

Female Students' Dropout at Primary Schools in the District of Quetta, Balochistan: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

Education is the most influential factor for empowering girls; however, the literacy rate of girls in Baluchistan is alarming. This study investigated the causes of female dropout at the primary schools in the district of Quetta, Baluchistan. The study was qualitative and based on semi-structured interviews. The sampling technique was two-staged, where at the first stage, dropout students were identified through snowball sampling, and they and their parents were interviewed. Then, the principals and teachers of the schools where they dropped out were interviewed. In total, 25 dropout students, 25 parents, 13 heads of schools, and 26 teachers were interviewed. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that the main causes of female dropout at the primary school level were parents' attitude, social norms, teachers' behavior and absenteeism, and students' lack of interest towards their studies. On the other hand, the findings also presented the remedial measures.

Keywords: *Causes, Dropout, Girls, Primary Level, Remedial Measures, Quetta.*

Introduction

Pakistan, as a signatory United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, has to ensure provision and access to quality education for all its children, regardless of age and gender (Ahmad, 2011; Alif Ailaan, 2015). The Government of Pakistan, in collaboration with different non-governmental

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organizations, has taken numerous initiatives to achieve the SDG goals. However, despite such efforts, the condition of Pakistan in this regard is discouraging.

In Pakistan, a large number of children are out of school, where at least sixty million people are estimated to be illiterate (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2024). Among other provinces, the situation of education in Baluchistan, especially girls education, is alarming with the lowest literacy rate (54.5%) and the highest percentage of out of the school children (6.9% for male and 6.7% for female) (ASER, 2024; Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The Government of Baluchistan has taken various transformative steps to improve the literacy rate and reduce the dropout rate. For example, the proportion of the budget to be spent on education has been increased, and different projects have been initiated. However, such reform initiatives have failed to produce desired results (Government of Balochistan, 2020). On the other hand, it has been reported that girls, as compared to boys, in Pakistan, dropout at a young age (Fatima et al., 2024).

Similarly, the problems of girls' dropout also remain a challenge for other developing and underdeveloped countries like India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan in the 21st century (Bhatia & Monroe, 2024; Karmaker & Lemon, 2024; M. Kumar et al., 2024). Ibor et al. (2024) argue that more studies are required on different interventions and programs related to girls' dropout. Besides, Ovejas and Rioja (2025) suggest more in-depth qualitative studies on issues related to girls' dropout. Literature shows that there are different factors that contribute to girls' dropout. In this regard, Shahidul and Karim (2015) identified the following four factors:

- a) Economic factors include parents' investment in their girls' education. Parents prefer boys' education and invest high in their education, which demotivates girls towards their education. Not only this, but due to high school fees, parents do not send their daughters to school.
- b) Household factors also lead towards girls' dropout as girls from an early age are involved in household activities, especially in rural areas.

- c) School factors include teachers' behavior, absenteeism, poor training, distance of school from home, and extra-curricular activities are some school factors that lead towards dropout.
- d) Early marriages, pregnancy, and cultural beliefs about girls' education are cultural factors that lead to girls' dropout.

The study of Msafiri and Lianyu (2022) proposed some main causes for female dropout. Firstly, student-based factors include low attendance, low grades, low motivation towards studies, and irresponsible behavior. Secondly, the social factor includes conservative social norms, gender discrimination, early marriages, and attitudes towards female education. The last factor, as a family factor, is based on parents' attitude towards their children's education, parents' relationship, divorce, and household chores. Moreover, in the southern region of Pakistan, various social, cultural, and economic factors are regarded as factors affecting the female dropout rate (Fatima et al., 2024). In addition, the unavailability of educated, successful women as role models is also a cause for girls' dropout. Similarly, Ibor et al. (2024) conducted a study to examine the role of insecurity in the dropout of girls in Nigeria. They concluded that different social, economic as well and cultural factors influence girls' dropout rate. Ovejas and Rioja (2025) conducted a quantitative study in Spain and found that boys are more inclined towards dropout as compared to girls at middle grades. However, they reported that girl students have a lower level of self-efficacy.

Moreover, Pednekar et al. (2024) conducted a study on how personal hygiene affects the dropout of girls in India and suggested that the data of school attendance should also be given importance because low attendance may lead to girls dropping out. Another study conducted in India also found that early childhood marriages, low worth of girls' education, parents' non-serious attitude and illiteracy, socioeconomic background, family income, violence, and migration are the main causes of female dropout (P. Kumar et al., 2023). Moreover, School-related factors like poor quality of education, poor infrastructure, overcrowded classes, teachers' non-serious attitude and teachers' absenteeism, distance from homes, and security risks contribute a lot to students' dropout. Another research study shows that in developing countries, over one-third of females drop out before entering the secondary level, and the reasons

identified are early childhood marriages, students' lack of interest towards studies, health issues, economic issues, domestic responsibilities, and parents' overstrictness. The condition is more crucial in rural areas (Murphy-Graham et al., 2020).

