes of teachers, uninteresting lessons, and harassment by teachers and peers. As gender is not important among the main reasons for being out of school, but in some ethnic groups and communities, girls pull out of school and into work especially low-income Muslim girls who dropped out of school after menarche (UNICEF, 2013).

One type of out of school children is street children; who work or begging on the street. Ozbas (2015) determined the personal traits and socioeconomic variables of Street Children resulting from their families by a multi-dimensional approach. He found that continuous absenteeism is the main reason for withdrawal from school and they have an insufficient schooling ratio. They have not accessed to education; their educational needs are not fulfilled and have inequality in their lives. Migration is the main cause of their problems. Their families have not right of employment in the base of their education; they live in bottom strata and have not any social insurance.

Bajwa (2011) elucidated in the Annual Status of Education Report- ASER some types of Out of School Children. He said that UN defined three types of out of school children which are (a) those who have attended classes in the past, but now they are not present in schools, (b) children who now are not in schools but in future they will get admission in schools, and (c) those who will never attend any school.

UNICEF (2018) defined Out of school Children as “a group of children in one or more of the 5DE (Five Dimensions of Exclusion) with certain shared characteristics” p.6.

Ananga (2011) explained the types of dropout in his report. There are five types of dropout.

Table 1

Types of Dropout

Types of Dropout	Types of Children
Sporadic Dropout	Dropping out of school temporarily (short term) for about three months due to economic survival needs.
Event dropout	Terminating schooling temporarily in response to one or more critical event, such as the death of a parent, sickness, conflict with school authorities, etc.
Long-term Dropout	Deserting school for two to four years, but with the possibility of returning to school; that is, falling out of one's cohort group.
Unsettled Dropout	Permanently dropping out of school with no prospect of any particular economic activity or apparent means of survival.
Settled Dropout	Dropping out of school permanently, but engaged in a vocation, trade or other economic activity for survival.

He also adopted six-zone of exclusion from CREATE by Lewin.

Objectives of Study

The core objective of this study was to find out the voices of dropouts. More specifically, this study aimed to:

1. Find out the socioeconomic factors which are responsible for keeping children out of schools especially girls.
2. Explore the cultural, demographic and psychological factors that increase the rate of dropouts.

Methodology

In this study, researcher adopted a qualitative research design. A qualitative design is more open and responsive to its subject. Braun & Clarke (2013) said that qualitative data is collected in the form of words, and in this research, the researcher seeks to understand and interpret data in more local meaning. It means this research produces knowledge that contributes to more general understandings. Therefore, qualitative research design generates narrow, but rich and illuminative data (Bengtsson, 2016). Researcher choice of qualitative method is because the qualitative method examines the how and why of decision making, not only when, where, what. However, to see the pattern of the voices of dropout children

interviews have some descriptive part for frequency counts. The researcher also employed a case study design and ethnographic methods for this research

The content validity of this schedule was done by expert opinion. This process helped the researcher to determine that questions were clear and related to the objectives of the study. A pilot study of the instrument increased the content reliability and so the researcher conducted a Mini Pilot Study and measured the consistency of question by using a video recorder. Changes were made after this process.

To assess the validity of the instrument the proposed interview schedule was sent to a panel of experts who commented on this interview schedule. The pilot-testing of the interview schedule was conducted before the actual data collection. The researcher developed a date wise plan and personally visited the rural and urban areas of two districts of Punjab and administered interviews to children and their parents. The answers to the questions provided room to give their opinion about the items which were not clear and need further improvement. Keeping given the suggestions of the children and their parents, the researcher refined the schedule.

These interview schedules had questions that comprised socioeconomic causes, psychological factors, cultural factors, and demographic factors. The researcher used thematic analysis in an inductive, semantic and realistic way for coding and theme development (Alholjailan, 2012; Maguire, & Delahunt, 2017; and Nowell, et al., 2017).

Codes were the labels assigned to important information given by interviewees (Delaney, et al., 2011; Davies, et al., 2014; Stead, et al., 2016; and Cassol, et al. 2018). Themes and sub-themes emerged from matching and reviewing codes and a thematic map was developed (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013; Costa, et al.; Javadi, & Zarea; and Vaismoradi, et al., 2016).

