# Determinants and Structure of Divergent Behavior and Dropout in Public Primary Schools: A Cross Sectional Study

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Abstract: This research aimed at investigating the determinants of divergent behavior leading to dropout of public primary schools children. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview protocols from all categories of people linked directly or indirectly with the dropouts. Poverty, the most family factor, was found as the major determinant of students' divergent behavior leading to drop out. Corollary factors were engagement of children in work with parents, learning vocational skills as apprentice or looking after the domestic affairs. Added to poverty was the lack of parents' interest in educating their children and dropouts' personal factors which included their more interest in playing and lack of interest and weakness in studies. All these factors interrelate to create a dropout syndrome. School environment lacking child friendliness was also found to be one of the factors causing dropout.

**Keywords:** divergent behavior, dropout, retention, family factors, personal factors, school factors

#### Introduction

Universal primary education became global movement with the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All, 1990. Vision of World Declaration on Education for all was reaffirmed by Dakar Framework of Action 2000. General Assembly of United Nations adopted a resolution on United Nations Millennium Declaration in September 2000. This declaration comprises eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. Number two of these goals is universal primary education.

Pakistan is one of the countries having low enrolment rate with high dropout. The Net Enrolment Rate at primary level in Pakistan was 57 percent in 2004-2009. (PSLM report 2009).

Getting children into school is a vital first step. But to achieve the goal of universal primary education, they must continue to attend classes till completion of primary level. The phenomenon of children getting themselves enrolled in schools but leaving it without completing primary level will never allow universalization of primary education. The question "What makes children quit the school before completion?" needs to be probed.

#### Focus and scope of the study

The study attempted to identify determinants of high dropout rate at primary level in Punjab. The findings could be used by the planners, policy makers, teacher educators to take measures for controlling drop out and increasing enrolment at primary level in Punjab. Other provinces and regions could also utilize the findings to improve primary education.

The objectives of the study were to:

- 1 identify the causes of dropout at primary level in Punjab.
- describe current conditions, resources, teaching practices, and instructional material used as a prelude to the development of instructional material and teacher training programs for schooling.
- 3 recommend strategies and practices to control high dropout at primary level.

#### Method

#### **Population**

Population of the study comprised all those who had knowledge and understanding of the dropout phenomenon and could analyze the reasons of dropout. Those included dropouts themselves, their parents, classmates, teachers, head teachers, Assistant Education Officers AEO, and district level educational administrators EDO/DEO/Dy. DEO.

# Sample of the Study

Sample was selected from six of the thirty six districts of Punjab. All the districts of Punjab were distributed into three clusters with respect to literacy rate i.e. districts with high, medium and low literacy rates. Two districts were selected randomly from each cluster: Rawalpindi and Lahore from high literacy rate districts, Mianwali and Hafizabad from districts with medium literacy rate and Rajanpur and Muzaffar Garh from low literacy rate districts. Forty eight schools with equal distribution by district, gender

and location (rural/urban) were selected. Students, dropouts, teachers and head teachers from the selected schools were included in the sample. Parents of dropouts were also included in the sample. All the district level officers form selected districts that were accessible on the days of data collection were included in the study.

## **Instruments for Data Collection**

Seven instruments separately for each source of information were developed. Three questionnaires were developed to identify the reasons for dropout from teachers, head teachers and students in school. Separate interview protocols were developed for dropouts, their parents, AEOs, and district administrators. All the instruments were validated through expert opinion. Questionnaires and interview protocols for dropouts and their parents were piloted and improved on the basis of feedback.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected by three teams of trained Research Assistants under the supervision of team leaders. Eighteen male and female Research Assistants who were mostly PhD students of University of Education and Punjab University and three team leaders were invited in a two days orientation workshop for data collection. The workshop resulted in agreed upon understanding of the instruments, procedure for data collection and logistics required to collect data in stipulated time. Each team collected data from two districts. Data collection teams approached district school administration and sought their help in locating schools with high dropout and data collection.

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

## Reasons of Dropout: Teachers' and Head Teachers' Views

Views of 78 teachers and 43 head teachers were elicited on 28 possible reasons of dropout inviting response on a five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Teachers and headteachers views on the dropout phenomenon were found almost similar with r=0.94. Mean values for responses of teachers, head teachers and overall (teachers and head teachers combined) were computed on each reason of dropout. All the twenty eight reasons were ranked by descending order of mean response values i.e. assigning '1' to the highest mean value indicating the most potential reason and '28'

to the lowest mean value indicating the least potential reason.