Education has a significant impact on human society, and no society can function optimally until it is proper education (Zarif, 2012). Education is a basic human right, and it fosters human development (Okidi et al., 2004). It is key for the development of nations. The condition of education in Pakistan is not satisfactory. The country's literacy rate is just 62.2 percent, with 66.25 percent for men and 41.75 percent for women (The National Commission for Human Development, 2024). In addition, it is reported that 77% of children in Pakistan are unable to read or comprehend simple written text by age 10.

In Pakistan, 22.8 million children aged 15 and 16 are out of school, which makes up 44% of the total population (UNICEF, 2024). Pakistan regrettably holds the world's second-highest number of out-of-school children. According to the report of UNICEF (2024) nearly 10.7 million boys and 8.6 million girls are enrolled at the primary level, which drops to 3.6 million boys and 2.8 million girls at the lower secondary level. In 2018-19, the COVID-19 pandemic has likely caused further damage (Moosvi, 2022).

The condition of literacy in Baluchistan is the worst, with the lowest as 42.1 % (Dawn, 2024). The dropout rate at primary schools is very alarming in Baluchistan. Maximum dropout and lowest transition rate have been observed from the primary level of education to the middle level of education. About 57% of children leave school without completing their education at the primary level (Baloch, 2014). In district Quetta, there are approximately 226,643 out-of-school children aged 6 to 15, which constitutes 57% of the total 395,207 children of school-going age (6-15). Level-wise, 49% of the primary school-going age children are out of school (Government of Balochistan, 2022).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the reasons behind the dropout rate of Girls students at the primary level in the district of Quetta, and the

main research question was: What are the reasons that cause female students to drop out at the primary school level in Quetta district?

Research Methodology

Qualitative research is inductive, and it explores meanings from a given situation (Ormston et al., 2013). The study aimed to get a deeper understanding of the causes of dropout. Thus, a qualitative approach was best suited to this study. The sampling technique was two-staged, where at the first stage, dropout students were identified through snowball sampling, and they and their parents were interviewed. Then the schools from which they had dropped out, their principals and teachers, were interviewed. In total, 25 dropout students, 25 parents, 13 heads of schools, and 26 teachers were interviewed. The qualitative research approach relies on interviews and observation because these do not limit participants' views (Creswell, 2012). One-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted. Audio recordings were used to save data, with the assurance of complete confidentiality. Afterward data was transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis for which ATLAS. It was used as software. The trustworthiness was ensured by triangulation and rich-thick description. The details of the schools selected for data collection are presented below:

Table

The Details of Schools

S. #	School Name	Assigned codes
1.	Government Girls high School Wahdat Colony, Quetta.	Scl A
2.	Government Pak Girls High School, Quetta.	Scl B
3.	Government Apwa Girls High School Archer Road, Quetta.	Scl C
4.	Government Girls Killi Shaikhan High school, Quetta.	Scl D
5.	Government Girls Model School, Livestock colony, Quetta.	Scl E
6.	Government Girls High School Kharotabad, Quetta.	Scl F
7.	Government Girls High School Postal Colony, Quetta.	Scl G
8.	Government Girls Primary School Killi Abdul Rehman, Samali.	Scl H
9.	Government Girls Middle School Balochi Street, Quetta.	Scl I

10	Government Girls High School Loher Karez Saryab Road, Quetta.	Scl J
11	Government Girls Primary School Faisal Town, Quetta.	Scl K
12	Government Apwa Girls High School Satellite Town, Quetta.	Scl L
13	Government Girls Middle School Killi Abdul Raheem, Kuchlak.	Scl M

Results of the Study

The thematic data analysis yielded five main causes that were responsible for female dropouts. What were the parents' attitude, students' attitude, society, school, and teachers? The themes are explained in the preceding sections:

Parents' Attitude towards Education

The majority of the participants said that the main reason for female dropout is parents' attitude. There were different types of attitudes that emerged from the data. One of the reasons for the student's dropout was the parents' death. For example, one of the respondents said that "I would love to go to school, but after my mother's death, there was no one to take care of my younger siblings and to do household chores. That's why I left my studies" (Student 10).

