CAPTURING THE VOICES OF SCHOOL DROP-OUTS IN BHUTAN

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Abstract

This paper captures the voices of students who dropped out of school in Bhutan. The aim of the study was to document student experiences in terms of what led them to drop-out of school and how they could have been supported to remain in school. A total of 158 participants (male 118 and female 40, between the ages of 13 to 44) from both Youth Development Centers and Rehabilitation Centers completed a self-developed questionnaire. Data was analyzed by the researcher, who created deductive constructed-analysis to identify broad and unique qualitative themes. Results showed that the majority of students dropped out of school due to individual and school related reasons such as lack of finances and lack of teacher support. Some of the major qualitative themes for dropping out of school ranged from poor family background followed by drug abuse, to lack of support, and negative life experiences. However, most students reported that they would have continued education if they had received some level of academic and personal support. Implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: student, school drop-out, family, teacher support and school support.

Introduction

Bhutan recorded an increase in school drop-out over the last 10 years (Dorji, 2005; National Statistics Year Book, 2013; Policy & Planning Division, Ministry of Education, 2011; Samdrup, 2009; UNICEF, 2009). School drop-out is a complex and multifaceted problem and demands a comprehensive review of the reasons associated with it from the voices of students themselves. Capturing and documenting the voices of students who have dropped out of school will give a clear insight into the reasons for dropping-out and fills a unique gap within the context of Bhutan for policy makers and educational practitioners. This study reports on data collected from students who have dropped out of school in Bhutan.

Bhutan has 7 years of primary education and four years of secondary education. Lower secondary school ends at grade 8; middle secondary school has years 9 and 10, and higher secondary includes grade 11 and 12 (Commission for Developmental Studies, 2010). Even though education is free school-drop and is well structured it still a major concern in Bhutan. School drop-out is a multifaceted problem and a number of studies have identified school and individual level factors associated with school drop-out wherein each factor must be studied and explored with regards to how it comes to influence and/or effect one to suddenly drop-out of school (Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbott, Hill, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2000; Dorji, 2005; Drewry, 2007; DuPont, Caldeira, DuPont, Vincent, Shea, & Arria, 2013; Freeman & Simonsen, 2014; Hunt, 2008; Mathis, 2013; National High School, 2007; Palmore, 1963; Rumberger & Lim 2008; Rumberger, 2001; Witte, Cabus, Thyssen, Groot, & Van Den Brink, 2013).

School drop-out is best defined in terms of a student suddenly leaving and/or abruptly quitting schooling before completion of a basic formal education (UNESCO, 1984). For policy-makers in Bhutan what is needed is a clear student voice in terms of how and what factors lead to or was associated with them dropping-out of school both at an individual and at a school level.

Individual Factors

A number of factors at the individual level are claimed to be directly related to school drop-out: low intelligence (IQ), desire to work, financial problems, home responsibilities, teenage pregnancy, family problem, lack of motivation to study, substance abuse, lack of family support and little knowledge
of the consequence/s of anti-social behaviours or crime (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA, 2008; David & Cuban, 2006; Drewry, 2007; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Harmacek, Gonzales, Richard, & Seeley, 2002; Lund, 2009; Mediamax Consultancy, 2013; Sarrico, Rosa, & Coelho, 2010; Plamore, 1963; Tidwell, 1988; UNESCO-UIS, 2012). Witte et al. (2013) also noted that family related factors such as a lack of family support against the stress of parental income, is likely to add more pressure in expediting the process of school drop-out given the cultural expectations in some cases. Importantly, Rwechungura (2014) argued that the most salient reason for dropping out of school is due to insufficient money to support the education process. It appears that a lack of support and household income seem to be directly related to school drop-out (Cardoso & Verner, 2007; Hunt, 2008).

An earlier study by Hunt (2008) also found that a lack of finances for schooling was associated with school drop-out, but it is not clear what these hidden and/or indirect costs were.

