



Research Article

Factors contributing to students' dropout in Laya Central School in Bhutan

Thinley Rabgay

Ministry of Education, BHUTAN

tthinleyrrabgay@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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The trend of students dropping out of school has been increasing yearly. They dropped out of school without completing the highest grade level. Thus, school dropout has been a major concern that creates an alarming phenomenon in the education sector specifically the district administrators. The education policies should have to be realigned to address this pressing problem. This paper explored the reasons or factors that contribute to students dropping out of school, particularly at Laya Central School in Gasa, Bhutan. Moreover, it tried to find out the solutions to minimize or prevent students' dropouts. The findings are drawn from data collected from 188 participants which include the teachers, parents, dropout students, and school-going students. The participants were selected randomly by assigning a number to their names using a random table of numbers. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used to collect the data. Numerical data were analyzed using SPSS and presented through descriptive statistics that includes frequency and percentage. The major reasons for school dropout are household responsibilities, family education, early marriage, and pregnancy. It is concluded that parental advice and support in education are vital to minimize or prevent students from dropping out the school. Therefore, the author highly suggests that the school should create and provide a state-of-the-art learning environment so it builds a stronger relationship between the teachers-students-parents, thus, captivating students' interest to learn and not drop from school.

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INTRODUCTION

Dropout is the case when students discontinue schooling without any obvious reasons. But the concept of dropout differs from individual and, country to country in their education system. Dorji and Kinga (2005) pointed out that the concept of dropout varies from one country to another depending on the prescribed level of basic education.

According to the Ministry of Education of Bhutan (Dorji & Kinga, 2005) dropout is defined as those students who are once enrolled but have left schools before completing secondary education. In general, those students who could not either enter vocational institutes, colleges, or any other tertiary education system are considered dropouts. Technically, the efficiency of the education system is determined in terms of efficiency indicators, according to which the lower the repetition and dropout rates and the higher the number of promotions and the survival rate, the more efficient the education system. Similarly, in North Carolina, a dropout is defined as any student who leaves school for any reason before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another elementary or secondary school. The Kosovo Dropout Task Force also defined a dropout as when students are not enrolling in school or leave school before completion of compulsory education (Services, 2007).

Laya is a beautiful place in Gasa District with 1124 people. It lies at an altitude of 3850 meters above sea level. The people of this community live a nomadic life and generate their income by collecting cordyceps and yaks. The average mean temperature for the warmest month of June is about 10 degrees Celsius, while the mean temperature for the coldest month is about -4 degree Celsius. The weather is very cold and receives heavy snowfall and rainfall, which causes the academic session to start late and winter breaks to start early compared to other schools in Bhutan. It is very difficult for teachers to cover the syllabus within a short time compared to other schools in Bhutan. The school was formally opened in April 1997 with 58 students and the first headmaster was Mr. Karma Wangdi. The establishment of the school was a dream come true for the people of Laya. The Community Primary school was born in 2006 with the up-gradation of the school to class VI and Lower Secondary School in 2013. On April 13, 2018, the school was declared Laya Central School. The school has children coming from eight villages comprising 261 households. The road toward Laya is under construction and it reached Koina (mid-way) from Gasa to Laya. The road gets blocked frequently during monsoon season. It is very difficult to walk for travelers during monsoon season. In the winter season, the road gets blocked by snow and ice. Laya community is connected to electricity since mid-July 2016 and 3G (B-Mobile) networking since July 2018. But there is a frequent fluctuation of electricity where they have to live without electricity for weeks.