Additionally, parents' strictness was another cause for female students to drop out. There were families in which fathers did not allow their daughters to go to school, especially after their primary level studies. Because fathers thought that they had grown up. Some families did not believe that girls should be educated, or believed girls should not study beyond a certain age. For example, one of the parents said, "There is no need for girls to go to school. They should learn household chores because they have to get married." (Parent:6).

In this regard, the same responses were recorded from the heads of schools and teachers as well. They thought that the family became a barrier to their girls' education. A junior school teacher shared, "In my point of view, the most important factor that causes girls to drop out is their families/parents' strictness.... I don't know when it will change (*aqal kab ae ge*). (Teacher: 9). One of the heads of the school said, "Drop-out ratio

in our school is comparatively less than others; however, cases are due to parents' interest in education for girls." (Principal: 6)

The poor economic conditions of the parents often forced them to remove girls from school and engage them in either domestic activities or make them work. A parent (father), when asked about girls' education, replied, "My investment in my boys will benefit me and my family, but investment in girls' education would not benefit us and will be useless". (Parent: 14).

Students' Tendency towards the Studies

The very important factor that causes females to drop out is a lack of interest in their studies. Most of the parents and teachers responded that their daughters were not willing to go to school. One of the mothers said:

I want my daughters to go to school. My two daughters are good at their studies, but one of my daughters was not taking an interest in her studies, due to which she was quiet. I feel bad for her, but she does not care (P, 16).

One of the heads of school responded in this regard that "in my opinion, to some extent, students are responsible for their dropout and the supposed ratio would be 4-5% and mostly of this percentage, students' lack of interest is a major factor" (Principal: 13). Not doing well in their studies was a reason given for high dropouts. Additionally, Fear of the board exam at the primary level was also a cause of students dropping out. One of the heads of school said that" ... in my school, I observed that some students drop out of school just before their primary board exam." (Principal: 8).

The data also shows that girls faced harassment on their way to school. Education is the best safeguard for females, but unfortunately, in our country, due to harassment, parents are frightened of sending their girls to school. One of the participants of the study said:

Nowadays, most of the parents are aware of the importance of education and are sending their daughters to school, but unfortunately, the people of our society do not let girls complete their education just because of their evil thoughts and misbehavior. As a result, which parents forced their daughters to leave the school (Teacher: 13).

Some families do not believe that girls should be educated, or believe girls should not study beyond a certain age. One of the respondents believed:

In our society, Pashtun and Baloch tribes still need awareness regarding female education. Some of our Pashtun and Baloch students drop out just because their fathers, uncles, or elder brothers do not allow them to study (Teacher: 25).

One of the teachers shared her experience, "Our society.... I am very ashamed of our society because we are living in a society where there is no respect for women. Some of my students complain that on their way from home to school, boys and even mature men do verbal harassment and do unethical things to them, which makes them frightened of coming to school, and as a result, they drop out." (Teacher: 3). Thus, sometimes the reason is not the parents but the family norms, which cause dropout. Like a mother of a dropout said:

We (my husband and I) are both aware of the importance of girls' education. We know that in modern society, one cannot live without getting education, but my brother-in-law does not let my girls to go to school (showing aggressiveness while talking), he is very conservative and he threatened my husband, that if he does not take his daughters out of school, then he will leave the home (Parent:15)

School Dynamics

The common challenge faced by many government schools is large class sizes, which significantly impact the quality of education and student-teacher interaction. Some potential consequences include difficulty in personalized attention and feedback, reduced student engagement and participation, increased noise levels and distractions, lack of teacher resources and energy.

One of the teachers responded that "There will be one teacher who is supposed to be teaching two sections. One section is supposed to be 35 kids but usually it is more 45, 50, so you have one teacher for 90 to 100 kids." (Teacher: 6). The absence of middle of high schools and poor infrastructure were also factors to drop out schools. One of the parent respondents said:

In our area, there is one primary school, and all of the girls go there to get an education. We do not have any middle or high schools in our area to send our girls over there. The nearest school is about half an hour distance from our homes (Parent: 15)

When researcher asked the particular parent responded to send her daughters to nearer school, for higher education, she rapidly responded, “no, no, no, no...are you joking? How can we take security risks? You (researcher) and all of us know about our society.” (Parent: 19).

Teachers' Response toward Student Retention

Many families complained of teachers being absent from school. One parent claimed, “Sometimes students go to school and there's no teacher, so they miss out on their studies” (Parent:13). Another parent shared his response, “This happens here. Throughout the year, teachers wouldn't teach students, and then for the last three months, there would be all this pressure before exams. In a week, they would come once or twice (Parent: 09).