Reasons of dropout fall under three major categories i.e. family related, students' personal and school related.

## Family related factors of dropout

Table 1 presents the opinions of teachers and head teachers on family related factors of dropout in terms of mean response values and rank order out of twenty eight.

Table 1

Teachers' and Head teachers' views on family related factors of dropout

Reason for dropout		Teachers' Opinion N=78		Head Teachers' Opinion N=43		Collective Opinion T & HT N=121	
		Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
•	Uneducated parents	3.94	1	3.98	2	3.95	1
•	Poverty of parents	3.88	2	4.05	1	3.94	2
•	Lack of parents interest in the education of their children	3.86	4	3.86	3	3.86	3
•	Parents' inability to guide their children	3.87	3	3.81	4	3.85	4
•	Lack of parent-teacher coordination	3.73	6	3.77	6	3.74	6
•	Students work with parents after school time.	3.67	7	3.79	5	3.71	7

Teachers and head teachers perceived illiteracy and poverty of parents as the most prevalent reasons of drop out. They also rated all family related factors i.e. parents' lack of interest, inability to guide their children, lack of coordination with teachers and students' work with parents as the highly potential reasons for dropout.

## Personal factors of dropout

The table below presents teachers' and head teachers'

Table 2

Teachers' and Head teachers' views on students' personal factors for dropout

Reason for dropout		Teachers' Opinion N-=78		Head Teachers' Opinion N=43		Collective Opinion T' & HT N=121								
									Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
								<ul> <li>Students' excessive attention</li> </ul>						
towards recreational activities (TV,	3.74	5	3.72	7	3.74	6								
Video games) at home.														
<ul> <li>Students' inability to do</li> </ul>														
assignments (School work to be done	3.53	9	3.49	9	3.51	9								
at home)														
<ul> <li>Students' lack of interest in studies</li> </ul>	2.47	1.0	0.47	1.0	0.45	10								
	3.47	10	3.47	10	3.47	10								
<ul> <li>Students' weak intellectual</li> </ul>														
capacity.	3.33	11	3.28	12	3.31	11								
<u>F</u> <i>J</i> .														
<ul> <li>Students' excessive interest in</li> </ul>	3.22	14	3.30	11	3.25	12								
playing	3.22	14	3.30	11	3.23	12								
<ul> <li>Students' chronic health problems</li> </ul>	3.17	16	3.12	16	3.15	17								

Students' excessive interest in viewing television and playing video games was viewed as the main reason for their dropout. Other factors were weak intellectual capacity, playful nature and not doing the homework. The opinion of teachers if considered valid, lead to infer that public schools neither provide a supporting environment to the intellectually weak student nor do they make learning a joyful and attractive activity for the students resultantly children reside more in non academic recreational and play activities.

# School related factors of dropout

Following table presents views on school related factors of dropout.

Table 3

Teachers' and Head Teachers' views on school related factors of dropout

Reasons for dropout		Teachers' Opinion N=78		Head Teachers' Opinion N=43		Collective T' & HT' N=121	e Opinion
		Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
•	Non availability of teaching material necessary to make instruction interesting for students	3.53	9	3.63	8	3.56	8
•	School councils' lack of interest towards dropout of children.	3.28	13	3.14	14	3.23	13
•	Curriculum beyond the metal capacity of the students.	3.32	12	2.91	17	3.18	14
•	Lack of co-curricular activities necessary to maintain students' interest in school	3.13	16	3.23	13	3.17	15
•	Compulsory learning of English from grade one.	2.85	17	2.95	16	2.88	17
•	School far from home.	2.82	18	2.86	19	2.83	18
•	Curriculum not interesting for students	2.78	19	2.65	20	2.73	19
•	Text books not attractive for students.	2.53	21	2.56	22	2.54	21
•	Teachers lacking skills to make instruction interesting for students.	2.60	20	2.63	21	2.61	20
•	Teachers' lack of coordination with parents.	2.32	25	2.91	18	2.53	22
•	School environment not child friendly.	2.50	23	2.53	23	2.51	23
•	Teachers unaware of child psychology.	2.50	23	2.51	24	2.50	24
•	Teachers' method of teaching not interesting for children	2.37	24	2.28	26	2.34	25
•	Punishment by teachers	2.14	27	2.37	25	2.22	26
•	Teachers ignore dropout due to large class size.	2.17	26	2.19	28	2.17	27
•	Lack of teachers' attention.	2.05	28	2.19	28	2.10	28