Laya Central School is a developing school with a Principal, teaching, and supporting staff. Today, the school has grades from pre-primary till VIII with 76 boys and 70 girls. The school will be upgraded to Middle Secondary School in 2019 with starting of class IX. The school has a separate toilet for boys and girls (four units each) and two units of staff toilets, the school has safe drinking water. Children do not have a comfortable playground in which the only assembly ground is used for multipurpose including for the conduct of co-curricular activities. The school has limited classrooms. The classes are decorated with poplin clothes and classroom teaching learning materials. The classrooms are provided bhukhari (firewood fuelled heating appliance, made in Bhutan) each where the students have to bring two loads of firewood in a year. But there is no bhukhari in hostels. The school provided water boilers each in the hostel to minimize water-related diseases. The school has limited teachers' quarters and offices. Teachers find their accommodation in the school. The teachers' office (small) accommodates all teachers. The school has a separate ICT room but it has a limited number of computers which is very difficult for teachers to teach ICT lessons. The school is connected with other places in the country with a LED TV which was donated by a foreigner. The school has a program where the students watch television every Wednesday which serves as a useful tool for learning. The school does not have an agricultural garden to cultivate vegetables. Hence, providing a variety of green and nutritious vegetables is a challenge due to the marshy soil around the school.

Nevertheless, the school can grow some vegetables with the support of a few parents who have spared a small plot to grow vegetables.

Objectives

There has been a rising trend in students leaving school without completing the highest level of Laya LSS (Class VIII). The dropout rate has been increasing every year and it is alarming to the education sector of the Gasa Dzongkhag Administration and the teachers of this school. The teachers have been giving a talk on the “Value of Education” to both the parents and students but still dropout rate has been on the rise. The school administration has been creating a welcoming school by initiating various programs and activities to stop the dropout rate but still, students are dropping out of school education. Therefore, the main concern is the up-scaling of the quality of education of students. Annual enrollment rate and dropout of students have become a concern for all the stakeholders. The concern is also about the well-being and wholesome development of the students through life skills, and values, building a positive attitude and accelerating the academic performance of children. Looking at the continuing trends of students’ dropouts it is essential to find out the reasons and causes for dropouts, particularly in the Laya community. This research may act as an agent of change in education and improve the rate of enrollment and reduce the dropout rate. This research may also act as a bridge between the policymakers and the community.

Literature Review

Household responsibilities

The students drop out of school to shoulder the household responsibilities when their parents feel they are elder and necessary to earn for the family and siblings. Students living with both parents have lower dropout rates and higher graduation rates, compared to students living in other family arrangements (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Similarly, Moussa Ahmed Abdoul Karim (2010) stressed, that dropping out of school is related to children with single parents, poverty, and the inability to assist the child. Joy and Srihari (2014) had done a case study on the School Dropout Scheduled Tribal students of Wayanad District, Kerala, and found that Vinod discontinued school when his father died and family finance and stability is the lead factor for his school dropout. The economic and social condition of the family is the single most crucial variable affecting drop-out (UNESCO, 1984). R. Gul, Gulshan, and Ali (2013) found that the parents involved their children in responsibilities that are not related to school, such as helping with family tasks instead of doing school work. Literature shows that there are more school dropouts in girls than boys due to female involvement in household work/responsibilities. Girls are expected to carry out household chores and child-rearing (Yokozeki, 1996). In addition, Shahidul and Zehadul Karim (2015) found that children in a household headed by widows are likely to work and could not attain higher education compared to a married woman.

Economic factors

The article “*Primary School Enrollment and Dropout in Ethiopia: Household and School Factors*” also included most of these studies that identified direct and indirect costs of schooling as important factors for school attendance and dropout. The economic downturn has caused numerous vulnerable school children to drop out over the years, though new programs aim to rectify the situation” (Chinyoka, 2014; Chinyoka & Naidu, 2013). For instance, Shahidul and Zehadul Karim (2015) highlighted that direct and indirect schooling costs are important factors for the education of children and some research indicates that schooling costs especially school fees are the central reason for early drop out from school. They also stated: Parental investment in children’s well-being can sometimes become gender biased. Although parents are altruistic about the gender of their children, they do not invest in education equally for all. Parental gender bias investment occurs particularly when parents have limited/lower income and resources, causing girls to leave school earlier than boys. Chugh (2011) surveyed and found that about 18 percent of the respondents reported that the

most significant factor of dropout is their inability to meet the cost of schooling". I also observed that one of the students dropped school since her parents could not afford the schooling. She is living with her mother and brother (who is also studying). They live at Norgi Jangsa (it is the place where their yaks graze) which is thirty minutes from the school. Pong and Ju (2000) agreed that virtually all previous studies have concluded that children from single-parent or female-headed households are more likely to drop out than are children who reside in two-parent families."