Physical punishment and severe verbal abuse can lead to psychological trauma, depression, and low self-esteem in children. These emotional scars can affect their well-being and ability to learn long after they leave school. A parent shared her reason of dropout “my daughter used to like to go to school, but her teacher's harsh behavior and use of physical punishment dishearten her and then she refused to go to the school (Parent: 24). The corporal punishment is banned by government but the data shown that there are some teachers who are still using corporal punishment in their schools. Some of the teachers themselves agreed that sometimes, they use corporal punishment. One teacher shared her opinions in this regard. She said, “I... Myself use corporal punishment, but that is just to maintain discipline and to keep my students on track. And I think that this might not be a reason for students' dropout” (Teacher: 17).

Some of the heads also agreed with the use of punishment. One of the respondents said, “There was a time, a few years back, when teachers were free to treat students as they wanted. They use severe punishment techniques to handle students, which is very unfair. After that, the government announced a policy and banned corporal punishment at

school. But... I feel and have observed that in my school, some of the teachers use corporal punishment... (Pause) But rarely. (Parent: 9).

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the causes of female dropout. The findings were in line with previously conducted research on the topic (Ovejas & Rioja, 2025; Ratusniak & Clauber, 2023; Sweeten, 2004; Zarif, 2012). Thus, showing that the problem of female dropout is still unsolved. The findings are consistent with the findings of Fatima et al. (2024), students' positive self-concept as well as positive image of school reduces the chances of dropout. However, contradictory to the results of this study, it was found that boys are more at risk of dropout (Ovejas & Rioja, 2025). Based on the findings of the study, recommendations are presented in the figure below:

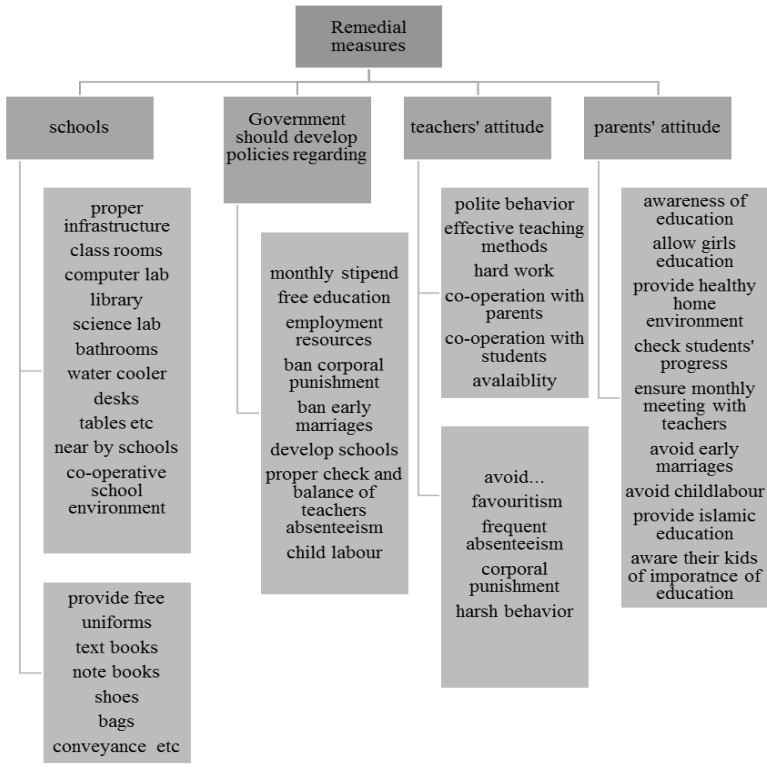


Figure: Remedial Measures

Different recommendations are formulated on the basis of the reviewed literature and data findings of this research study in the following sections. First, the government should develop policies regarding monthly stipend, free education, and employment resources, and should ban early marriages, corporal punishment, child labor, etc. In addition to these, the government should develop high schools and keep proper checks and balances on teachers' absenteeism.

For parents, they should allow their girls to get an education, provide a healthy home environment, check students' progress, ensure monthly meetings with teachers, avoid early marriages, avoid child labor, provide Islamic education, and be aware of their kids' importance of education. Teachers should avoid favoritism, frequent absenteeism, corporal punishment, and harsh behavior, and should adopt polite behavior, effective teaching methods, hard work, co-operation with parents, and co-operation with students. From the perspective of schools, the data shows that the respondents recommend making schools well-equipped. Schools should have proper infrastructure, classrooms, a computer lab, a library, a science lab, bathrooms, a water cooler, desks, tables, etc. School environment should be co/-operative and schools should provide free uniforms, textbooks, and notebooks.

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