It is qualitative research and due to its subjectivity readers interpreted it differently. Although, a large number of participants and the sheer amount of data collected, lend a great deal of credibility to findings and these voices also provided excellent, solid, well-warranted answers to the list of objectives and questions. The evidence researcher provides is telling and should convince any critic that change is overdue in providing conditions that enable children to be in and stay in school. Numbers say a great deal, but never enough. Qualitative interviewing is intended to add depth to information about the lived experiences of people.

Ethical Issues

For any empirical investigation, ethical considerations are important especially, when your participants are children who never attend a school or dropout from a school (Young & Barrett, 2001). Therefore, “*ethics in research is related to the application of the system of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to be good, respectful and fair*” (Morrow, 2008:51). Ethics are also dealt with the belief about proper or improper, good or bad, and right or wrong (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006:142). According to Royce et al. (2010), searchers should be open to criticism and ideas, conduct research with care, and fair in report writing. This study requires some ethical considerations, just as consent, anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, and harm to respondents. The researcher informed both children and their parents about the brief description of this research and video recording of interviews and discussion. Only those participants’ responded who were agreed. The researcher also ensured the identity of participants by caring for their confidentiality and also ensured them at the start of the interview that the pieces of information given by them kept being confidential. The researcher used code names of the respondents in the study to increase the anonymity as it is the responsibility of the researcher that participants should not be harmed or in danger due to research. All possible measures were taken to reduce the involvement of adults during the interviews of children.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a process of identifying and highlighting the “Patterns” and “Sequence” in a wide set of data. In this process firstly researcher should become familiar with the data followed by generating initial codes. After that, the process of searching for subthemes and reviewing the subthemes should be done. The next step is defining and naming the themes and at last, is producing the report. The

responses of children and parents were analyzed by the “Coding Process”. The words that come again and again were given certain codes so it becomes easy to handle a large number of responses and to understand data in a systematic way. For this purpose Firstly, the “Transliteration” process of interviews, Focus group discussion, and Facebook data had been done. In this process respondents' speech described in the mother tongue in the English Alphabet. After that, the process of “Translation” was done. The next step was “Labeling Data” in which common similarities and differences of the responses, attributes, and characteristics of children and parents were grouped and labeled. This process was done with the help of NVivo 11 plus software. The next step was the development of “Sub Themes” and sub themes are data-driven. In the end, after the process of initial coding, some “Themes” emerged from the whole data. The theme is a concept, a description, an element, or an attribute. Themes can be organized from repeated words, concepts, and ideas of dropouts.

Findings

The theme “Culture Factors” was also emerged from the voices of dropout children, and had four sub themes. These were “Area’s Environment”, “Teacher’s behaviour”, “Literacy” and “Female Problems”. The sub theme “Area’s Environment” emerged from some codes. These codes were children of my caste, fear of sexual harassment, handicapped children, send their mentally retarded children to school, and area are very rich. The sub theme “Teacher’s behaviour” emerged from the codes that were teachers’ punished, afraid of teachers, and teachers beat me harshly. The sub theme “Female Problems” emerged from the codes that were different attitudes towards boys and girls, the marriage of girls, a positive attitude towards boys, and a negative attitude towards girls’ education. The sub theme “Literacy” emerged from the codes that were mother is illiterate, parents are illiterate, and started to hifz Quran e Pak.

This theme “Demographic Factors” that was found from the voices of dropouts had three sub themes. These were “Family Size”, “Living Area’s Status” and “Distance”. The sub theme “Family size” emerged from some codes. These codes were large family, and lack of educational accessories. The sub theme “Distance” emerged from the codes that were daily long traveling, and reaches in school late. The sub theme “Living Area’s Status” emerged from the codes that were living in the barren area, living in the green area, disaster area, Punjabi, where we find work we go there, and wandering for earning.

