

Caste, Costs and Educational Access in Rural Punjab

Tayyaba Tamim

Lahore School of Economics, Pakistan

dr.tayyaba.tamim@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is based on some key findings of an original research carried out to explore the issue of inequitable access to education within caste-based social structures in rural Punjab, Pakistan. Data from 36 interviews with low and high caste parents, school heads and four key informant focus groups in two villages in southern and central Punjab revealed that schooling costs remained difficult to manage for the poorest low-castes despite provision of government sponsored free schools. Bourdieu's social critical framework used with specific reference to his notion of capitals reveals processes of social reproduction. The economic capital transubstantiates into social and cultural capital, refracting into schooling costs that are not just economic but also temporal, psychological and social for the lowest caste groups. This limits the impact of economic subsidies offered by the government for expanding educational access. The paper contributes to the current literature by arguing that policies aimed at equitable educational access must conceptualize educational costs as multidimensional, just as poverty itself is not just economic but multifaceted.

Keywords: Bourdieu capitals, caste, inequality, rural, school access

Introduction

Inequality in educational access remains a challenge in several South Asian countries with rural poor who are among the most disadvantaged (Millennium Development Goals (2015). Concerns about unequal distribution of educational opportunity drive the Sustainable Development Goal 4 -2030 with its clear emphasis on inclusivity and equity in the provision of quality education (Global Education Monitoring Report (2017). Although the primary focus of SDG-4 is on gender parity, the report acknowledges that location and wealth are two key dimensions that merit close monitoring. The GEM report states that compared to hundred

percent of children in high-income countries completing lower secondary school, only 54% of the lower middle-income countries and 14 % in low-income countries complete school at this level. More importantly, the report reveals that “household surveys do not capture many vulnerable populations...around 250 million people worldwide are excluded...and a further 100 million are under-represented in the country based data sets” (GEM Report (2017. p 2).

This means that a significant number of marginalized communities may not only remain excluded from education, but also evade detection in numerical estimations of country- based averages. The issue of inequitable educational access may at times rigidly persist despite provision of schools and economic subsidies in education for the poor. More often than not, this problem is common where schools are embedded in contexts of wider social inequalities. One such dimension of inequality, relevant to several regions of South Asia, is the class/caste nexus that triggers intergenerational marginalization of certain groups on the basis of their social identity (Alavi, 1971; Das, 2006; Gazdar, 2007).

Caste based discrimination historically operates in the culture of several countries of South Asia, especially Nepal, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. With the spread of education and wider economic opportunities, while some countries like Japan have been able to challenge such discrimination, it remains firmly entrenched in several other contexts. Caste is an inherited social identity that denotes group affiliation. Based on kinship, culture, bloodline and/ or religion, it links up with the positioning of the group in a functional occupational hierarchy in the social structure. With roots in class-based difference, caste draws legitimacy from culture, and/or religion to justify discriminatory practices against social exclusion of certain groups (Gazdar & Mallah, 2012).

Research reveals that low-castes in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan own fewer assets, have limited access to resources and are trapped in intergenerational poverty (Kabeer, 2006). Caste-based discrimination is well recognized in India, where affirmative policies attempt to address the issue. Now, a growing body of research also explores its relationship to educational access and learning outcomes (Rawal & Kingdon, 2010). However, in Pakistan, caste based discrimination, though observed in several parts of the country, is adamantly dismissed under the assumption that the prevailing Islamic egalitarian ideology rules out any such

possibility (Gazdar, 2007). Hence, caste in Pakistan has merited little attention in policy and research, with the exception of a few studies (Alavi, 2001; Gazdar & Mallah, 2012). Only a handful of studies explore the relationship between caste and education (Jacoby & Mansuri, 2011; Karachiwala, 2013; Tamim & Tariq, 2015), which otherwise remain largely under investigated.

This paper contributes to the current literature by exploring the comparative nature of schooling costs facing low and high caste households in two villages in Punjab, Pakistan. It addresses two interrelated questions:

1. What is the nature of costs faced by low-caste parents?
2. Are these costs similar or different from those faced by high caste parents?

Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical construct of capital is used to analyze the results. The paper focuses only on similar themes across both villages and any differences including those related to gender are beyond its scope. The paper also limits itself to an exploration of the nature of schooling costs without taking into account other variables that might be at work or details of the differential response to educational costs. The arguments concentrate on the costs faced by low-caste households with only brief comparative reference to high caste groups to sharpen the focus of this paper. The generalizability of the findings is limited because of the study design. Nonetheless, these provide valuable insights into the issue for informed policies to expand educational access. The paper proceeds with an overview of literature. It then presents the theoretical framework of the study and its methodology. Later, following contextual information, the findings are discussed and concluded.

Literature Review

Education and costs

The economic costs of schooling have received a lot of attention from policy makers and researchers to make education accessible for the poor. Research has shown that economic variables, child poverty and the structure of economic market lead to low schooling enrollment and absenteeism especially at primary level (Jensen & Nielsen, 1997; Zhang 2003). Later, this also negatively affects transition to secondary school (Siddhu, 2011). Analysis of data from Uttar

Pradesh and Bihar, two northern Indian states, provide evidence that child labor and schooling costs are negatively related to school enrollments (Hazarika & Bedi, 2006). Research in multiple African countries also highlights the significant role of educational costs in low schooling enrollments (Castro-Leal, Dayton, Demery & Mehra, 1999). The same pattern emerges in Pakistani context, where household assets and economic structure are found to be co-related with schooling enrollments (Sawada & Lokshin, 2001). Another study suggests that low-cost private schools increase educational access for the poor, while reducing financial liability of the government (Andrabi, Das & Khawaja, 2005).

