

Dropout Causation at the Elementary Stage: A Social

Category-wise Analysis in Mansa District, Punjab

Dr. Sandeep Kaur, Principal

Mata Gurdev Kaur Memorial Educational Institute, Bareta, Mansa

E-Mail- sandeep01barnala@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the differentiated reasons for elementary school dropout across social categories—Scheduled Caste (SC, N=17), Backward Community (BC, N=4), and General (G, N=10)—among 31 dropout children in Mansa district, Punjab. The research utilized a qualitative approach, classifying reasons into child-centred, parent-centred, and school-community-centred categories, as reported by the children. Results indicate a general similarity in dropout causation across the groups but highlighted specific, higher-occurrence reasons within the **Scheduled Caste (SC) category**. Specifically, the SC group showed a higher prevalence of **Child labour** and **Migration for work** (child-centred); **Poverty, Children accompanying parents during work**, and **Doing parents' jobs/help at home** (parent-centred); and **Subject teacher shortage** and **Harvest season and festivals** (school-community-centred). The Backward Community (BC) group was too small (N=4) for conclusive comparisons. The findings confirm that elementary dropout in the district is attributable to a **multitude of interconnected reasons**. This exploratory study suggests the need for further, large-scale investigation to inform targeted, social-category-specific intervention strategies.

Keywords: School Dropout, Elementary Education, Social Category, Scheduled Caste, Parent-Centred Reasons, Mansa District.

Introduction and Review of Context

Universal access to elementary education is a foundational pillar of sustainable development and a constitutional mandate in India. Despite significant policy interventions like the Right to Education (RTE) Act and initiatives aimed at retention, **school dropout at the elementary stage** remains a persistent and complex challenge, particularly in socio-economically vulnerable regions like Punjab. The economic and social cost of early school leaving, including reduced earning potential, perpetuation of poverty cycles, and compromised national human capital, necessitates rigorous investigation into its root causes.

Recent educational discourse emphasizes that dropout is not a singular event but a prolonged process of **disengagement** often driven by an interaction of factors at the child, family, and institutional levels (Kumar & Singh, 2021). Latest review of dropout studies highlights a critical

shift: while initial research focused primarily on school infrastructure or poverty, current literature increasingly points to the differentiated impact of these stressors across social groups. For instance, research consistently shows that Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students often face compounded barriers related to **caste-based discrimination, multi-generational poverty, and labour participation** (Chowdhury, 2019; Rao, 2020). Conversely, dropout in relatively affluent groups is sometimes more strongly correlated with factors like **curriculum irrelevance, lack of student engagement, or parental disinterest driven by high aspirations for quick entry into family businesses** (Verma & Jain, 2022).

Specifically, in the context of Punjab, a region with a high dependence on agriculture and labour migration, the factors of **seasonal employment and family mobility** are crucial yet often under-examined (Sharma, 2019). The current study is motivated by the need to move beyond aggregated data and compare the self-reported reasons for dropping out among children from three distinct social categories: **Scheduled Caste (SC), Backward Community (BC), and General (G)**, within the Mansa district of Punjab.

This research aims to answer the core question: **To what extent do the reported reasons for elementary school dropout vary across different social categories?** By isolating and comparing the prevalence of child-centred, parent-centred, and school-community-centred reasons across these groups, this study seeks to provide empirically grounded evidence for developing targeted, social category-specific intervention strategies that are relevant to the unique socio-economic landscape of the Mansa district.

Methodology

Research Design and Sample

This was an **exploratory, cross-sectional study** utilizing a qualitative classification of self-reported dropout reasons. The total sample comprised **31 children** who dropped out of school at the elementary stage in Mansa district, Punjab. The sample was classified into three social categories: **Scheduled Caste (SC, N=17), Backward Community (BC, N=4), and General (G, N=10)**.

Data Collection and Categorization

The data were collected through interviews with the dropout children, asking them to report their reasons for leaving school. The reported reasons were then organized into a comprehensive list and categorized into three main clusters: **Child-Centred, Parent-Centred, and School-Community Centred**. The frequency (N) and percentage (%) of children within each social category reporting a specific reason were calculated and presented in Table 1.