A more recent study by Rwechungura (2014) found that a lack of financial support, loss of parent, parents’ being sick, poor academic performance, pregnancy, early marriage, and rape all contribute to student disengagement from learning and schooling. Further, several non-academic related factors are also claimed to be associated with school drop-out, for example: early involvement in delinquent behaviour and anti-social behaviours and commitment to deviant peer group (Hawkins, Jaccard, & Needle, 2013; Merloy, & Wolpinz, 2009; Patterson, Capaldi, Bank, 1991; Witte et al., 2013).

School Factors

In terms of school related factors a number of studies have found lack of teacher support, lack of advice/support and counselling, positive teacher-student relationships, a lack of a culture of second opportunities and a lack of student focus in terms of supporting them in their own learning as being directly correlated with school drop-out (Adams & Beck, 1990; Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Blue & Cook, 2004; Dalton, Gennie & Ingels, 2009). While these factors are, to some extent, conventional and retrospective in nature, there is a gap of not knowing the actual experiences of students who have dropped out of school. In other words, very little is known from the perspective of those students who have dropped out and what they perceive and/or experience with regard to a ‘lack of teacher support, lack of advice/support and counselling’ in terms of their own experience.

Similarly, a lack of support during transition between grades, absence of personalized support from teachers, failure, poor academic performance, dislike of school and expulsion as both independent and inter-related factors are also claimed to be associated with school-drop-out (David & Cuban, 2006; Witte et al., 2013). In support of the above in particular, Witte et al. (2013) noted that grade retention alongside low academic achievement are two potential predictors for early school drop-out. Witte et al. (2013) also noted that keeping failing students in the class creates a stigma of unintelligent agency in the student, and therefore, perhaps this, coupled with the pressure of needing to perform well to get into Grade 10 and beyond, could lead students to a sense of learnt helplessness; important within the context of Bhutan was that after completion of standards 10 and 12, students who do not qualify for government scholarships have only two other options: private schooling or vocational training at their own expense (Dorji, 2005; National Statistics Year Book, 2013; Policy & Planning Division, Ministry of Education, 2011; Samdrup, 2009; UNICEF, 2009). Further, other factors such as school culture in terms of punitive policies that adhere to strict systems, where the emphasis on performance and outcomes also appears to deter students from continuing education as they perhaps are likely to have had several negative experiences around schooling and not given a second chance (Witte et al., 2013).

Equally, studies on school drop-out also contend that a number of factors are inter-related and are inter-connected, and that one factor may be more closely linked to another or a combination of factors could be working together. For example, poor academic performance coupled with a dislike of school leading to expulsion, could lead one to drop-out of school; or the need to work to support a family alongside home responsibilities can possibly lead to school drop-out; similarly personal problems such as teenage pregnancy without proper family and teacher support can put social and psychological pressures
leading to withdrawal from schooling; and other factors such as substance abuse, involvement in crime, lack of future prospectus are highly likely to compound and expedite the process of school drop-out (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Drewry, 2007; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Lund, 2009; Mediamax Consultancy, 2013; Tidwell, 1988; UNESCO-UIS, 2012). Therefore, while it may be useful to study factors separately and independently, it is important to appreciate that there is an interplay between factors that certain factors may be more prominent and directly associated with drop-out and while other could be indirectly working against successful completion of schooling (Witte et al., 2013).

Context of the Study

Similar to the study by Hunt (2008), this current study attempted to capture student voices with regard to their own stories in terms of what factors led them to dropping out of school. Further, this study extends the finding of Dorji (2005) to directly capture the voices of students who dropped out of school. To date no study has been undertaken in Bhutan to qualitatively capture and record the voices of students who have dropped out of school making the current study unique and the first of its kind in Bhutan. Importantly, little work has captured student voice in terms of what could have been done to assist them to continue education, and thus, this study fills two purposes: firstly, documenting the reasons for school drop-out and secondly, to capture how schools and/or teachers and/or the community could have assisted them to continue schooling. This study recruited students who had dropped out of school from two different regions, four districts and seven different locations in Bhutan. These places were randomly selected to gain a broader perspective from varied student backgrounds. Documenting the voices of those that have dropped out of school avoids inferences and speculations from organizational characteristics and/or agencies (Eddy & Reid, 2001; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007).