Strong evidence of the importance of economic costs of education has led to several initiatives across the globe to subsidize educational costs for the poor, like voucher schemes, waiving of fees and provision of free books. Although this has helped in expanding educational enrollments and retention generally, success in relation to historically marginalized groups have been limited. Castro-Leal, Dayton, Demery, Mehra (1999) concluded from their study that those who benefited from educational subsidies were relatively better off and not the poorest. They argue that although schooling costs are a major impediment to educational access, adjusting subsidized programs may not resolve the problem because it is only one of the several constraints faced by the poor.

Dreze and Kingdon (2001) found in their study that social background, parental education, school infrastructure, teacher postings and mid-day meals at school affected educational access. Others identified schooling distance, gender (Siddhu, 2011) and family size (Patrinos & Psacharopoulos, 1997) as influencing variables. In Indian context, caste also emerged as an important intervening variable affecting educational access and learning outcomes (see Rawal & Kingdon, 2010). In the few studies in Pakistani context, the role of caste in educational access emerged as significant. A quantitative study by Jacoby and Mansuri (2011) showed that schooling enrollments of low-caste girls dropped if they had to cross over to high caste settlements to attend school. Karachiwala (2013) also explored the link between caste and educational achievements quantitatively, but the results remained inconclusive because of issues in research design. Another study in the rural context, using qualitative methodology revealed subtle but potent processes of social exclusion of the low-caste groups from educational opportunity (Tamim & Tariq, 2015).

While these studies enrich our understanding of the role of educational costs, caste and other factors affecting educational access, none of these touch upon the issue of comparative schooling costs in relation to caste in a rural context. Also, these studies oversimplify the construct of schooling costs by conceptualizing them narrowly in economic terms only. As such, they add little to our understanding of the nature of cost itself. This paper contributes to the current literature by conceptualizing costs as multidimensional based on the premise that poverty also is best conceptualized as multifaceted and not just in economic terms. The paper limits its discussion to caste and education. Other variables, for example gender and parental education in schooling enrollment are beyond its scope of discussion.

Theoretical framework: Capitals caste and education

Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes that the notion of capitals is central to the understanding of social structure. He argues that it is the unequal distribution of capitals that cluster individuals in relative positions of power in a hierarchical social space. Capitals are a “potential resource for profit, which are accumulated over time with a tendency to reproduce themselves in identical or expanded form” (p. 242). The basic forms of capitals: economic, cultural and social, Bourdieu (1977a) argues, sustain each other; however, it is the economic capital that forms an essentially shared base. Hence, all other capitals are a transubstantiation of economic capital and are also convertible into it. Nevertheless, the cultural and social capitals work most powerfully to the advantage of the privileged when their link with economic capital remains hidden (Bourdieu, 1977a; 1986). This leads to misrecognition of the superiority of the dominating as natural and their privilege as common sense. Hence, the triggering of symbolic violence that minimizes the chance that the authority of the privileged will ever be challenged.

The institutionalized shape taken up by the capitals legitimize the symbolic violence. As such, economic capital may emerge as property rights; cultural capital as educational qualifications; and social capital as nobility or group titles among other forms when institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986). The accumulation, maintenance or restructuring of capitals lies at the core of the struggle in the social space which involves following its norms to justify group membership, maintain its distinction and guard group boundaries (Bourdieu, 1977a).

Caste titles, I argue, as institutionalized social capital, also assume the form

of symbolic capital because of the symbolic value they assume over the time. This allows them to consecrate class based group differences and generate misrecognition that the permeable class boundaries are absolute and insurmountable. As such, they serve a dual purpose. First, they emphasize collectivism and legitimize group authority over the individuals, demanding conformity to group norms in exchange for affirming group membership. Second, deriving their validity from their historicity or time lag, caste titles attempt to maintain the intergroup power hierarchy. They remind everyone of their relative positioning in the social hierarchy and the distances that must be kept. They thus attempt to insulate social order from change, even when a group might have lost its distinctive capitals or others might have restructured their capitals. In this way, while caste cuts across class given the historical division of labor on which it is based, it sustains itself beyond it, grounded in historically persistent and culturally embedded relative relationships of power. Nevertheless, this cultural script needs not be seen as static, but as an evolving process, albeit slow, connected to economic structural change.

Educational institutions embedded within the given sociocultural context are not immune to the prevalent social prejudices. Rather, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977b) argue that schools become complicit in the reproduction of the social order by upholding the cultural capital of the dominant as a norm. Against this norm, the dominated may be deselected by institutions (via admission tests) for not coming up to merit or stand out as an aberration, if they enter, for lacking talent (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b; Reay, 2001). Bourdieu (1986) argues that what is classified as talent, is misrecognition of the link between economic and cultural capital mediated through time. It is a product of investment of time of the parents, children and their cultural capital and economic capital that allows them to buy free time of others. This understanding allows one to break away from the common sense assumption that academic success is the result of mere natural ability (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977b). The school triggers symbolic violence when it labels the disadvantaged children as uneducable, no brainers coercing them to believe and accept that their failure is a result of their own lack of talent, which is natural and absolute. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977b) emphasize that this often leads to the self- deselection of the disadvantaged from education, paving the path for social reproduction. Nevertheless, the very fact that the structures are re-produced, offers a possibility of change.

Methodology

The study used multiple case study design with two villages (each as a case study). A qualitative methodology was used for in-depth insights of the social processes at work, affecting differential educational access.