Early marriage and pregnancy

Chinyoka (2014), found out that early pregnancy and parenthood are the main reason for school dropout for girls. Chinyako and Naidu (2013) stated that pregnant girls may feel embarrassed about going back to school, struggle with morning sickness or fatigue, and have difficulty keeping up with their classwork (Chinyoka, 2014). Holcamp (2009) found that girls' dropout rates become higher because parents look for no benefit in schooling girls once they leave their families after getting married (Shahidul & Zehadul Karim, 2015). In a similar study, Molteno et al. (2000) found that when girls reach puberty, parents consider it is time for them to get married and tend to arrange early marriage instead of continuing schooling. Chugh (2011) found that 17 girls got married and dropped out, of which 15 girls are younger than 17 years of age. Mpyangu and Eric Awich Ochen (2014) found out that parents pressure girls to get married because they feel that their children (girls) are grown up and ready for marriage.

Family education

The level of education attained by family can bring a great impact on school dropout. Along with several factors, familial factors are most influential in child schooling and quality of education. The other factors can be overcome if there is a positive atmosphere exists in the family (Dela Fuente, 2019; Mishra & Azeez EP, 2014). Their study also shows that those parents who are educated enough or have an awareness of the value of education are more successful in completing and getting a quality education for their children. Samarrai and Peasgood (1998) pointed out that the father's education and the mother's education have a greater influence on boys' and girls' schooling respectively (Mishra & Azeez EP, 2014). The study of Mishra and Azeez EP (2014) showed that school dropouts can be prevented by better family education.

Attitude of teachers

Teachers affect students' attributions daily, through their comments to students, feedback on assignments and examinations, and the types of praise that they offer during instructions (Dela Fuente, 2021; Chinyoka, 2014). Snowman and Biehler (2012) made comments on teachers' attitudes to students' learning that these comments can have important long-term effects on student learning and motivation (as cited in Chinyoka, 2014). Chirtes (2010) did a case study on the causes of school dropout. The study found that 100% of respondents believed that the main cause of school dropout was a lack of motivation and interest in school. Chugh (2011) found that the majority of the respondents had complained about the rude behavior of teachers towards them and teachers would take disciplinary action against them without fault. Similarly, the Ghana Ministry of Education (1993) cited that punishment is a cause of school dropout (Yokozeki, 1996). Mpyangu and Eric Awich Ochen (2014) also found that some teachers are so unapproachable and tough for they embark on canning the children, harassing girls by touching their breasts, punish students a lot for even the slightest things. Other teachers are so reluctant in executing their duties, they do not teach well; some come late to class or do not come at all. These all discourage the children from attending school. Female teachers are role models for female students to continue schooling, and the lack of female teachers discourages girls from continuing their schooling (UNESCO, 1986).



Teaching-learning atmosphere and school facilities

The article “Primary School Enrollment and Dropout in Ethiopia: Household and School Factors” stated that from the supply side of education government policy and school characteristics determine child schooling outcomes. Chinyoka (2014) concluded his research that: The researcher observed that overcrowding in the school leads to a high pupil-teacher ratio causing a lack of individualized learner attention to the learners by the teachers, difficulty in identifying and monitoring discipline problems among the students, and competition of time between classroom preparations and handling discipline issues among the learners. Chugh (2011) found that the unavailability of drinking water facilities and toilet facilities is not the main reason for dropping out of school, but this creates discomfort for students. The group of researchers (Dela Fuente, 2021; Mpyangu & Eric Awich Ochen, 2014) also found out that an unfavorable school environment makes it hard for children to continue their education.

Geographical situation of the school

The factor affecting both enrolment and drop-out is geographical location. Mountainous areas experience higher drop-out rates, as do deltaic regions (Berondo & Dela Fuente, 2021; UNESCO, 1984). Gitter and Barham (2007) reported a negative and significant effect on child educational attainment of travel time to the nearest school in rural Honduras. The learners who travel long distances ended up dropping out of school or maybe truant when they find that they are late for school (Chinyoka, 2014). Distance also proved to be a barrier for some children continuing in school (Chugh, 2011). And (Mpyangu & Eric Awich Ochen, 2014) also found out that long distances make children drop out of school.