The above table shows mean response value  $\geq 3.0$  only for four of the factors which means only four factors were endorsed by the teachers and headteachers as possible causes of dropout. These factors include lack of instructional material in schools, school councils' inefficiency to tackle the problem of droupout, curriculum beyond the mental capacity of the students and lack of cocurricular activities in schools. They consider that instructions are not child friendly due to lack of instructional material and

physical facilities.

Teachers and head teachers' responses reveal that they consider family related factors as the primary reasons for dropout. They also view personal factors as causes of dropout but they generally do not hold school related factors responsible for dropout. It appears that teachers and head teachers were putting most of the dropout blame on outside school factors.

## **Teachers' Opinion on Actual and Desired School Practices**

Teachers' opinion regarding actual and desired frequency of different school activities were sought on a five point scale with options as most often, often, moderately, some times and rarely. Mean values were computed for their responses on scales for actual and desired practices.

Table 4

Teachers' Opinion about Actual and Desired Practices in School

Activities in School	Practice	Should be
<ul> <li>Students' participation in co-curricular activities.</li> </ul>	3.27	4.47
<ul><li>Students' appreciation at success.</li></ul>	4.17	4.63
<ul><li>Students' encouragement.</li></ul>	4.5	4.74
<ul> <li>Assessing students' learning difficulties</li> </ul>	3.69	4.58
<ul> <li>Giving extra time to guide students</li> </ul>	3.19	4.19
<ul> <li>Individual attention to students.</li> </ul>	3.41	4.48
<ul> <li>Contact with the parents.</li> </ul>	3.83	4.64
<ul> <li>Use of multiple teaching methods.</li> </ul>	3.73	4.53
<ul> <li>Making instruction interesting</li> </ul>	4.12	4.62
<ul><li>Use of AV aids.</li></ul>	3.4	4.66

The above table shows teachers' belief that they encourage and appreciate students for their better performance and they try to make their instruction interesting. Teachers also believe in need for enhancing the frequency of such activities.

## Students' Perceived Reasons of Dropout

Classmates and friends better know the reasons of their friends leaving the school. Hence the enrolled students are an important source of information about dropouts. A questionnair was administered to grade IV and V students to know the

reasons for dropout and seek information about school environment. The questionnair had enlisted ten reasons for leaving school, four of those were related to family, three were personal and three were school related. Responses were invited on four options i.e. 'it is not the reason', it can be the reason', it is also a reason' and 'it is the biggest reason'. As the response options had an inherent progression of perception on a continuim, hence mean response values were computed for response values ranging from '1' to '4'. The following table presents the percentage of response frequencies on options for reasons and mean response values.

Table 5

Reasons of leaving school as percieved by classfellows

Reasons for leaving school	N	It is not the reason %	It can be a reason %	It is also a reason %	It is the biggest reason %	Mean of response value ranging 1 to 4	Rank			
Family Related Reasons										
Work with parents after school.	852	34.00	22.30	18.90	24.80	2.34	2			
Learn some vocational skill.	860	33.70	27.20	16.90	22.20	2.28	3			
Poverty of parents.	866	38.00	23.90	15.70	22.40	2.23	4			
Not getting any pocket money.	855	43.60	20.70	14.00	21.60	2.14	6			
Personal Reasons										
High interest in playing.	872	30.50	20.40	22.20	26.80	2.45	1			
Weakness in studies.	865	46.90	16.00	12.50	24.60	2.15	5			

Peers not interested in studies.	856	49.40	20.20	15.00	15.40	1.96	8			
School Related Reasons										
Punishment for not doing home work.	869	47.40	15.30	22.60	14.70	2.05	7			
No appreciation from teachers on their good work.	866	68.60	7.40	9.10	14.90	1.7	9			
Teachers not affectionate.	859	70.30	11.90	6.80	11.10	1.59	10			

Students held the dropouts themselves responsible for leaving school due to their high interest in playing. Other reasons endorsed by the students were poverty related which either forced children to work with their parents or to learn some vocational skill to support family by earning. It can be noted that family related and personal reasons are at the top with respect to their mean response value  $\geq 2.0$ , where as school related reasons are at the bottom with mean response value  $\leq 2.0$ . Main reasons of dropout as reported by the class mates of the dropouts were rooted in poverty of the parents. This perception is the same as that of teachers and head teachers.