Sample

The two villages from Central and Southern Punjab (District Faisalabad and Southern Punjab respectively) were purposively chosen on the basis of lowest school enrollments and heterogeneity in terms of caste. Using the representative sample of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2007-2008) available from the Punjab Bureau of Statistics, Pakistan, the households were grouped into: a) high castes; b) service castes; and c) menial labour castes (Gazdar, 2007). This categorization was based on: a) land ownership; b) income; and assets (Gazdar & Mallah, 2012) and c) their social positioning affirmed in key informant focus group interviews in the field. Only the highest and lowest castes were selected for comparative analysis. Sixteen households were chosen in each village for comparative study with equal number of high and low-caste households. An additional criterion was the presence of a child of school going age. Thirty-six individual interviews were conducted with both parents, heads of schools (private and public in each village) along with four key informant focus group interviews (two in each village segregated by gender).

In each site, the village head was approached for support in arranging two focus group interviews (male and female) comprising six to seven members. The aim of the focus group was to initiate oneself with the prevalent caste based social hierarchy and accompanying cultural norms. This also helped in reaffirming our purposive sample.

Instrument

The data collection was through structured individual and focus group interviews. The interview protocol explored three main dimensions: a) demographic details; b) perceptions of the social positioning of the households; and c) choices made for the schooling of children and factors affecting them. The interviews were conducted in local languages of the participants and were recorded. All the participants were explained the purpose of the research and their consent was taken.

Data analysis

Interview data were fully transcribed in the local language so as to minimize the issues of translation, which nevertheless was done to describe the data at later stages. Constant comparative method was used in the analysis (Strauss & Juliet, 1998). Each interview was individually coded and then compared with other interviews and field notes using detailed matrices. This involved several cycles of categorizing and recoding the data to arrive at emerging themes. These were then analyzed with reference to Pierre Bourdieu's social critical theory for insights into the dynamics of class/ caste nexus at work in the given sociocultural context in relation to schooling costs for this paper. Pseudonyms have been used in place of real names of the participants for ethical reasons. This paper concerns itself with only similar themes related to costs across both villages related to educational access and more specifically on educational costs faced by the low castes with brief comparisons to the costs faced by high caste households. The findings have limited generalizability, but these offer important insights for research and policy.

The context

Pakistan is an agricultural country, with 19.53 percent of GDP and 42.3 percent of its employment coming from agriculture (Economic Survey Report, 2016-2017). Sixty percent of its population is rural, which also forms the bulk of its poor (ibid.). Of the total 38.8 % suffering from multidimensional poverty in Pakistan, 54.6% live in acute poverty in rural areas as compared to only 9.4% in urban parts (Multidimensional Poverty in Pakistan Report, 2016). The school dropout rate at 50% retention makes it a major issue (Economic Survey Report, 2015-2016). According to Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM 2014-2015), the most common three reasons given by households for school drop outs and not sending the child to school was children's lack of motivation, schooling cost and parental decision (unexplained factors).

The village in district Bahawalpur was defined by large agricultural lands concentrated in the hands of few high castes. This was true of the village in Faisalabad also, though landholdings here were much smaller, forcing the high castes to seek other jobs in the city. Nevertheless, the historicity of landownership was a mark of high castes. High castes in Bahawalpur, Jatts and Gorayas with their sub castes, Cheema, Deol, and Kahloon and in Faisalabad, Kamboh, Rajput, Gujjar, Arain,

and Jatt were historically privileged in the volume and structure of the capitals they possessed. They were economically strong with landholdings, assets and unrivaled in political power as permanent members of the Panchayat (the village decision making body) and their presence in the local government.

In contrast, the menial labour/ low castes in Bahawalpur: Meerzadey, Jam, Taheem, Paoli, Masihi and in Faisalabad, Muslim Sheikh/ Mussalis, Masihi, Badu, Faqir, Machi, Ansari, and the nomadic Phuwar/ Qalandar were inter-generationally poor. With the exception of one household they were either stranded in their traditionally ascribed occupations or engaged in menial daily wage labor now available with the spread of cities, services and industrial activities. Nevertheless, some signs of change were apparent, for example, a member of Masih household though engaged in traditional occupation of cleaning, now worked at the village hospital at a higher salary; while his eldest child was now a peon at a bank after completing secondary school. A major exception was a Meerzada household that had undergone socioeconomic mobility because of the remittances they received from a household member who had found employment in the Gulf. This household now claimed a higher caste title and followed high caste trends, which is not discussed with low castes in this paper. The low caste parents were uneducated with the exception of one Masih mother (primary school dropout). None of the low castes had legal papers of the houses they claimed to be their own; while the most stigmatized and poorest low castes were living on the outskirts of the village. The low-castes had no voice in the village, beyond their own specific community and the decision of the panchayat was almost always the final. Typically, the low-castes had much larger families, with 6-8 children and other extended family members also living under the same roof.

Schools, both private and public were operational in the villages. There were at least two government (primary to higher secondary level) schools and several private schools (higher secondary level only in Faisalabad) in both villages. The government schools had trained teachers and offered free education, though examination and computer fee [each around PKR 20-30 less than US \$ 1] was payable. The private schools were unanimously considered better in terms of resources and teaching/ learning outcomes, though the teachers were less qualified. The latter charged a monthly fee ranging from PKR 500- 1500 (US \$ 5 – 15). The high caste households sent all their children to private school when the option was

available, while the low-caste households sent their child to government schools if they chose to engage with school. The only exception here was a Masih household in Faisalabad, who were sending their children to their own community school. The poorest and the most stigmatized castes did not send their children to school at all.

Findings

The findings reveal that the nature of costs of schooling was not just economic, but multidimensional: economical, temporal, psychological and social. In addition, the costs multiplied in correspondence to the low status of the caste and decreased with the higher caste status.