METHODS

The study employed mixed methods with the concurrent process. The data collection tools used were a questionnaire and semi-structured interview to survey the number of dropout students and reason for the dropping out of school respectively. Creswell (2014) also stated that survey research provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” in terms of quantitative design. The questionnaire contains eight main headings that give information about the demographic, and how seven factors contribute to dropping out of school, which were further structured into specific statements at the level of layman's understanding.

Participants

The sampling of the participants had been randomly selected. They were selected by allocating the number against their name and used a table of random numbers by pointing the pen tip on it. They were a sampling frame of 20 individuals for teachers, 70 for parents, and dropout students. They were 100 students who are still going to school. The participants of the research were teachers (13), parents (49), students (class IV-VIII, 73), and dropout students (53) with 188 participants in total. They were the participants of this study from whom the study gathered their perspectives on dropout. Since some of the students had been keen on studying but due to family factors, they had dropped out of school. The parents were randomly selected. The students need not have to fill up their age and marital status since they all are under 18 years and they are not supposed to marry since it will affect their studies. Moreover, it is also a crime to get married before attaining the age of 18. Under Chapter 14 Sexual Offences, section 183 of the Penal Code of Bhutan states, a defendant shall be guilty of the offense of rape of a child above the age of twelve years if the defendant had sexual intercourse with a child between the ages of twelve to eighteen years. The offense will be a felony of the third degree. Teachers and students (ongoing students) are included to see their perspective on the causes of dropout and also to know the factors because they have faced the problems while they are in school. Parents and dropout students are included as participants

because they will give precise and many reasons for dropping out the school. The participants were also interviewed with semi-structured interview questions. Interviews were conducted with dropout students and parents of the Laya community.

Data Collection

With the approval of the school principal and the Gup (Head of block administration) to conduct the study and data collection. The author conducted an orientation to the respondents on the objectives of the study and the confidentiality of their responses.

Ethical Consideration

This paper is for general purposes and the author did research due to my interest. However, the author followed the research ethics. When studying any topic with human subjects, confidentiality and integrity are the main components. Confidentiality must be kept in order not to share information about participants. The integrity must be observed not to manipulate the data. The individual trust is honored and appreciated when permission of sharing their information is granted. To collect data from the school and Laya community, the author put up an approval letter to respective offices. The respective offices approved my proposal. After data collection, the author secured the questionnaire by putting it in my briefcase and gave a random number to the questionnaires. Their identities were not shown. When analyzing the data, the author did not use their real identity. The promise between the participants and researcher was kept. There was no bias in data collection and no sort of influential things was used to make participants respond.

Data Analysis

The data obtained using questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS and the numerical data were presented through descriptive statistics including frequency and percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study. Numerical data from the survey questionnaire and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews are presented supplementing and complementing each other. The descriptive findings will be discussed below under each section of factors contributing to school dropout respectively.

Household responsibilities

67 of the respondents said that the reason for dropping out of school is being the eldest of the siblings and 53 of the respondents said that they have to take care of their younger siblings which supports the previous statement. The eldest of the siblings is being dropped out of school to do household responsibilities. DS6 said, *"I am the eldest of the siblings, no one at home to work so I dropped school"*. Similarly, DS3 also said, *"also being the eldest sibling in the house I have to serve the parents"*. Moreover, DS3 said that *"it is a kind of custom where the eldest one helps their parents"*. But the parental demise does not lead them to drop schooling which are 21 (11.2%) of the respondents support this variable, which is comparatively less (42, 22.3%) than those who do not support this statement. However, if they have a single parent they dropped school to help their parent and do household chores. Parent 1 said, other reason for school dropout could be due to problems like having no one at home to work, parental divorce, and single parent. Although, Layaps depend on yaks for their livelihood sustenance they do not drop the school over herding yaks (50 of the respondents disagree). Therefore, the study found that it is a kind of custom (and necessity) where the eldest one helps their parents in doing household chores. Moreover, the eldest dropped

out because they have to care for the younger sibling(s) and work at the expense of education.
Economic factors