METHOD

Participants

A total of 158 (118 males and 40 females) participants took part in the study. Participants were from four Youth Development Centers [Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Drug and Alcohol Dependence (Thimphu District, n= 8), Nazhoen Pelri Drop-In Centre (Thimphu District, n=59), Nazhoen Pelri Phuntsholing, Chukha District, n=47), Samzang Retreat Centre (Paro District, n=14)], one Detention Center [Youth Development and Rehabilitation Centre (Chukha District, n=22)] and a Community area (Samtse District, n=8). All the regions and the centers were randomly selected as per the convenience of the Researcher. The ages of the participants ranged from 13 to 44 years, with a mean age of 22. Of the 118 male participants, 22 were inmates serving sentences for Index Offences (i.e., reason for current conviction and incarceration).

Design

Similar to Dorji’s study (2005), this study also adopted a survey design. The Researcher initially contacted the respective Centers and sought approval and consent to visit centers and to recruit participants. The Researcher visited six different centers and explained to the participants the nature of the study and that it had met with their Departmental Consent and Ethics approval. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to capture their voices with regards to them dropping out of school; that the study was particularly interested in capturing factors that led them to dropping-out of school, and whether they engaged in any antisocial behaviours. Participants were also informed that their participation would be voluntary and that there was no incentive, reward or remuneration for their participation.

In addition, the Researcher informed participants that no identifiable information would be collected and that they could opt out of the study at any time. After these instructions, time was given to participants to ask questions or to seek clarification. Not knowing the education levels of participants, information to participants was given verbally, and information was read out aloud rather than requiring
participants to read information sheets. After providing all the information verbally, the Researcher presented the survey to the participants, all of the participants completed them individually, without any help and it took on average 20 minutes to complete the survey. The Researcher was present when participants were completing the survey to assist any who required questions to be read to them. No identifiable information was collected on the survey. All participants completed the survey and where appropriate, they provided quantitative and qualitative responses. After completing the survey, each participant returned the survey to the Researcher.

Measures
Using Dorji’s (2005) six questions of inquiry, a 14 item survey was developed. This survey had 3 qualitative and 11 quantitative questions. Three qualitative questions, 6, 13 to 14 were: 6, please mention reasons for dropping out of school; 13, what do you intend to do after you leave the center, and 14: comment on how the school could have assisted you not to drop-out of school. Quantitative questions included: age, gender, highest level of education completed, school drop-out (yes/no), year of drop-out, job (yes/no), age at the start of employment, age of first offence, nature of offence, total number of offences, penalty received.

Data Analysis
Quantitative data around demographic details are presented through descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis aimed at capturing themes among participants. The Researcher created deductive constructed-analysis which was used to capture emerging ideas, meaning and categories in the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Results are reported in line with the research questions and in terms of descriptive information as to how many dropped out of school, factors that led them to drop out of school and whether they engaged in antisocial behaviours. In addition, increase in school drop was analyzed at the grade level.

RESULTS
Participants reported that they had dropped out of school during the time period of 1984 to 2014 and at all levels of education starting from Grade 1 to Grade 12. Importantly, a significant number, 75.3% (n=119), reported that they had dropped out of school, with over 90% (n=36) of females dropping out of schools and with over 70% (n=83) of boys reporting they had dropped out of school with girls appear to drop-out at a higher rate than boys. While most male students were expelled from school due to disciplinary reasons such as fights, drugs abuse, alcoholism, girls had to leave schools due to pregnancy and to help parents at home. Further, in terms of the number of students dropping out at the secondary level, the highest was at grade 12 accounting for 31.6% (n=50) of drop-out, followed by grade 10 accounting for 22.2% (n=35) of drop-out and together secondary school drop-outs accounted for over 78.5%, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Number of Students Dropping out by School Level (Grade)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 12</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School drop-out and school drop-out according to per gender
In terms of the reasons for dropping out of school, a total of 75.3% of participants mentioned 22 different reasons for dropping out of school, while 24.7% (n=39) did not state any particular reason for dropping out of school. The most significant reasons for dropping out of school were financial problems 18.4%, followed by drug abuse 17.1% and then family problems 14%. Overall, financial problems, drug use and family problems accounted for 54% of school drop-outs. The summaries of reasons for drop-outs are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Reason for Participants Dropping out of School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs abuse</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholism</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested in studies</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ divorce</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents pressure/option</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antisocial problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline problem at school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of family &amp; school support</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion from school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem with teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disqualified for higher studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizenship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ran away from home</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reason</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor in studies</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Descriptions of Themes

**Individual:** At the individual level, this section will present how poverty, family problems including parental divorce, having to be a home, becoming pregnant, involvement anti-social behaviors and use of substances and alcohol – have to impact their schooling.