#### Reasons for Dropout Stated by the Dropouts

Dropouts were identified from the school record and approached to know the reason for their leaving studies. A total number of 138 (77 boys and 61 girls) were interviewed. Reasons of leaving school stated by the dropouts are summarized below.

## **Poverty of Parents**

Dropouts' responses confirmed that it was poverty that forced them to leave school. Fifty out of 138 interviewees (36%) reported poverty and poverty rooted reasons for their dropout. Children reported that they left school because their parents wanted them to work for earning or to learn some vocational skill to enable them to earn as soon as possible. Some of the responses indicating poverty as reason for their dropout are as

#### below:

- "Father asked me to leave school due to poverty"
- "I left studies to sell clay pots"
- "I left school to work in a factory."
- "I left school to do labour as my parents' desired".
- "Parents wanted me to learn stitching and embroidery"
- "Father was unable to work due to accident."
- "I left school due to illness of father and poverty"
- "I left school to help my mother in working at others' houses", was a response from five of the girls who had bade farewell to their studies.
  - "Father has died, mother could not afford school so I had to leave the studies"
  - "I left school due to poverty and father's death."

### Teachers' Attitude

Second major reason for leaving school reported by dropouts was teachers' attitude towards students. Twenty five out of the 138 respondents (18%) held teachers responsible for dropout for their harsh treatment, punishment and non affectionate behavior. Students reported:

- "Teacher used to punish me"
- "Teachers did not pay attention to the students"
- "Teachers were very strict and did not pay attention"
- "Teachers used to punish and teaching was poor, students did not follow his teaching."
  - "Teacher insulted me and sent me home, so I left forever"

## **Household Responsibility**

Some of the girls reported that they had to leave school to do household due to illness of their mothers or assist in household for other reasons.

- "I left school as mother was ill."
- "I had to leave school to do household as my mother was ill."
- "I have to look after my home due to the illness of mother"

"As my father and mother both go to do labor so I have to look after my younger siblings."

## **Social norms**

Twenty three of the 61 respondent (37.7%) girls left school because their parents or elder brothers did not allow them to get education. Some of the responses were:

"Mother said girls should learn stitching and other household", said two girls.

"Brother did not allow me to carry on my studies"

"I have step father, mother asked me to get religious education."

"Parents were of the view that as I was maturing so I should stay at home."

"They don't like female to get education."

#### Lack of interest in studies

Many of the dropouts (20) left school because they were not interested in studies. Some of the related responses were:

"I am not interested in studies, I like playing. My parents are illiterate so they do not ask me to carry on studies."

"I had no interest in studies, teacher used to teach but I was unable to understand"

"I was not interested in studies, I used to escape from school and teachers had no control"

"I have no interest in education although I know its importance"

# Other reasons stated by dropouts

Other reasons reported by the dropouts were, shifting them to religious education, school at a long distance in case of girls, failing in examination and physical disability.

"My parents wanted me to learn Quraan by heart and get religious education" was reported by five dropouts.

"I left school as it was away from my home."

"It was difficult to cross trunk road to go to school"

"I left school as my family has enmity with another family.

"Others hurt me by calling me a failed one"

"I am a bit hard of hearing so I was unable to follow my teachers".

## Parents' and Teachers' Reaction on Leaving the School

A large proportion (46) out of the 138 dropouts reported that their parents asked them to continue study. Thirty five dropouts reported that they left school on parents' advice or with their consent. A majority of the teachers (60%) advised dropouts not to leave the school.

A reasonable number of dropouts, more than 30% reported that their teachers did not bother on their leaving the school. Some of the children said that their teachers discouraged them. Teachers' discouraging remarks included:

"Dull students like you cannot study"

"My teacher taunted me and labeled me as dull"

## Reasons for Dropout: Parents' Perspective

Parents have the first hand knowledge of the activities of their children. They know better why their children were unable to continue studies. One hundred thirty three parents of dropouts were interviewed to know why children leave studies. Fifty nine percent of the parents said that their children left the school with their consent. They stated following reasons for the dropout of their children from school.

