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**Abstract:** School dropout produces inverse effects on the person, their entire family, and society. However, primary school dropout results in even more drastic consequences, including drug addiction and criminality. The current study intends to explore the social and political factors associated with primary school dropout. The study is conducted in the Swat district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It is a qualitative endeavor that elaborates the findings from a scholarly point of view. A sample size of 60 participants (dropped-out students) of primary schools, i.e., GPS (Government Primary School) Haji Baba, GGPS (Government Girls Primary School) Haji Baba, GPS Malookabad, GGPS Malookabad, GPS Raja Abad, and GGPS Watke, was selected for the study. To reach more precise information, data were collected through an interview guide. The data are presented to the readers through an interpretative paradigm. The current study finds that multiple factors pave the way for primary school dropout, of which social and political ones are more influential. More engaging among the social factors are poverty, unemployment, an ineffectual system of education, child labor, and lack of technological development and commercialization. Whereas, lack of educated political leadership, their undue interventions in educational institutions and recruitment processes, their lack of interest in educational and technological advancement, the state's lack of prioritization for education and sciences, and lack of the rule of law are the political dimensions that cause students to drop out from primary schools. The study recommends that, like tiny employment positions, the political leadership also needs to have appropriate qualifications and accountability. Moreover, the political intervention need to be minimized from recruitment processes. The researcher feels a need to explore the causes of political and governance failure that have created enormous problems for the state and its inhabitants.

**Introduction**

Education, science, and technology are among the leading sources of human survival and well-being. Education stands as the tallest indicator for future planning and development. Moreover, education

works as a panacea for all social structural and functional issues and challenges, including institutional dysfunction, inappropriate policy making, mismanagement of resources, and bad governance. It brings about a productive social change in the mind and behavior of people mainly through promoting awareness, enlightenment, social acceptance, and adaptation (Ahmad & Khan, 2021). Social scientists believe that education has three main outcomes, i.e., spiritual satisfaction, broadening one's mental horizon, and empowering man upon the resources of society (Pathak, 2007). In addition, a well-equipped system of education that provides for the public's personal and social needs in letter and spirit attracts their trust (Ahmad & Khan, 2021).

Education, besides fostering personal and behavioral development, provides opportunities for career building and development. It provides equalization opportunities to the people of low socio-economic cohorts predominantly through imparting professional knowledge and skills along with mental and behavioral transformation (Fourali, 2010). Moreover, it enriches the educated people in business-related manners that might stabilize their position and the market and source further livelihood opportunities. In such a situation education won the confidence of citizens regarding its role and outcomes (Haveman & Wolfe, 1984). However, it loses public trust and acknowledgement when it fails to provide for personal and social needs of the citizens, which is manifested in a lack of students' enrollment and/or their dropout (Pathak, 2007).

The nature, functions, and outcomes of education are influenced by multiple factors, including the practicality of the curriculum, the level of professionalism in educational institutions, policy inaction and implementation, ethical and moral values attached to meritocracy, and more broadly the system of governance (Fourali, 2010). Among these, governance carries on a more influential position that, if upright, focuses on the quality of the education and its outcomes in the form of employment, business, and capital formation. However, a lousy and failed system of governance results in remarkable challenges to education and its expected outcomes (Ahmad, 2014). In third-world countries, bad governance not only poses political problems but also creates economic and social challenges that the citizens suffer. Corruption, unstable markets, inflation, unemployment and underemployment, lack of meritocracy in jobs, lack of qualified personnel in different institutions, brain drain, and dropout are its relevant manifestations (Barton, 2005).

Public attitude towards education gets affected by multiple factors, including the direct and indirect cost of education, the kind of imprints that education produces on the mind and personality of the people, behavioral differences of educated people from the uneducated ones, availability of employment opportunities in the market, and the quality of life of educated people (Ahmad, 2014). Unfortunately, in Pakistani society, lousy governance style and inexperienced political leadership have deteriorated the structure and functions of educational institutions as well as created enormous challenges for the educated youth in acquiring employment opportunities. Research indicates that political intervention in educational institutions not only has impacted the quality of education but also has created hurdles in merit-based recruitments in the market. Due to this fact, a substantially large number of educated youth shifted to other countries for livelihood purposes (Ahmad, 2014). In addition, the above and some other social factors like poverty, inflation, and child labor have caused students to drop out of schools. The recent sociopolitical implausibility of Pakistan has caused a rapid spike in primary school dropout that indicates an alarming situation for youth.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The study possesses prime importance due to its relevance to the most significant pillar of society—education. Quality education promotes economic development and well-being of individuals and

society, as it determines the worth of science, technology, and globalization. However, education needs a peaceful and conducive environment that shapes the mind, behavior, and social relationships of the students. In Pakistani society, the socio-political atmosphere is less conducive for students to continue their studies. Resultantly, an increasing rate of primary school dropout is witnessed that inflicts the very cause of education in letter and spirit. The current study aims to find out social and political factors that affect the mind of students or their parents, resulting in primary school dropout. The problem has been examined from other perspectives, yet there is very limited knowledge on the social and political factors promoting primary school dropout in third-world countries like Pakistan.