Data Analysis

The analysis involved a direct comparison of the reported frequency percentages across the three social categories (SC, BC, and G) for each of the 34 identified reasons. Special attention was given to identifying reasons showing a **marked deviation** or significantly **higher occurrence** in one social category compared to the others. The small sample size of the BC group (N=4) was noted as a limitation for conclusive statements regarding that specific group.

Results

The data, presented in Table 1, reveal the social category-wise breakdown of dropout reasons.

Table 1

Reasons of Dropout as Reported by Children who Left School at Elementary Stage (Social Category-wise)

S. No.	Reason for Dropout	SC		BC		G		Total (N=31)	
		(N=17)		(N=04)		(N=10)			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	Child-Centred								
1.	Child Labour (support parent in earning)	08	47.06	-	-	04	40.00	12	38.71
2.	Migration for work to another place	11	64.71	02	50.00	03	30.00	16	51.61
3.	Disinterest in studies	03	17.65	01	25.00	06	60.00	10	32.26
4.	Health (child or parent)	02	11.76	-	-	02	20.00	04	12.90
5.	Learning Disability	04	23.53	-	-	05	50.00	09	29.03
6.	Low academic achievement	04	23.53	02	50.00	03	30.00	09	29.03
7.	Weak foundation at primary school	06	35.29	02	50.00	05	50.00	13	41.94
	Parent-Centred								
8.	Poverty (economic conditions/ lack of resources)	16	94.12	02	50.00	05	50.00	23	74.19
9.	Doing Parents jobs/ Help at home or family responsibilities	14	82.35	03	75.00	05	50.00	22	70.97
10.	Lack of awareness of parents	05	29.41	02	50.00	05	50.00	12	38.71
11.	Family disputes/domestic violence/Family issues	12	70.59	04	100.00	07	70.00	23	74.19
12.	Non-availability of parents for feedback	08	47.06	-	-	03	30.00	11	35.48

S. No.	Reason for Dropout	SC		BC		G		Total (N=31)	
		(N=17)		(N=04)		(N=10)		N	%
		N	%	N	%	N	%		
13.	Parental neglect/ Lack of parental support	06	35.29	01	25.00	05	50.00	12	38.71
14.	Less involvement in school activities or child Education being busy in work	11	64.71	04	100.00	05	50.00	20	64.52
15.	Parental Illiteracy	07	41.18	02	50.00	01	10.00	10	32.26
16.	Social Norms and Cultures	08	47.06	02	50.00	07	70.00	17	54.84
17.	Gender discrimination-less priority to girl child education-meant for domestic work only.	09	52.94	01	25.00	03	30.00	13	41.94
18.	Drug addiction/alcoholism in father.	05	29.41	03	75.00	06	60.00	14	45.16
19.	Children accompanying their parents during work.	16	94.12	04	100.00	-	-	20	64.52
	School-Community Centred								
20.	Harvest season and festivals	14	82.35	03	75.00	01	10.00	18	58.06
21.	Safety or social security of Child	11	64.71	03	75.00	09	90.00	23	74.19
22.	Involvement of teachers in non-academic tasks (unwanted projects)	15	88.24	03	75.00	09	90.00	27	87.97
23.	Subject teacher shortage (vacant posts)	11	64.71	03	75.00	03	30.00	17	54.84
24.	Lack of commitment towards the profession (unattractive/ineffective teaching)	08	47.06	01	25.00	04	40.00	13	41.94
25.	Inability to understand child psychology to identify individual differences.	04	23.53	-	-	04	40.00	08	25.81
26.	Untrained teachers in technological and pedagogical tools to pace the modern world	08	47.06	-	-	07	70.00	15	48.39
27.	Non-availability of transport services (provision of bus or van by school).	10	58.82	04	100.00	08	80.00	22	70.97
28.	No detention policy till 8 th	06	35.29	01	25.00	03	30.00	10	32.26