## Poverty as the major reason for dropout

A large proportion of interviewed parents (36%) confirmed that their children could not continue studies due to poverty. They wanted them to work for earning or learn some skill to be able to earn.

"Poverty does not allow us to keep our children in school" was a clear cut response from 30 parents."

A mother whose daughter had left school reported, "Father of the girl is ill, we have no source of income so we are very poor".

Another mother reported, "Her father has died, we cannot afford. Moreover she is weak in studies."

"We are poor, my youngest child is ill, his treatment is more necessary"

"She left school due to poverty. Now she sells clay pots with me."

## Teachers' inability to maintain child's interest in learning.

The second main reason for dropout emerged from parents' responses was teachers' inability to maintain students' interest in studies. Twenty (15%) parents held the teachers responsible for their children's dropout. Parents reported that:

"Teachers did not pay attention" was reported by nine parents.

"Teachers used to punish my child so he left school."

"Teachers used to punish him, so my child had learnt escaping from school and eventually he left studies"

## Playful nature and low mental ability of children

Parents reported that their children had to leave studies due to their playful nature and deficiency in studies. They consider their children were not intelligent enough to carry on studies without teachers' punishment.

Parents reported that they wanted their children to carry on studies but children were not interested at all. Examples of parents responses are:

"He had no interest in studies" was reported by nine parents.

"She had no interest in studies".

"He had no interest in studies due to bad company"

"He used to escape from school as he was not intelligent enough to follow the lessons."

"He was unable to understand lesson"

# Other reasons stated by parents

Some of the mothers (8 out of 61) reported that their daughters were not allowed by their brothers or fathers because girls were grown up.

"She is grown up. So brother does not allow her to go out of home" was reported by three mothers.

"Father does not allow" was a response of four mothers.

"She is growing up so she should stay at home" was a response of one mother.

Some boys and girls (six) had to leave studies due to illness. One of the mother reported that her daughter could not continue studies due to some mysterious ailment/possession by sprites called 'Saya' in Punjabi.

Some of the boys and girls left school to get religious education and memorize Holy Quran. A father reported that his son had to quit studies due to tribal enmity. He said that he could not take the security risk of his son.

## Reasons for Dropout: EDO/DEOs Perspective

Eleven Executive District Officers (EDOs) and District Education Officers of the sampled districts were interviewed to know their opinions about the phenomenon of dropout at primary level.

Almost all of the senior district officers were of the view that **poverty** was the major reason for dropout at primary level. Majority of the officers i.e. six out of eleven held the parents responsible for the dropout of children due to their **illiteracy and ignorance the corollaries of poverty.** Parents' **lack of interest in the education of their children** promotes disinterest among children for studies that eventually results in dropout. Some (three out of eleven) of the district heads of educational administration were of the view that **teachers' non friendly behavior and corporal punishment** to students was also a reason for dropout at elementary level. One of the officers considered the curriculum neglecting interests of the students a source of disinterest among children for studies. One of the interviewees was of the opinion, 'School environment **lacking basic facilities for young children** is a reason for dropout'. One of the officers asserted that **lack of interaction between parents and teachers** was one of the causes for dropout at primary level. **Distance from school especially in case of girls students** was assumed to be a potential reason for dropout.

#### **AEOs' Views about Dropout**

The Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) who are at the first level of school administration at district level believed that accurate data on dropout rate was not available. They estimated a higher dropout rate in rural area schools as compared with urban areas.

Eight out of ten (80%) AEOs reported poverty as the biggest reason for dropout.

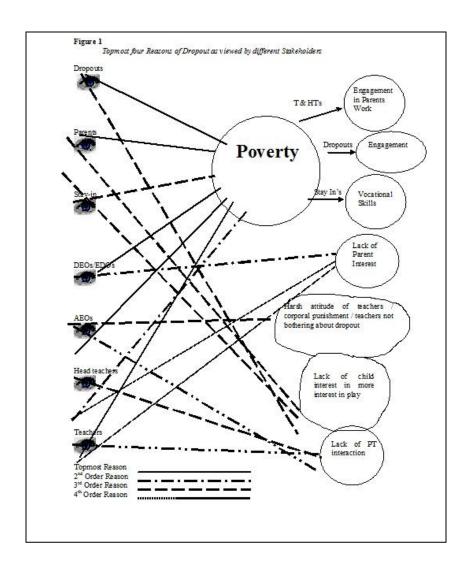
AEOs also indicated the following reasons for dropout at primary level:

- 1) Shortage of teachers which leads to lack of individualized attention to students.
  - 2) Poor physical facilities in primary schools.
  - 3) Lack of interaction between teachers and parents.
  - 4) Teachers not concerned for dropout.