### Research questions

- How poverty lead to primary school dropout?
- Do family factors (Parents interest, Gender discrimination, and Traditional parents) contribute in dropout of children?
- How school related factors (poor teaching methods, defunct curriculum, learning difficulties, and corporal punishment) result in primary school dropout?
- How political leadership cause imbalance in recruitment process?
- How bad governance disturbs the quality of education?
- Is political leadership inclined to devise policies for education and recruitment?

### Methods and procedures

The current study is conducted in district Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study is carried out through a qualitative research design and framework. Initially, the information regarding the students who dropped out in the last 2 years, i.e., 2022-23 and 2023-24, was collected from their respective schools, including GPS (Government Primary School) Haji Baba, GGPS (Government Girls Primary School) Haji Baba, GPS Malookabad, GGPS Malookabad, GPS Raja Abad, and GGPS Watke. The total number of students who dropped out from these primary schools in the aforementioned period was 461. Utilizing the purposive sampling method technique, a sample size of 60 participants was selected for the study. Based on the saturation level of information, 10 dropout students from each school were inquired about during the study. To reach and record appropriate information, an interview guide is used as a tool of data collection. Interviews are a way to gather factual data on the social world by asking people to discuss details about their lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). After the collection of primary data, it was carefully translated and transcribed, redundancies and irrelevancies were removed, and codes were developed. The interpretative paradigm is used for data presentations for the readers.

### Literature Review

Primary school dropout is among the major academic problems Pakistan is facing. The problem gets impulse from multiple factors, including personality, family, socioeconomic status, and related policies (Rogers, 2005). The Economic Survey of Pakistan (2009) correlates primary school dropout with child labor, as poor parents send their children to workplaces to meet their family needs and expenses. Another research demonstrates that poor people withdraw their children out of schools at early ages mainly because of the hidden costs of education such as conveyance, uniforms, books, and food, etc. (Lynd, 2007). Moreover, many households are affected by unexpected economic and demographic shocks such as incurable illness or death of the family guardian, underemployment, unequal income opportunities, and job loss, etc. (Ahmad, 2014).

A study indicates that students in low socio-economic neighborhoods have more chances to drop out of school than students in more substantial neighborhoods. In their study of over 1,100 dropped-out students, the researcher found that the socio-economic status of a student's neighborhood is more

correlated to their chance of dropping out than student attachment to school, parents' adolescents' delinquent behavior, and parental control over adolescents' behavior. Furthermore, parents and their children in socioeconomically backward neighborhoods feel that school completion offers very few opportunities to change their miserable conditions or to offer a better quality of life (South, Baumer, & Lutz, 2003).

Globally, the female literacy ratio is lesser than the male, and in underdeveloped and developing countries, the practice is directly under the control of socio-cultural and economic constraints (Holmes, 2003). Moreover, in rural areas, where girls are married quite early, the opportunity cost of sending female children to school is even higher because outcomes of their schooling do not add to their parental household. Likewise, early marriages not only affect the schooling of female children; rather, they are considered an escape route from poverty as they lower the financial burden of the family (Kakuru & Muhwezi, 2003; Kasente, 2004). Furthermore, due to social and cultural influence, parents are least likely to educate their female children. In remote areas spending on a girl's education is considered a waste of money, as after their marriage they shift to the family of procreation, and they are less likely to be allowed to profess a job for earning (Khan, Azhar & Shah, 2011).

Studies recommend that dropping out is not an instant act but rather multiple factors making a chain of disengagement from school and its procedures, including a less cooperative and less conducive school environment, individual personality with fewer absorption traits, lack of child interest in studies, conflicting home environment, large family size, and socio-economic conditions of the student family (Alexander & Entwisle, 1997). Another study identifies two separate lines of inquiry for dropping out. The first line examines individual student factors such as social and economic environment, including the family background of the student, education of parents, family profession, and ethnicity. The second line identifies the institutional factors and the conditions of schooling, like the availability of basic needs of life, including clean drinking water and updated methods of teaching (Pathak, 2007). In a more comprehensive context, Ahmad (2014) analyzed a three-fold categorization affecting school enrollment and attainment choices-- household demand for education includes education of parents, family size, and structure of household; supply of education service includes access to education, availability of facilities in schools, and student-teacher ratio; and government educational policies and preferences.