Economic costs

The economic cost of schooling (private or government) was easily affordable by high castes. In contrast, the low-castes struggled with the economic costs of even government-run schools, despite the economic subsidies being in place. They still found it difficult to afford the financial costs of uniforms, shoes, notebooks and stationary, which came to a considerable sum when estimated for 6-8 children they had. Qulsoom, a low caste mother from Bhawalpur explained:

“If my children are young, and I have food and I earn a few hundred or a thousand rupee, then I would want my children to get education. If I have no clothes and food to eat, then how will I provide education to my kids?”

The Heads of schools also explained this as the main reason why low-caste children were either not in school or dropped out. The finding validates the emphasis of policy makers and researchers on lowering economic costs of education for expanding enrollments (Hazarika & Bedi, 2006; Jensen & Neisen, 1997; Sawada & Lokshin, 2001; Zhang, 2003). The issue of economic costs runs through the discourse of all low caste households, except a Masih family which received additional support in their community school to mitigate economic costs. The assertion that low-fee private school increased educational access for the poor (Andrabi, Das & Khawaja, 2005) might be true for the relatively better off, but these remained beyond the reach of the poorest low-castes in this context. This also affirms the significance placed on economic capital in Bourdieu’s theory (1986),

further discussed in the cumulative argument of this paper.

Time costs

Schools demanded investment of time: precious daytime around a yearly calendar, not to mention after school study hours. The high-caste households could easily meet time cost of schooling, since their children had time free from the economic necessity to work (Bourdieu, 1977a). In contrast, the low-caste households were time poor. Meeting basic needs sapped up the time of adults and children alike in low caste households. The demand on their time intensified in harvest season, when all hands were needed in the fields. As low-caste children were pulled out of school for almost two weeks at a time and schools proceeded with their temporal regimes, the time costs swelled for the low caste households. Their children already lagging behind academically with little support from their illiterate parents, frequently repeated grades. Amjad, a low caste parent, not sending his children to school, explained:

“Those who have time go to school, we don’t have the time...we are poor people...those who have time send their children to school...we don’t have time...if we had time we would.”

This confirms the findings that school enrollment is correlated with pressures of child labor (Hazarika & Bedi, 2006), but time itself as a cost factor has drawn little attention in these. Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes the pivotal role that time plays in maintaining differential positioning of relative power. It is the time lag that puts the low caste children at a disadvantage and gives a head start to the high caste children. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977b) argue that talent itself is a product of the investment of time. By virtue of being able to buy labor time of others, the dominant gains the surplus time to invest in their own cultural capital, while the dominated sell their time for economic necessity. Hence, the latter suffer from negative or wasted time, when they actually need more time to be at par with others (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, the time costs keep rising for the low caste children as they lag behind others.

Psychological costs

The psychological and affective costs of schooling were unique only to

low-caste households, with the exception of one Masih household that sent children to their own community school. The low caste children with uneducated parents, suffering from poverty and work pressures, found it difficult to survive in schools. More often than not, the teachers labelled these children as uneducable, ‘no brains [zahn nahi hei],’ constructing a psychological cost for them that often resulted in their dropping out of school. Zubeida explained as her child, a primary school dropout, sat next to her:

“He does not have the brains...He went to school for three years ... but could not even read a line ... I kept asking the teachers to pay attention to the child, but they said he had no brains...they tried... He also cried a lot and said he did not want to go to school. He said the teachers thrashed him. Then we pulled him out of school and now he is learning work at a bicycle shop.”

The psychological cost for low caste households also builds up if the school was in a high caste settlement. Almost always when low caste children had to cross over to high caste settlements to attend a higher grade of school, they reported drop outs. This confirms the findings that crossing the boundaries of a settlement led to low caste children to drop outs (Jacoby & Mansori, 2011). I interpret that this as an effect of social distance rather than physical distance, a psychological cost of cultural transgression. An example in this regard could also be the most stigmatized, spatially excluded poorest castes, who treated like untouchables, never engaged with schools.

The psychological costs of schooling have been under addressed in South Asian literature with relevance to schooling access, while this has been discussed with reference to schooling choices in western context (Reay, 2001). Nonetheless, it has not been conceptualized as a cost. One could argue that the lack of child motivation and in parents’ refusal to send the children to school reported in PSLM (2014-2015) could be a hint of psychological costs involved. Bourdieu’s (1986) construct of symbolic violence unleashed by schools in labelling of the dominated as uneducable explains the psychological cost faced by low caste children. As schools value the cultural capital of the dominant, they legitimize the misrecognition that the failure of the low caste children is the result of their own lack of ability. This

makes the dominance of the privileged as much a common sense, as their own lack of it, concealing the time mediated role of economic and cultural capital at play in the field of education.

Social costs

The social costs of schooling were only relevant to the poorest and most stigmatized low-castes. While sending children to school was a high caste norm, the reverse was true of the most stigmatized. Hence, if the former sent the children to school, they strengthened their social capital, but when the latter chose to engage with schools, they faced the cost of being ostracized. Nazir, a Qalander from Faisalabad commented:

“We don’t send our children to school. It is not our norm. If a girl goes to school, people will say look that girl goes to school. Times are bad ‘zamana kharaab hai.’ We have them learn Quran. We don’t study in schools.”

Another low caste parent narrated an incidence when a Jam household sent their child to school, setting off resentful gossip in the community. The child was eventually withdrawn from school when a community elder sternly reminded the household that the group norm of not sending the child had to be observed. However, the lesser-stigmatized low caste groups did not have this self-deselection norm. Hence, the social cost of education did not apply to them.