The dropout children also explored the next theme “Psychological Factors” that had five sub themes. These were “Adjustment Problems”, “Relation with Parents”, “Personal Problems”, “Future Dreams” and “Subject’s Problem”. The sub theme “Adjustment Problems” emerged from some codes, i.e. can’t adjust among small children, attitude problems, can’t adjust in school, discomfort in school, and personal attitude. The sub theme “Parents and Children’s Relationship” emerged from the codes that were parents provided me emotional support, parents gave me love hug, and parents consoled after teachers’ punishment. The sub theme “Personal Problems” emerged from the codes that were weak in the study, puberty, no other wish, my friend left school so I don’t like school, grown-up, disability, don’t think about my future, and dislike studies. The sub theme “Future Dreams” emerged from some codes, i.e. think about my future, a future dream is to become businessman, failed to fulfill dreams, a dream is to get a job of an educationist, a dream is to become successful person, classmates are studying, a dream is to become police officer or doctor, become an army officer, become a doctor in future, and become an engineer. The last sub theme “Subject Problems” emerged from some codes, i.e. study in the mother tongue, mother tongue is different from instructional language, like Urdu, like to get an education in the mother tongue, learning of Urdu I have found some difficulties, learn Urdu, difficulty in all subjects, difficulty in reading and learning of Science, difficulty in reading and learning of Mathematics, and difficulty in instructional language.

The last theme of interviews of drop out children was also “Socio Economic Factors”. It had four subthemes. These were “Poverty”, “Occupation”, “Unemployment”, and “Family Problems”. The “Poverty” sub theme had emerged from twelve codes that were the worse condition of living, parents worry about our food, not our marriage, beg from people, get help from relatives, poor, no money for school expenditures, monthly income is less to fulfill our needs, learn some skills to increase family income, live hand to mouth, high inflation rates, poor family condition, and low family income. The sub theme “Occupation” emerged from the codes that were father is tailor, works with a constructor, works in a brick furnace, and father sells vegetables. The next sub theme was “Unemployment”. This sub theme emerged from unemployed parents, one mother is working, parents work, and father does nothing and takes drugs.

The last sub theme “Family Problems” had some codes that had been extracted from interviews of drop out children. Such as parents quarrel with each other, parents have no relations, no time for lesson preparation, mother died, mother’s illness, home problem, health problem, father died, parents discouragement, parents’ problem, and brother’s death.

Discussion and Conclusion

The qualitative results of interviews of 108 dropout children also identified four major themes which become the actual reasons for their not attending the school. These themes were cultural factors, psychological factors, demographic factors, and socioeconomic factors. Just as, Shadreck (2013) explained school-based factors of dropout and explained some causes of dropouts that were some socioeconomic factors and also explored teacher-student relationships, curriculum affects, and school physical environments that affect students’ decision to drop out of school.

The thematic analysis of this study showed that the dropout children identified the teacher’s behaviours which become the main reason for not attending the school for dropout children. Just like, Shah et al (2015) identified the causes of dropout at the primary level. These were unawareness of the parents about the importance of education, poverty of the parents, heavy workload at home, teachers’ absenteeism, unskilled and untrained teachers, frequent absenteeism of students, failure or repetition of grades, shortage of teachers, corporal punishment by the teachers, and migration of parents.

Children stop their education due to teacher’s harsh attitudes. Mostly, teachers punish them in class as they have not educational accessories and due to the afraid of teachers children drop their education. Dropout children said that their area was not prosperous but the people of their area send their mentally retarded and handicapped children to school. Most of the children of their caste went to school, but many faced the fear of sexual harassment in school or on the way to school. Children told that their family was illiterate and children stop their education as they started Holy education. Female problems again set ahead against their education. Parents did not like to continue girls’ education as they had a different attitude towards boys and girls and mostly it was negative. Girls’ early marriage stopped their education. Most parents thought that there is no need to continue their education as girls move to other families after their marriage. Some studies just as, Khanam et al (2016) informed the reasons and implications of the dropout phenomenon in women by revealing that personal, domestic, social, emotional, academic, and financial factors were responsible for dropout. They also explained that poverty; the opposition of male members’, household and domestic responsibilities, girls’ personality traits and intentions, and institutional deficiencies were the major factors of dropout.

Children face the same demographic challenges and these challenges become a hurdle against the education of dropout children just like out of school children. Children explained that in a large family it is difficult for parents to fulfill all the educational accessories require in the classroom. One member is not enough to earn for the whole family so everyone busy in works for earning. One other reason was living as area status. Dropouts defined their living areas as disaster areas, barren area, green area; they are Punjabi, wandering for earning, and where they find work they went there. This thematic analysis reflected that they were not earning better in these areas. Distance is another important demographic factor which influenced the education of dropout children more than other demographic factors. Dropout children told that due to daily long travelling they reached school late and teachers punished them.