Hussain, Fikree, & Berendes (2000) correlate primary school dropout with school-level factors, for instance, lack of adequate schools or facilities therein, harsh behavior of teachers and corporal punishment, lack of practicality of the existing curriculum, and widespread unemployment. Research studies indicate that failing grades individually or in combination with other factors like socio-economic status of the student, parental education, single-parent family, and emotional disengagement contribute to their dropping out of school (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). Another study further elaborates that traditional or poor teaching methods, persistent learning difficulties, low attendance, and corporal punishment act individually or in combination to produce dropout (Akyeampong & Ananga, 2010).

Pakistan's Parliament, via the 18th Amendment in the constitution, declares education as a basic human right: *"The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law."* However, the public sector has failed to deliver mass education due to utter corruption and mismanagement. Remote areas first lack public schools, and if there are any, they do not have the basic needed facilities like buildings, clean drinking water, toilets, electricity, and boundary walls for security purposes. In contrast, the private sector plays a pivotal role in meeting the demand of education and ensuring quality education in society (Chhapra,

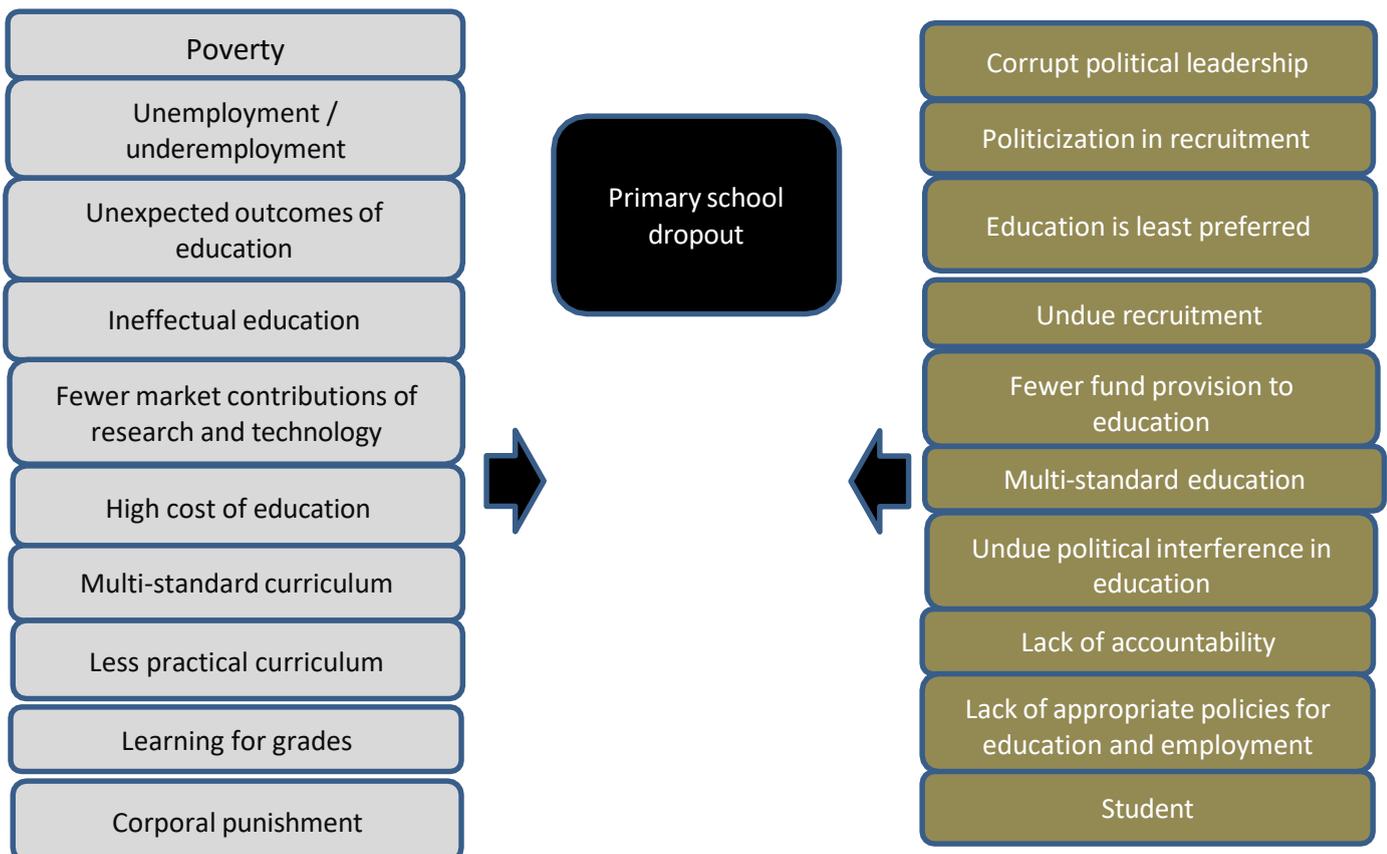
2012).