56.4% of the respondents (N=106) reported that the students dropped out the school because they have to collect the cordyceps during the cordyceps collection season. It is their main income and they earn a lot from the cordyceps collection. Parent 3 said, *“their parents and they mainly focus on the collection of cordyceps”* Parent 1 also said that *“parents keep their child at home because they can able to do work and able to collect cordyceps”*. When interviewing with few dropout students and when they shared their experiences, it seems that they dropped out of school to collect cordyceps. It is being generalized from their experience sharing. DS6 shared the experience, *“I got the experience of collecting cordyceps”*, so DS6 earned Nu. 100,000/- in one year. DS2 also shared the same experience of cordyceps collection and greenhouse construction. The students also dropped school for doing small business by transporting goods with horses. They usually do business like grocery with Lunanaps. When asked about their life and work satisfaction, DS4 said, *“I am going to say that the work is very interesting. Mostly I have to work with horses where I do business to Lunana and reach the loads”*. However, it is a bit less than those who strongly disagree with this variable. The study concludes that students drop school to collect cordyceps for better earnings and to carry and transport goods with horses.

Early marriage and pregnancy

Van Pelt (2012) and Kato (2015) observed that in the United States girls without teen pregnancy have high school diplomas compared to teen mothers. Similarly, from this research, it may be concluded that one reason for school dropout is parents forcing students to get married. 29.3% (N=55) of the respondents revealed that students leave school due to marriage practices. Parent 3 responded, *“if the girl is around at age 15 they get married and dropped the school which is like our custom”* while an interview about personal views on dropping out of school before completion of education.

Table 1. Marital status of the respondents

Age of the respondent								
Marital Status of the respondent			Below 21 years	21-30	31-40	41-50	Above 51	Total
Married	Identity of the respondent	Teaching Staff	0	4	4	0	0	8
		Parents	0	9	12	20	7	48
		Dropout Students	11	16	7	0	0	34
	Total	Total	11	29	23	20	7	90
Unmarried	Identity of the respondent	Teaching Staff	0	3				3
		Supporting Staff	0	1				1
		Dropout Students	13	4				17
	Total	Total	13	8				21
Divorce	Identity of the respondent	Teaching Staff		1				1
		Parents		1				1
		Dropout Students		2				2
	Total	Total						
Total	Identity of	Teaching Staff	0	8	4	0	0	12

the respondent	Supporting Staff	0	1	0	0	0	1
	Parents	0	10	12	20	7	49
	Dropout Students	24	22	7	0	0	53
Total		24	41	23	20	7	115

When we are looking at the marital status of dropout students, 34 of them are married while 2 of them are divorced. 11 of the married dropout students are below 21 years old. 16 of them are between 21-30 years. They married at a young age. This indicates that culture influences early marriage which ultimately causes the students to drop out the school.

Family education

Some of the respondents (21.3%) strongly agreed with the variable, that students drop out because their parents are unaware of the importance of education which is more than those who strongly disagreed (17.0%). Researchers (Chirtes, 2010) found that, the parents' low level of education and educational abilities; while Ali, Gul, and Gulshan (2013) found that illiteracy and ignorance of the parents influence the students' education. Parental awareness of the value of education influences school dropout. Mawere (2012) pointed out that this is because uneducated parents normally do not see the value of education. Parents 2 responded that since some of the parents are not studying and they think that their children will not benefit if they study and so they insist they drop school to help them. Therefore, parental education and awareness of the value of education influence school dropout.

Attitude of the teachers

Although the attitude of the teachers did not affect much on the school dropout, however, it had been affected a few of them. When interviewed with dropout students, DS6 said *"that some of them dropped out the school because teachers beat them – corporal punishment"*. Among the six variables of the attitude of the teachers, the corporal punishment given by teachers forced them to drop school spell out more with 9.6% of respondents strongly agreeing. Besides that, discrimination by teachers among students (7.4% strongly agree) and the harsh nature of teachers (9.0% strongly agree) also have an impact on school dropout. From this section, it is concluded that corporal punishment, discrimination, and the harsh nature of the teachers cause the students to drop school.