#### **Conclusions**

On the basis of triangulation of data from various sources it is concluded that:

- 1. Poverty was envisioned, by all the stakeholders, as the leading force behind student dropouts. Its corollary factors were children's engagement in earning activities and the households.
- Girl child still has to face additional deterrents of conservative attitude of family members particularly father/ brother towards girls' education and girls' going outside the home. Girls also have to assist their mothers in households and rearing of siblings.
- 3. In-school factors leading to dropout include at top the unfavorable and unfriendly attitude of teachers to the extent of inflicting corporal punishment. These views were expressed by the dropouts, their parents and District School Administrators, Teachers and Head Teachers did not mention these factors.
- 4. The school personnel, teachers and head teachers, and AEOs considered lack of parent-teachers interaction as one the topmost four reasons of dropouts. They also mentioned the irrelevant school curriculum, and lack of instructional material contributing to dropout.



#### Discussion

There is almost a consensus among the players and participants of primary education about poverty being the leading force behind student dropout demonstrated in the form of parents' incapacity to finance children's education, engage them as earning hands or supporting households etc. The poverty factor is further aggravated by illiteracy and ignorance of the parents.

Other reasons for dropout were perceived differently by the different stakeholders. The second most important reason mentioned by the dropouts and their parents was the harsh attitude of teachers exhibited in the form of simple neglect of low achievers to their corporal punishment. It was supported by DEOs and AEOs but not by the teachers themselves The Government of the Punjab has placed ban on corporal punishment in government schools in 2005 ( Order No:PS/SS(S)/Misc./2005/127 cited in Plan Pakistan and Govt. of the Punjab, 2005) and propagated the slogan of 'Maar Nahin Piar' ( love and not punishment). But, a recent study (Plan Pakistan and Govt. of the Punjab, 2009) has found that corporal punishment is experienced by more than 90% of the students of government schools. Earlier Govt. of NWFP, UNICEF and Save the Childern (2005) brought forth similar findings about schools in NWFP, now KPK province.

Teachers and Head Teachers mentioned the lack of parent teacher interaction, irrelevant school curriculum and lack of instructional material as some of the important factors of dropout. The dropouts and their parents did not mention these factors. It is assumed that poverty stricken illiterate parents and the children do not have perception of a good school environment other than the kind behavior of teachers. All these factors fall within knowledge and power realm of the school personnel.

One of the most important factors which came into the limelight from interviewing girl dropouts was the holding of social norms of either restricting the adolescent and young girls within four walls of the house or preferring for them the learning of households over school education. This shows that many parents still view formal education either useless or harmful for girls. This is an alarming situation in the biggest province of the country.

In a society with such traits the role of school, other educational institutions and law makers becomes of paramount importance. Cross cultural research has vividly

in less developed societies as compared with the industrialized ones. Our social and educational landscape warrants a proactive role of teachers and head teachers to optimize the available facilities to provide a gratifying and joyful learning environment by internalizing the slogan 'love and not punishment" and valuing each child as a national asset not to be neglected and wasted.

#### Recommendations

Findings of the study lead to recommend that:

- 1 Free compulsory primary education is the umbrella solution to the dropout factor. Under the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan education up to secondary level has been declared as the basic right of every one. The state should take necessary measures to respond to its duty at the earliest.
- 2. Not only the education be made compulsory, the school environment should be child friendly for proper development of intellect and personality of the child. Need based curriculum, minimum requisite facilities and instructional material should be provided and used properly. Most important of all, the teachers should be trained to adopt friendly and supportive attitude to refrain from corporal punishment and use alternative behavior modification strategies. The schools should open their doors to the society and should educate the illiterate parents about the worth of education for boys as well as for girls. Government and civil society organizations should also contribute to the awareness campaign.
- The Government of Pakistan should take necessary measures to amend the law relating to disciplining children (Section 89 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860).

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