Membership of certain social groups has been identified as a variable in schooling access (Dreze & Kingdon, 2011; Tamim & Tariq, 2015); however, the loss of social capital has not been interpreted as a cost of schooling. Bourdieu (1986) explains that abiding by group norms is crucial to claim group membership because the performance of group norms is what distinguishes social groups from each other. The high caste households only affirmed their group membership and gained the social capital institutionalized in their caste title by sending their children to school. The comparatively better off low caste groups attempted to emulate this high caste norm in their struggle for a higher social positioning. In contrast, the most stigmatized caste groups deselected themselves from education with the norm of not sending their children. Bourdieu (1977 a) argues that self-deselection from education is the product of despair and hopelessness. This could also be seen as

conformity to the given social order and the social distance they were expected to observe. Hence, sending children to school was viewed as a deviance from the group norm, a social cost that could not be afforded.

Conclusion

This paper explored the comparative nature of costs facing high and low castes, based on the theoretical assumption that costs though linked with economic capital are multidimensional. The study affirms the results of previous research regarding the significance of economic costs in determining educational access. It also confirms the importance of other intervening factors suggested by many studies, for example, family size and social background, while drawing attention to the psychological and temporal factors at work, the latter under researched in Asian context with reference to schooling access and retention. The key contribution of this paper lies in reinterpreting and capturing these different factors as integrated processes consolidated in the construct of educational costs. Thus, a more complex understanding of the construct of cost itself is offered; the dimensions of which may be variable in different contexts for different groups.

Bourdieu's (1986) theory reveals the interplay of different capitals: social economic and cultural in the field of education. The economic capital refracts into social, temporal and psychological costs of education as it intersects with the class/caste nexus. To make matters worse, the findings reveal that these time-mediated costs multiplied with the increasing stigma and poverty of the low caste households and decreased with the higher status of the caste. Nevertheless, evidence showed that these costs could be minimized with communal support to the extent that schooling became affordable as in the case of Masih households in Faisalabad. Bourdieu's theory explains the role of schools in building up the psychological costs for low caste children by unleashing symbolic violence using the tool of time as a structural tool. Bourdieu (1997a) argues that when economists conceptualize only the economic costs of schooling, they fail to account for the investments of different capitals that provide differential access to and profits in education.

The paper endorses the argument that mere educational subsidies may not help in expanding enrollments (Castro-Leal, et. al., 1999), because it is only one aspect of schooling cost. Once the multidimensional nature of schooling costs is conceptualized, specific schooling costs for the marginalized in a given context

may be identified and addressed separately. In this particular context, the study suggested that more needs to be done regarding the economic subsidies being offered. Additionally, more inclusive economic opportunities should be available for the marginalized that may reduce their dependency in agriculture. For example, it may help to involve the low-caste poor in school related businesses like making of uniforms, notebooks or shoes and other commodity. In addition, it might help when literacy and learning a skill are not presented as options, but as simultaneous processes with schools offering vocational education also.

Similarly, re-negotiating the temporal structure of the school to meet local needs could help and / or regular remedial classes for the marginalized and could reduce the temporal and psychological ones. Government support for community based schools, or inclusive opportunities for low caste teachers in government schools could also help with psychological costs. Lastly, it is crucial to sensitize the teachers both in pre-service and in-service programs, regarding the struggles faced by low caste households, their own prejudices and taken for granted beliefs and assumptions that influence their teaching practices. The findings though not generalizable, offer an understanding of schooling costs as much more than just economic, varying across different social groups in the same sociocultural context.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the funding and support extended by Lahore School of Economics and the World Bank for this research. I would also like to thank Dr Shahid Amjad, Rector and Dr Hamid Director Centre of Research in Economics and Business, Lahore School of Economics for their strong support for this research and Ms. Hana Tariq for her valuable assistance in the process. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Dr Dhushyant and Mr Rehan Jamil from World Bank in conducting this research.

References

- Alavi, H. (1971). The politics of dependence: A village in West Punjab. *South Asian Review*, 4(2), 111–128.
- Alavi, H. (2001). The two biradiris: Kinship in rural West Punjab. In: T.N. Madan (Ed.), *Muslim communities of South Asia: Culture, society and power* (3rd ed), (pp. 1-16). New Delhi: Manohar.
- Andrabi, T., Das, J., & Khwaja, I. A. (2005). Private schooling: Limits and possibilities.

- Retrieved from https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/akhwaja/papers/PrivateSchool_d_Final_Nov5.pdf
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In: J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977a). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977b). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. California: Sage.
- Castro-Leal, F., Dayton, J., Demery, L., & Mehra, K. (1999). Public social spending in Africa: Do the poor benefit? *World Bank Research Observer*, 14(1), 49-72. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/14.1.49>
- Das, M., B. (2006). Do traditional axes of exclusion affect labor market outcomes in India? *Social Development Paper, No. 97, South Asia Series*. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Gazdar, H., & Mallah, H. B. (2012). Class, caste and housing in rural Pakistani Punjab: The untold story of the five marla scheme. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 46(3), 311-336.
- Gazdar, H. (2007). Class, caste or race: Veils over social oppression in Pakistan. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(14) 86–88.
- Government of Punjab. (2008). Multiple indicator cluster survey, Punjab 2007–2008. Retrieved from http://floods2010.pakresponse.info/Nutrition/surveys/MICS_Punjab_2007-08.pdf.
- Government of Pakistan. (2016). *Pakistan Economic Survey 2015–16*. Retrieved from http://finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_13/10-Education.pdf.
- Government of Pakistan. (2017). *Pakistan Economic Survey 2016–17*. Retrieved from: <http://finance.gov.pk>
- Government of Pakistan, Bureau of Statistics (2007-2008). *Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement 2007-2008* Retrieved from http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/pslm/publications/pslm2005_06/education.pdf
- Hazarika, G., & Bedi, S., A. (2006). Child work and schooling costs in rural northern India. *Discussion Paper Series, IZA DP No. 2136*. Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit Institute for the Study of Labor. Retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp2136.pdf>
- Jacoby, H. G., & Mansuri, G. (2011). Crossing boundaries: Gender, caste and schooling in rural Pakistan. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 5710*. Retrieved from SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1875415>