**Financial (poverty):** Three participants said that because of their poor family background they were unable to continue their studies. To this end, another participant reported, I had “… no financial support to complete [or] continue education …”, and yet another commented, “…due to poor condition and [because] my parents who were very … very … poor … I had to drop out of school ….” Further, two
more remarked, “… because of the financial problem…” we had to drop out of school. And similarly two more recollected, because of financial problem they could not complete class 10 and one went on to state, “… I could not to continue my education [as] my parents could not afford [for] me to go for further studies …” It appears that students from poor family backgrounds are not able to afford education.

Further, it appears very few options are available for students after grade 10 if their grades do not show that they are a high performing student, as one participant reports, “… that they cannot afford private education and the vocational training institutes cannot absorb all standard 10 and 12 graduates…” perhaps this leads more directly to students dropping-out of school as very few can get places due to continue education in Grade 10 and Grade 12.

**Family problem:** One participant remarked “… due to family problems and lack of support …” I dropped out of school, and similarly, another added, “…because of my family problem and problems within my family…. my father and mother are fighting every day so I was sad and get drop out …” Three other participants commented that they dropped out “… due to family problem …”.

**Parental divorce:** One participant stated that due to their parents being divorced, “… [I] could not support my schooling expenditure…”, and another said, “… my father and mother got divorced, so I got very sad and stopped studying”.

**Required to be at home:** One participant noted that the reason for dropping-out of school was that it was required that, “… [I] had to help parents because [there was] no one to support [my] parents ….” Similarly, two other participants similarly mentioned that they had to drop-out of school because their “…parents wanted [them] to stay home … because no one [was] there to help us, so that [I] have to leave [school]…” Likewise, another participant remarked, “… because there was no one to help my mother …” I had to drop-out of school and yet another remarked, “…because at home there is no one to work so I had to drop my school and help my parents at village …”

**Pregnancy:** One female participant reported that she dropped-out of school as, “… I became pregnant…”

**Antisocial Behaviours:** One participant commented, “…I had to drop out because of gang fight…”, and another commented, “…I was caught in gang fights repeatedly …”

**Alcoholism:** One participant stated “… I had to drop out because of drinking alcohol during school hour…”. and another said “… because of my drinking problem, couldn’t attend my classes regularly…”

**Substance abuse:** One participant stated “… due to my addiction, I could not study properly and that’s why I have lost my school….” Two other participants reported that they dropped-out of school, “…due to addiction problem… and one commented, “… the reason for me to drop out of school was [that] I was caught with substance abuse …” and the other reported, “… because of addiction problem…” I dropped out of school. Yet another stated, I was, “…not interested in studies due to my addiction matter …”

**School:** At the school level this section will provide insight into how school discipline and lack of interest had led students to drop out of school.

**School discipline:** One participant noted, “…no school was willing to admit me…”. It appears that certain schools had very strict policies around admission, retention, expulsion and re-entry. Another participant commented, “… rather than taking strict actions like suspension and expulsion, they could have helped a student like me by giving counselling or the teachers must be well trained in handling this kind of situation or students. Teachers shouldn’t neglect people like us….”. Yet another stated, “… if the teachers would have little understanding on me and supporting me to overcome my addiction problem instead of expelling me from the school, I would have completed my education …”. While another commented, “… the school administration could have assisted me not suspending me that wasted precious two years”, rather they could have sent me to retreat/rehabilitation centre…”

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Lack of interest in studies and poor academic achievement: One participant stated, “… because I am not interested in education and I wanted to be trained in vocational training … [I quit school]...” Another participant commented on poor academic achievement by noting, “… I had to drop because of my ignorance in study and I failed several times. So, I had no other option than to drop out ...” Another reported, “… couldn’t qualify for higher study...” and yet another similarly reported, “…reason for dropping out of school [was] that I could not qualify in class twelve…”, and yet another commented I was “ …not qualified …” to go on to future studies.