Teaching-learning atmosphere and school facilities

The teaching-learning atmosphere and school facilities did not cause them to drop the school. However, bullying in school (12.2%) is reported to have some impact on school dropout compared to other causes (<8.5%). Therefore, a climate characterized by safety and orderliness in a location that is accessible and non-threatening can make a powerful contribution to dropout prevention (Dela Fuente, 2021; Woods, 1995).

Geographical situation of the school

It seems that the distance of the school from their homes affects them to drop out the school. And also the weather and climatic condition caused them to drop school since it is very difficult to adapt to different places. After completing class VIII from Laya Lower Secondary School (till mid-April, 2018) they have to join Bjishong Central School where the altitude is lower than Laya. From 2019 they need not have to join a different school after class VIII since Laya Central School (which came into force in April 2018) will be upgraded to Middle Secondary School. Parent 2 said that some parents shared the climatic condition of hot places where their children got sick. Similarly, Parent 3 also pointed out that *"since our child stays in a cold place and when they move to hot places, they get sick. They could not adapt to hot places, they got sick and so they dropped out the school"*. Other than the geographical situation of the school, the distance of the school and the climatic

condition of a place causes the students to drop out the school. On top of that, the health condition of an individual student also contributes to dropping out the school.

Effect of the school dropout

The school dropout has affected the dropout students. When they were asked about their opinions on the completion of school before completing, most of them said it is not a good thing. They have faced many problems and shared their experiences and opinions. One of the dropout students regretted not completing the education because whenever moved into the crowd they could not walk proudly since they have some hesitation. The other dropout students also stated the same opinion because they feel that they should know something such as letters and foreign languages wherever they go or whatever they do. They also shared their experience when they faced difficulties in filling up the bank deposit form. The parents also shared similar opinions. One of the parents said they could not write letters, face interviews or they could not do anything. Besides that, they stated that there will be more job opportunities and they will get many experiences. People are nowadays employed based on their qualifications (Dela Fuente & Biñas, 2020; Mawere, 2012). They are worried that their child may remain like them without completing education and they want their child to study at least till class 12.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It is concluded that household responsibilities, early marriage and pregnancy, and family education are the direct factors for the increased rate of dropout in Laya community. While economic factors, the attitude of the teachers, and the geographical situation of the school indirectly cause the students to leave the school. Students dropped school to earn more and to do business with other villages. However, the teaching-learning atmosphere and school facilities do not affect them to drop out the school but bullying by the elders may contribute on a larger scale if we do not stop it now. The prevention and way forward of school dropout are complex problems too. It requires the involvement of an individual, institutions, parents, teachers, and non-governmental and governmental organizations. It may be near impossible to eradicate school dropout, especially in a context like Laya, however, attempts can be made by way of organizing modest programs at the school level, geog level, and district levels at least to reduce school dropout.

Many studies have been carried out on the prevention of the school dropout rate. The governmental organizations, education sector, and schools had to look over the prevention of dropouts. If the school atmosphere is positive, the dropout can be prevented. Ultimately, it will reduce absenteeism and reduce the dropout rate. Therefore, to create a good atmosphere at school, parental advice and support in education are crucial because they will create a positive mindset in the students which will contribute to creating a positive school climate. Future researchers can also research the girl's education at Laya and the dropout rate among the gender. This study is a starter of research in the education system at Laya.

LIMITATIONS

This study has some limitations and drawbacks. The questionnaire had been provided to different categories of respondents but the number of participants had been less than 200. Interviews were done to dropout students and parents as participants respectively. Due to technical problems, the author could not retrieve the messages from some of the interviews. The author could not interview teachers due to the time limit. There are many research papers on reasons for school dropout but the author could review only a few of them which are relevant to the topic explored. There are reasons not included such as personal competence in study or academic performance, their interest in the study, and health condition. The study was not able to delve into these characteristics.

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