- Jensen, P., & Nielsen, H. J. (1997). Child labour or school attendance? Evidence from Zambia. *Journal of Population Economics*, 10(4), 407–424. doi:10.1007/s001480050051
- Kabeer, N. (2006). Poverty, social exclusion and the MDGs: The challenge of durable inequalities in the Asian context. *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin*, 37(3), 64–78.
- Karachiwala, N. (2013). *Social distance and learning outcomes: Evidence from Pakistan*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference at the Centre for the Study of African Economies, Oxford.
- Patrinos, H., & Psacharopoulos, G. J. (1997). Family size, schooling and child labor in Peru – An empirical analysis. *Journal of Population Economics*, 10(4), 387–405. doi: 10.1007/s001480050050
- Reay, D. (2001). Finding or losing yourself? Working class relationships to education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(4), 333–346.
- Sawada, Y., & Lokshin, M. (2001). *Household schooling decisions in rural Pakistan*. World Bank Policy Working Papers. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org>
- Siddhu, G. (2011). Who makes it to secondary school? Determinants of transition to secondary schools in rural India. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(4), 394–40. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.01.008>
- Strauss, A., & Juliet, C. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for development grounded theory*, California: Sage.
- Tamim, T., & Tariq, H. (2015). The intersection of caste, social exclusion and educational opportunity in rural Punjab. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 43, 51–62.
- United Nations Development Program. (2015). *Human development report 2015*. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr15_standalone_overview_en.pdf
- United Nations Development Program (2016). *Multidimensional poverty in Pakistan*. Retrieved from http://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/hiv_aids/Multidimensional-Poverty-in-Pakistan.html
- United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2017) *Global Education Monitoring Report*. Retrieved from gem_report_2017unesco.org on January 16th 2017.
- Zhang, M. (2003). Link between school absenteeism and child poverty. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 21, 10–17. doi:10.1111/1468-0122.00249

Perceptions of Teachers about the Role of Parents in Developing Reading Habits of Children to Improve their Academic Performance in Schools

Jamila Bano

Karakorum International University, Pakistan
anushah3030@gmail.com

Zahra Jabeen

Karakorum International University, Pakistan
zahra.jabeen@kiu.edu.pk

Sadrudin Bahadur Qutoshi

Karakorum International University, Pakistan
sadrudin.qutoshi@kiu.edu.pk

Abstract

This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions about parental role in developing reading habits of children to improve their academic achievement. The study was conducted in one of the private schools of Gilgit city situated in the Northern part of Pakistan. Using a case study approach to research within the qualitative design, semi-structured interviews were used for data collection, which enabled the researchers in capturing qualitative experiences, opinions, beliefs and perceptions of purposefully selected research participants. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis approach and emerging themes were represented in the form of figures to provide a clear understanding. The study confirmed that reading habits, for example, out of school reading and reading for pleasure, have influenced academic performance and parental role is pivotal in developing children's interest in reading because healthy reading activities can help them to develop critical thinking and analytic skills. This could also develop their vocabulary to a great extent. Consequently, children exhibit improvement in their overall academic performance. The findings confirmed that if parents focused on reading improvement of their children in early ages, they could better develop reading as a routine activity. The study recommended that parents should play an active role in developing attitude towards reading by

Keywords: academic achievement, parental role, reading environment, reading habits, technological effects

Introduction

In both developed and developing countries context, reading is considered to be an instrument for learning that appears to be a priceless activity (Okeke, 2000). Reading is the ability to understand words written in a textual form which enables the readers to improve their knowledge for personal development (Dadzie, 2008) as well as academic performance. The child's exposure to different reading materials can open new ways to make meanings and to explore experiences about the world. However, it is not so simple to get clear meaning of a text if the reader is not clear about the purpose of reading. The parents and teachers can guide children in setting the purpose of reading, hence making them conscious about what and why they read. Loan (2009) claimed that a weak person becomes a communicator and a lame person can climb mountains of knowledge through reading. This appears to be one of the reasons that McPike (1995) believed that reading is the "gateway to all other knowledge" (p.3), which can open new avenues for the reader to understand the world that is hidden in the text and beyond.

Many authors including Guthrie, Benneth and McGough (2007) asserted the notion that reading is a multifaceted cognitive process of building meaning of the texts written in different sources. However, it depends on the ways readers are exposed to the textual attraction for their interest that would not only improve academic performance, but also enable them to become successful in this knowledge society. Research supports that those children who read at early age are likely to exhibit greater interest in reading at later ages (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994). Additionally, Weinberger (1996) suggested that students who were attached to books at the age of three, could best perform in grade VII. This argument builds the basis that parents' role is very critical in the lives of their children.