Combination of factors:
A number of factors seem to work against students unable to continue education and/or leading to sudden drop-out. To this end, one participant reported, “…pressuring teachers and drugs and fighting …” all led to drop-out of school. Further, another participant commented, “…lack of support from family and teachers…” and another similarly reported, “…problem with teachers and family problem …” led me to drop-out of school. Similarly, another participant mentioned, “…from the beginning itself, I used to abuse substances and due to that I involved in fighting and that’s the reason why I dropped out…”, and likewise another stated, “…I had to drop-out from school because I was caught red-handed by teachers with the substances. I used to use drugs … actually, when I was in class nine, I got indulged in substance abuse because of my friends. I was so addicted to it that I used to take even in school hours. When I was in class 10, I was caught red-handed and was expelled...” Another participant revealed that, “… because of addiction, couldn’t even manage to get pass mark, couldn’t get through class 12...” Additionally, another participant described that, “…influenced by my friends, I got involved into anti-social problems…” which led to this participant dropping out and another stated “…[lack of] family support and getting pregnant …” led this student to drop-out of school. Yet another remarked, “…I was an average student but because I got caught by police as I was indulged in gang fight and was imprisoned. As soon as the school received news about me, they decided to terminate me …”

Qualitative themes of how students could be assisted from not dropping-out of school.
This section will present how school/teach support and guidance support could have realistically assisted students to continue and/or re-engage in learning.

School support and teacher support: One participant reported, “…if I was given support and advised not to drop the school …”, and another participant stated, “… the school could have assisted me by not terminating me out of school …”. Yet another commented, “…school could have given me second chance rather than ruining my future…”, and another participant reported the same by saying, “…I could have been given second opportunity…” Yet another importantly remarked, schools and teacher alike should, “…give moral support and give a second chance to change myself …” Similarly, another participant pointed out, “… rather than taking strict actions like suspension and expulsion, they could have helped a student like me by giving counselling or the teachers must be well trained in handling this kind of situation or students. Teachers shouldn’t neglect people like us…” Likewise, another participant noted that “…I was suspended and teachers didn’t want to help …”

In terms of school providing support, one participant remarked, “…[being aware of my problems] … they may have sent me to rehab before..., as now I am in rehabilitation center after being suspended…”, in support of the above, another participant goes on to note, “…the school committee should be aware of what their students are up to. They should enforce strict rules and above all, give counselling from time to time to their students... [they] … should focus on those students like me, who are backward in studies and should have made a committee for the students, those who have poor financial background for further studies ...” Another participant reported, “…if they could financially help me to continue my education …”, that they might have helped me not to drop-out of school. Two more participants similarly remarked that the school should “…support financially poor students who wish to continue their education … [and] …school should talk about the financial problems and about loans…”
suggested that some financial assistance in terms of aid or loan could have assisted them to continue education.

**Teacher support:** One participant reported, “...I would suggest teachers should be trained well and they have to understand the situation of the student …” In addition, another participant stated, “...teachers should give equal attention to everyone ... [and] teachers should be friendly and advising the students ...” Yet another commented, “...if the teachers would have little understanding on me and supporting me to overcome my addiction problem instead of expelling me from the school, I would have completed my education ...” Two participants reported that, “...teachers should give equal attention to everyone ...” and that “...teachers should be friendly [in] advising the students ...”

**Guidance and counselling:** One participant reported, “...school should have given me counselling rather than sending me out of school...”, likewise another commented that school “...could have encouraged parenting meeting to bridge gap between children and parents [and] school should advise what is good and bad for girls in the future to their parents...”, as the consequences of dropping-out of school is not known to parents. Another participant reported that schools should regularly emphasize and run, “...awareness program[s] on ill effects of drug use, [and provide] counselling [on the] value education.” Similarly, another participant remarked that schools should inform students of the consequences for the lack of “...education, ill effects of drugs and alcohol and the benefits of continuing the studies...” indicating that timely advice and information could have stopped them from dropping out of school.