S. No.	Reason for Dropout	SC		BC		G		Total (N=31)	
		(N=17)		(N=04)		(N=10)			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	(absenteeism prevails, no fear of struck off their name)								
29.	Inadequate learning resources.	10	58.82	03	75.00	07	70.00	20	64.52
30.	Migration of students towards more facilitated schools (model schools).	05	29.41	01	25.00	06	60.00	12	38.71
31.	Very less activities at school to involve parents	05	29.41	01	25.00	03	30.00	09	29.03
32.	Lack of counsellor at school who can take feedback of absenteeism (guidance and counselling)	04	23.53	02	50.00	06	60.00	12	38.71
33.	Less conduction of co-curricular activities to nourish talent	04	23.53	03	75.00	08	80.00	15	48.39
34.	Non-availability of sports ground or facilities	05	29.41	01	25.00	03	30.00	09	29.03

Note: SC=Scheduled Caste, BC=Backward Community, G=General

Key Findings by Social Category:

1. Scheduled Caste (SC) Category (N=17):

- 1) **Economic Vulnerability Dominance:** The SC group reported a significantly higher frequency of reasons directly linked to **economic necessity** and family labour participation, notably **Poverty (94.12%)**, **Children accompanying their parents during work (94.12%)**, and **Doing Parents jobs/ Help at home or family responsibilities (82.35%)**. **Migration for work** was also highly prevalent (64.71%).
- 2) **School-Community Barriers:** They uniquely emphasized external school-related factors such as **Harvest season and festivals (82.35%)** and **Subject teacher shortage (64.71%)**.

2. General (G) Category (N=10):

- 1) **Internal/Quality Factors:** The G category showed a marked prominence of internal and school-quality related issues, including **Disinterest in studies (60.00%)** and **Learning Disability (50.00%)**.

- 2) **Systemic Quality Issues:** School-community concerns were high for **Safety or social security of Child (90.00%)**, **Involvement of teachers in non-academic tasks (90.00%)**, and **Less conduction of co-curricular activities (80.00%)**.

3. **Backward Community (BC) Category (N=4):**

- 1) The small sample size (N=4) makes conclusive statements difficult. However, 100% of BC dropouts reported high-impact reasons like **Family disputes/domestic violence**, **less involvement of parents in education**, **Children accompanying parents during work**, and **non-availability of transport services**.

Discussion

The relative uniformity in dropout causes across the total sample masks critical variations when analysed by social category. The high prevalence of **poverty-driven reasons** among the **SC category** aligns with established literature on marginalized communities facing economic imperatives that supersede educational continuity. The need for SC children to engage in **child labour, accompany parents to work, or leave school during harvest season** directly reflects the fragile economic condition and low-income agricultural/labour dependence prevalent in this group in Mansa district. Furthermore, the higher rate of reported **Subject teacher shortage** among SC students might indicate that schools serving these communities are often under-resourced or less prioritized for staffing.

Conversely, the elevated frequency of **disinterest, learning difficulties, and inadequate co-curricular activities** reported by the **General (G) category** suggests that for children whose basic needs are likely met, the dropout decision pivots on the **quality, engagement, and relevance of the educational experience itself**. This distinction reinforces the idea that poverty acts as a potent **push factor** for marginalized groups, whereas systemic shortcomings and motivational deficits become more significant for others.

The findings thus underscore the necessity of a **dual-pronged policy response**: a focused socio-economic safety net (e.g., enhanced scholarships, direct cash transfers conditional on attendance, robust child labour enforcement) for the SC and similar vulnerable communities, combined with comprehensive **educational quality reforms** (e.g., specialized teacher training, provision of counsellors, enriched co-curricular offerings) to improve retention across all groups, particularly addressing the school environment issues highlighted by the General category.

Conclusion

Elementary school dropout in Mansa district, Punjab, is driven by a complex interplay of factors, with marked differences in the dominant causes across social categories. The **Scheduled Caste (SC) category** is overwhelmingly affected by **economic vulnerability and family labour participation**, necessitating targeted welfare and anti-poverty measures. The **General (G) category** faces challenges rooted more in **pedagogical and school-environment quality**, requiring systemic educational reform. The study confirms that an undifferentiated approach to dropout prevention is ineffective. Future research with a larger, more comprehensive sample is essential to validate these findings and provide the granular data necessary for effective, social category-sensitive intervention strategies.

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