The thematic analysis of this study revealed that they faced some problems in learning of subjects. Children liked and disliked subjects on the base of their individual differences. Some said that they like and learn Urdu as they want to study in their mother tongue while others said they found some difficulties in reading and learning of Urdu. Some like English and Science and some like Mathematics. On the other hand, some find difficulties in Science, Mathematics, and English. They failed in those subjects in which they find difficulties. Some dropout children explored that they find difficulties in all subjects so they drop their studies in the way. Gouda et al (2014) explored that less interest in studies, high academic expenses, inhome and outhome tasks for payment in cash/kind, repeated failures, work in farm and for family business, distance to school, no importance to further studies, got married, no admission, less girls’ safety, no proper school facilities for girls, transport not available, required for the care of siblings and no female teacher.

Their personal problems also became the causes of their dropout. Children told different causes of their dropout which link to their Psyche. Such as they told; they were weak in studies or disliked to study. Children explored that due to puberty they stopped their education and one other reason was that they were grown up, so they would not adjust among small children. Some children were hopeless and they said that they had no wish to study and some said they did not think about their future or dreams of the future. One child identified an interesting reason for his dropout. He said as my friend left school so I don't like to go to school. One said that he can't be able to continue his education due to his disability.

Children also said that due to their attitude they could not adjust in school and felt discomfort so, they discontinued their education. Burrus et al (2012) identified prevalence, risk factors, and remediation strategies for dropouts.

Dropout children and their parents' relations also important as these relationships sometimes encourage and sometimes discourage children to pursue their education. Thematic analysis of interviews of dropout children reflected this relationship in these words, i.e., parents provide me emotional support, parents gave me love hugs, parents consoled me after teacher's punishment, parents got progress report of their children. Sometimes parents did not bother about their children's education. Torres et al (2016) explored reasons behind dropout and these reasons are hostility in the family, adversities at home, peer influence, learning difficulty, low self-esteem, and poor disposition, and negative social interaction.

The dropout children had some future dreams. It's quite right, they had stopped their education, but they have a right to see dreams. So, children and parents showed their dream's passion as children want to become a successful person, a doctor, a businessman, a government officer, a police officer, an engineer, and an army officer. Some hopeless parents and children explained that poor people can't see dreams, think nothing about the future, their classmates are studying, and failed to fulfill dreams.

Socioeconomic factors which were responsible to dropout were unemployment, poverty, family problems and occupation of parents as identified by Latif et al (2015) found economic effects of students' dropout.

Children explored the unemployment of their family as one member is working, unemployed parents; my father does nothing and takes drugs.

Parent's occupation also becomes a socioeconomic barrier against the education of dropout children. The researcher found that mostly the dropout children belong to low-income families. Children identified their parents' occupations as; father is a tailor, works with a constructor, parents work in a brick furnace and labourer.

Dropouts told about their family problems as; parents quarrel with each other, mother died, father died, mother's illness, parents have no relations, have no time for lesson preparation, brother's death, home problems, health problems, parents' discouragement. Now the last and most important socioeconomic factor is poverty. Shadreck (2013) showed that poverty and financial constraints are the major reasons for dropout and in rural areas, there is a high poverty rate among parents and this may have influenced their inability to meet the financial demands for their children's schooling.

Our society is the society of rich and they grind the lives of the poor. Education becomes a business. Poor's think their child got a better education. For this purpose, they send their child to private street schools. After two or three classes, parents can't afford children's educational expenses and children discontinue their education. One thing which the researcher found is that some parents are worried about the tuition of their children after school as they can't be able to teach their children in homes or help in homework. The result revealed the poverty of the family in these words such as; worse condition of living, parents worried about our food, not our marriage, monthly income is less to fulfill the needs, I learned some skills to increase the income, we beg from people, relative help, live hand to mouth, high inflation rate, poor, no money for school expenditures, family poor condition, low family income, lack of educational resources, only eat not study, etc.

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