Literature indicates that school dropout in Pakistani society is pervasive, and primary school dropout is even increasing day by day. The major part is played by failed governance styles and their irrational policies predominantly related to education and employment. Defunct policies include lack of funding assistance, policy to increase school leaving age, alternate education opportunities, provision of alternate pathways to the labor market, provision of early counseling of at-risk students, and anti-dropping-out campaigns (Ahmad, 2014). Another study indicates that the dropout youth are more likely to drop into the lot of unemployment, poverty, and deviant systems such as the criminal justice and welfare systems (Gates, 2007).

Fourali (2010) recognizes three dimensions of engagement that prevent students from dropping out. *Behavioral engagement* includes behaviors that express involvement of students in academic activities and attachment to social aspects of school, such as doing homework and assignments and participating in extracurricular activities like sports and student politics. *Emotional engagement* means students' affective response to their experiences in classes and in their school, such as whether they are happy and active or bored and lazy. *Cognitive engagement* refers to mental behaviors and the process of learning, such as working hard and expending time in academic activities.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the main part of any research activity that aims to explore and break down the primary information into more vivid categories. It is the segment that gives the readers explicable facts out of research activity. This section is devised to analyze factors predominantly social and political ones promoting primary school dropout and aids to social problems like child labor, poverty, drug addiction, and criminality. Social problems, according to the study comprised of actively present factors in individual, familial, and social life of the people of the area. Whereas, the political factors are purely related to governance and the institutional framework.



**Figure#1: Social and political factors promoting primary school dropout**

### Results and Discussions

It is a known fact that poverty is the mother of all social ills. Generally, parents in all societies of the world want to educate their children in ways that might support them in their career building. However, in a situation of poverty, they prefer to utilize their children in practices that assist them in meeting their immediate needs of finances. Consequently, children from poor families get dropped out of schools to meet familial expenses (Ahmad, 2014). Moreover, the utmost purpose of education is to ornament a student's personality so that they might get a standard job for living. Unfortunately, in Pakistani society, increasing unemployment and underemployment have lowered the trust of people in education. Consequently, people tend to engage in tiny businesses instead of waiting for jobs or shift abroad to avail livelihood opportunities and financially support their left-behind families. This creates in them a trust deficit regarding education that paves the way for the dropout of their children from schools (South, Baumer, & Lutz, 2003). In addition, the unexpected outcomes of education in terms of mental development, personality formation and change, and resilience have caused a further setback for students to continue their studies. It is worth mentioning here that the system of education in Pakistani society cannot claim effectiveness because of multiple reasons, including lack of relevance with mental growth, behavioral supremacy, and job attainment. In advanced societies, technological advancement aims to facilitate the citizens. For this purpose, research aids that find out up-to-date dimensions of various fields and their wise commercialization create new opportunities of recruitment for youth. Conversely, in Pakistani society, research in various fields is limited to the copy-and-paste process as well as commercialization worth even negligible amounts to create new employment opportunities (Ahmad, 2014). The primary data indicates that primary education is made free by the United Nations as a Millennium Development Goal, but the increasing inflation and cost of education—for instance, that of admission and examination fees, books, uniforms, and transportation charges in the case of distant schools in remote areas of Pakistan—deprive the poor students of the ability to complete their educational programs (Khan, Azhar, & Shah, 2011). Moreover, dropouts are higher in the students of low socioeconomic cohorts, predominantly because of ever-increasing inflation, unstable markets, unemployment, and low wages that hinder their ability to meet their everyday needs. They also added that the educational system in Pakistani society is comprised of multi-standards, i.e., public schools, private schools, public-private partnership schools, and international franchises. The latter three provide standard education that is approached by the prosperous people, whereas the poor people are limited to the first category because of the direct and indirect cost of education. Indeed, the public sector of schools experiences high dropouts because of the less practical and outdated curriculum, frequent cases of corporal punishment, and uncertain future security of its students (Gates, 2007). Respondents revealed the most hazardous view regarding our educational system: that the quality of education has declined tremendously because of the current trend of securing the highest grades (irrational). It is claimed that education has lost the development of behavioral and cultural aspects of human personality and has focused on earning even though illegal. With this, the students with average and below-average intelligence levels have lost their place in competition for employment opportunities with those who come from standard educational institutions. Those students therefore prefer child labor over education that cannot support them in job opportunities.