Parents as first teachers of their children need to focus on developing reading habits such as reading for pleasure and out of school reading, so that it can further help them to read easily at school and beyond. Studies inform that reading as a routine activity helps the learners in obtaining meaningful and desirable

knowledge. Bashir and Mattoo (2012 as cited in Owusu-Acheaw, 2014) believe that it is the good reading habits that “acts as a strong weapon for the students to excel in life” (p. 2). Other studies extensively support the idea that parents who read in front of their children, can inspire them towards reading books and resultantly they are attracted automatically towards reading (Morrow, 1983). Furthermore, parents who read regularly can influence their children to engage with reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997). Parents can provide many other opportunities to their children to start reading different texts for their academic improvement as well as for their general knowledge. Moreover, parents can provide materials related to reading at home that can enhance children’s reading achievement and cognition (Stuart, Dixon, Masterson & Quinlan, 1998). Similarly, Kaiser and Hancock (2003) acknowledged that for children, their parents serve as their first teachers, who can develop a love for reading that could enable them to excel in their academic as well as social life. Thus, the effective role of parents in improving reading engagement cannot be ignored (Baker, 2003), which ultimately helps their academic achievements (Pressley, 1998). Therefore, in order to understanding their critical role, parents should contribute in the success of their children by listening to them while they read their school books and other texts of their interest (Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982).

It has been specified in scholarly literature that everyday reading activities of children are affected in many ways, but the most important and prominent element appears to be the engagement with modern technological tools (Loan, 2009). Loan further asserts that reading habits of children are almost withering and the reason for reading time is playing with technological tools. Hastings and Henry (2006) presented a report in which they clearly mentioned that 85% of children prefer to watch TV over reading. According to Loan (2007), technology kills reading activity time of children. This means that unnecessary use of modern technology reduces time for reading books in the new generation; this is an issue that needs to be understood by parents, teachers and other stakeholders in education to develop effective reading habits in children in order to facilitate them to improve their academic achievements.

The main purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of teachers about the role of parents in developing reading habits to improve academic achievement of their children. To achieve this objective, the researchers came up

with the following research questions:

1. What do teachers mean by reading habits of children?
2. What are teachers' perceptions about the impact of reading habits on academic performance?
3. How can parents develop reading habits in their children?

Methodology

To address the above questions, the researchers employed a qualitative case study research approach. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two teachers teaching at primary level, the researchers explored the phenomenon at a deeper level which enabled them to develop themes from the data gathered. Semi-structured interview is a data collection method which helped us in capturing qualitative experiences, opinions, information and perceptions. It helped the researchers to collect data about practices, experiences and school parent interactions (Merriam, 1998). During the whole engagement of the research activity, the researchers considered ethical aspects of the study by discussing the research process with the participants and seeking consent from them.

Participants' selection is a significant component of qualitative research design, which has been given less attention in methodological textbooks and journals as compared to centrality to the process warrant (Webster, 2010). The researchers selected a purposive sampling technique to collect the desired data from the research participants (Godambe, 1982) to enable them to extract accurate and reliable data. Purposeful selection is a technique used in qualitative research for the selection of information for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002).

Data analysis approach

In qualitative study, content analysis is considered as a spiral, iterative and explanatory process (Creswell, 2008). The data were analyzed by using thematic analysis approach. Thematic approach to data analysis focuses on how to find major themes arising from a systematic arrangement of similar and contrasting ideas arising from the collected data sets (Yin, 2003). This included arrangement of data

based on themes coming out of the whole process of deliberate meaning making. This technique enabled them to understand the phenomenon under exploration through explanation of these themes (Yin, 2003). Different themes were presented in a sequence according to the order of the purpose and research questions of the study. The focus of the analysis was to compare and contrast the responses of two teachers (research participants) guided by the interview guide.

Findings

The study came up with the following key findings after analyzing the data collected through three research questions.

Conceptual meaning of reading

While analyzing data regarding the perceptions of teachers, we came to know that the research participants seem to be aware of the concepts of reading. Fatima said:

“Reading is to go through a text and understand the message or the theme it contains.”

We found some similar views which were shared by Rahima in her own words:

“... If a child can read a sentence without breaks... and can understand its meaning is known as reading.”

This study found that the perceptions of the research participants support the relevant literature on the concept of reading. According to many writers such as Dadzie, (2008) and McGough (2007), reading is the ability to understand words which are available in a text and use that knowledge for personal development. Dadzie and McGough further stated that it is a multifaceted cognitive process of building meaning of the texts written in different sources. Moreover, McPike (1995) believed that reading is the “gateway to all other knowledge” (p.3) and a basic building block of knowledge acquisition (Irwin, 1967). Perhaps, Rahima’s further explanation of reading supported this view in the existing literature. She believed that:

“Reading is the main element that helps students to acquire knowledge”

We infer that reading is a process of making meaning from a written text. Both research participants had experienced their own ways of looking at the meaning of reading from the point of view of their students’ engagement with a text to make meaning of it. The figure below helps to summarize the emerging theme.

Relationship between reading habit and academic achievements

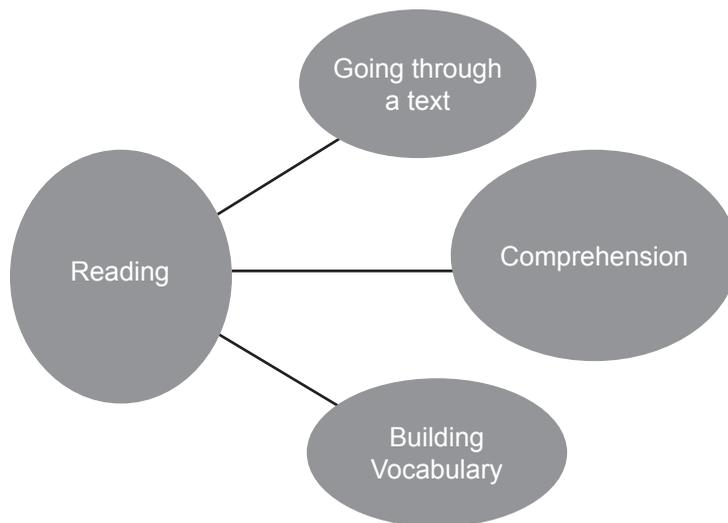


Figure 1. Reading and its meaning.

By analyzing the data on the relationship between reading habits and academic achievement of students, it emerged that reading is a basic component which leads to academic success. Reading texts and academic success are interrelated activities that have a profound effect on children’s lives (Owusu-Acheaw, 2014). Fatima stated:

“I believe that reading habits have a great influence on students’ academic achievements. The more they read, the more they learn and more knowledge they acquire which leads to success.”

Whereas teacher Rahima shared same views and shared:

“If students can read and understand the concept than their academic grades can be improved. Reading is directly related to academic achievement as reading includes vocabulary and pronunciation if a student knows all these elements of reading than his/ her grades can be improved.”

The reviewed literature also supported the idea that reading and academic achievement is interrelated. Exam results of those who lack good reading habits may not be satisfactory and may become a source of worry for parents, teachers and stakeholders of education (Issa, Aliyu, Akangbe & Adedeji, 2012). It is important to engage students in reading activities on daily basis that can help them to get better grades in examinations. According to Cotton and Wikelund (2003), students who perform best in their academics are supported by their parents by attaching them with reading from early ages. One of the participants said:

“Parents who help their children in reading, improve learning at school... those students who are good in reading they can better learn things as compared to other students....” Reading is all about learning. For my students who are fluent readers are mostly supported by their parents in their reading activities. Such children can better learn in classroom as well. I think through reading, students learn new words, which improve their language and writing skills. They also acquire new information by reading books which increase their knowledge.”

It was found that Rahima had similar views regarding the same question. She said:

“Reading is consisting of following elements like vocabulary, pronunciation, understanding and reading without breaks. If one is keeping in mind all its elements than the process of learning is increased.”

Reading, learning and academic achievements are related to each other. According to Rahima:

“If students spend their time in reading books, they can better learn things and their academic achievement can also improve.”

On further probing she shared her experiences in these words:

“For better academic achievement, students need to focus on reading. As a teacher I analyze that in my class those students who are left behind in examinations are those whose reading is not good and their parents appear to be less supportive... in our examination system teachers are not allowed to read question papers, due to which students with weak reading are unable to attempt the exam.”

After analyzing the collected data, it was found that there is a strong relationship between reading and academic achievement of the students. Students only read or memorize the answers of specific questions and ignore rest of the text in the book; this culture is mainly responsible for their weak reading skill. Worthy (2002) opines that students’ level of reading is highly influenced by their attitudes towards reading and it exerts a positive impact on their academic achievement. Figure 2 illustrates a better understanding of the emerged themes.



Figure 2. Relationship between reading habits and academic achievements.

Role of parents in developing reading habits of children

The responses of the research participants showed that parents play an important role in developing the reading habits of their children. Fatima suggested that parents should encourage their children to read at home by providing reading materials like story books and magazines which are available for kids. Similar views were shared by Rahima in these words:

“Reading habits should be developed in children from early ages. Almost 20 hours of a day children spent with their parents and much less time is spent with their teachers; therefore, parents need to focus on their children. Parents need to develop reading skills in their children by using a variety of books and setting up reading corner at home.”

Reflecting on the findings of the study and looking at the literature, it can be concluded that both research participants’ views are in accordance with the findings of many researchers. For example, Begum (2007), Lynch et al., (2006), Purcell-Gates (1995), Roberts, Jurgens and Burchinal (2005) and Rowe (1991) have strongly supported the notion that parents who provide better reading enrichment activities at home, contribute tremendously to develop their children’s reading skills.

After analyzing the views of research participants and literature, we also conclude that parents are role models for children. According to Kaiser and Hancock (2003) parents are the first and most continuing teachers for their children. If parents read books in front of their children, their children’s reading habits will automatically be developed. If parents engage in other activities like watching television and using mobile phone and ask children to read, the children will also avoid reading. Rahima shared her views as follows:

“Those parents who do not create a conducive environment (providing material like books especially pictorial books) or reading time at home, their children are also weak in reading as compared to those students whose parents provide such activities at home. I personally observe many parents even highly educated parents engage themselves with electronics and ask

their children to read books, which actually kills the motivation of their children towards reading.”

According to Vygotsky (as cited in Senechal & Cornell, 1993), children learn skills like reading and can understand their world when they interact with adults. This means that children learn different skills from adults by interacting with them at home. Generally, early ages of students are the most important period for development of any skill; reading is also a skill for development for reading habits in children. Parents need to expose children to reading from early ages, even before they enter formal schooling. According to Fatima:

“Those students who are aware of phonics before entering school do not hesitate in reading when they came to school at the age of 6. I am a teacher of grade 2. This year I have six students who cannot read even a simple word. I was very upset and always thinking of those students. My sister-in-law has a diploma in early childhood development and I shared the problem of those students with her. She said that those students were not familiar with the phonics which they need to learn in their early ages. If they are not familiar with the phonics of English and Urdu, they will not be able to read. After discussing with her, I went to school and asked students to read phonics. Surprisingly, the students did not even know the sound of ‘A’. After that I gave some time to those students to teach phonics. At the end of the session, I was surprised to see the transformation in those students who could not read a single word were now able to read much better.”

Literature also supports the view of research participants. According to Arnold and Whitehurst (1994) and Weinberger (1996), students who are attached to books in early years can also exhibit greater interest in reading at later ages. The benefits of positive role of parents, like providing proper support and guidance by developing reading habits of children can lead them to read any kind of text fluently (Saracho, 2002). Figure three elaborates the theme discussed above.