Social problems, their underlying causes, and consequences in many instances are interconnected. In the same way, primary school dropout that Pakistani society experiences is not just the outcome of personal and familial choices or school-related factors; rather, political instability and bad governance contribute a major part to it. According to the primary data, the widespread corruption in almost all institutions, predominantly in the political one, creates hurdles in the lives of ordinary people. Lack of educated leadership and their personal interests has caused disequilibrium in youth graduation and recruitment. It is a sad reality that instead of creating employment opportunities and a conducive market environment for the citizens, they always have a tug of war for personal benefits. For their vote bank and/or favoring their party members' purpose, the recruitment process in various organizations has been politicized. They provide employment opportunities to their party persons or acquaintances, or they sell the posts. This practice has seriously affected almost all the organizations of the society, including the health department, education department, police, and even judiciary. More pathetically, education is by no means the state's priority. This is evident from the comparison of funds allocated to charity programs, for instance, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), and to the education sector, which is not able to smoothly pay the teachers' salaries (Ahmad, 2014). In addition, the current study finds that the political leadership, through political interventions, has overly recruited their party members in various public organizations, including universities, hospitals, railways, and even PIA. Eventually, not only do the organizations face a serious financial loss, but also it has caused tremendous unemployment and frustration in the educated youth. Furthermore, the undue political interference in educational institutions in respect of staff recruitment, transfer, school patronage, and political activism has degraded the quality of education. The primary data also establishes that to minimize the primary school dropout, the political leadership could make sincere efforts to provide direct benefit to the families of school children through various NGOs like WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, etc. Indeed, it is a sad reality that neither of our politicians has any rational plan for the system of education and employment of the youth, nor do they intend to take any potential step for the development of the society in general and for the well-being of the youth in particular. Due to this fact, the society and its inhabitants become poorer, while every politician is getting wealthier with every passing day. Above all, the widespread lawlessness not only guards those politicians from accountability but also creates even further hurdles for the ordinary people. Such a political environment suppresses the abilities and capabilities of youth and deprives them of opportunities that they dream of. Eventually, they drop out from schools and resort to other means for securing their future, including overseas migration.

### **Conclusion**

Since education stands the tallest for career building and development, and educated people observe a more decent life than the uneducated. However, in Pakistani society, the abnormal socio-political atmosphere has lowered the public trust in education for finding employment sources. Due to this fact, a vast majority of the people deny the significance of education either by not admitting their children in schools or withdrawing them from the schools. The current study is therefore undertaken to discover the social and political factors promoting primary school dropout. The study explores that the change in public perception is mainly because of the widespread abnormalities in the socio-political environment that have changed their attitude towards education. Primarily, poverty forces poor people to withdraw their children from schools so that they may contribute to the financial needs fulfillment of the family. Moreover, the rapidly increasing population, unemployment, cost of education, and its unexpected outcomes incline poor people to withdraw their children from school and to train them for livelihood by other means. Likewise, the ineffectual educational system, accompanied by a multi-standard curriculum

with the least practicality and rational share in technological advancement, causes even further dropout. In the political context, the uneducated and less sincere political leadership, their undue intervention in educational institutions, and politicization of public recruitment have caused tremendous setbacks to meritocracy and competence. This has caused migration and brain drain in educated youth, considering its exploitation of resources. Furthermore, the attitude of the political leadership vividly shows their lack of interest in the system of education that is revealed in the allocation of funds to education, their struggle for maintaining a single-standard education system, the lack of updated policy for education and recruitment, the undue recruitment in various organizations, and the lack of their proper accountability. These factors, on the one hand, lead to school dropout and, on the other hand, increase antisocial tendencies, for instance, drug abuse, street crimes, institutional failure, and even extremism. The study recommends that there should be strict qualification criteria for the election of political leadership and that their influence from educational institutions and recruitment processes should be thoroughly eradicated.

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