**DISCUSSION**

School drop-out in Bhutan is a multilayered problem and the student voices obtained in this study have identified several factors associated with and/or leading to school drop-out. For example, a lack of finances, drug and substance abuse, family problems, involvement in fights, a lack of interest in studies, parental divorce, parents pressure/option, antisocial problems, discipline problems at school, a lack of family support, a lack of school support, pregnancy, expulsion from school, problem with teachers, disqualified for higher studies, ran away from home, burglary, health, repetition and other personal reasons. The above findings were in line with a number of previous studies related to school drop-out (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Drewry, 2007; Dorji, 2005; DuPont et al., 2013; Freeman & Simonsen, 2014; Hunt, 2008; Mathis, 2013; National High School Center, 2007; Palmore, 1963; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Rumberger, 2001; Witte et al., 2013). Importantly, future studies must closely investigate to what extent a factor is either accidental, and/or cultural and/or chance and/or purposeful, for knowing the function of the factor might assist schools and policy makers to set up much needed support.

This study found that the most salient reasons for dropping out of school were financial problems, followed by drugs and then family problems (Dorji, 2005; Tidwell, 1988; UNESCO-UIS, 2012). The main reasons attributed for drop-out of school in Bhutan, appears to financial as there is a lack of money to support schooling/education related expenses; it also appears that economics of education in terms of parents being unable to support expenses has led to students to drop-out of school. This is an interesting finding because education is free in Bhutan, so it raises questions as to what other indirect costs they are with regard to schoolings in Bhutan. Future studies must closely investigate what these costs and they have come to hidden such a barrier and obstacle towards students continuing education.

Another interesting finding within the context of Bhutan was that after completion of grades 10 and 12, students who do not qualify for government scholarships due to the high grades requirement, are faced with two options, either to study in private school/college or opt for vocational trainings, and perhaps this leads to sense of learnt helplessness, for if a student is not high achieving student, they are likely to learn early on that if they don't score high grades and/or have the required finances that they cannot continue education, and perhaps this is another reason they could be drop-out of school early as the bar is set high. It is very likely these student either to take up a job or stay at home to assist family and
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 quit schooling all together. Perhaps offering scholarships and/or setting up some financial aid for such students, might at least give some of them an opportunity to continue and/or remain in education.

This study confirmed that school drop-out does not happen in isolation, and importantly has found that a number of individual and school factors are associated with students dropping out of school (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Drewry, 2007; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Lund, 2009; Mediamax Consultancy, 2013; UNESCO-UIS, 2012; Tidwell, 1988; Subedi & Nepal, 2010). A mixture of drug abuse, involvement in gangs, crime and punitive school polices alongside lack of support, all seem to contribute towards school drop-out. In addition, it appears that a combination of both personal and social factors seem to contribute to school drop-out, i.e., students are required to be home to support domestic/agriculture work or in other words be economically productive and at the same time support the family. Perhaps a cultural sense family obligation of having to be at home, overrides their personal commitment to study. Here the complexity of the problem is twofold: one, it is very difficult to assess how much students are culturally pressured to be at home in assisting and caring for the family, and secondly, it is not clear whether this inadvertently turns into a negative and stressful experience, wherein children are unable to continue or pursue their own aspirations and/or ambitions.

Finally, a novel finding of the study was that students themselves provided realistic, reasonable and practical ways that schools and teachers could have assisted them to remain at school. Students clearly stated that they need to be supported in a number of ways while at school and the most prominent was through counselling. Also, having a culture of second chance and teachers giving a hearing to their everyday pressures could have further assisted some students to remain in schooling. Future studies must explore what support programs are already set up in schools and perhaps review these programs to see who is accessing them and to what extent they are available to students who are at risk of disengaging.

In terms of implications, schools in Bhutan must take seriously the voices of students, especially with regard to providing financial, personal and school support at both individual and school level. Schools in Bhutan must provide the necessary support to students, especially those who are at the risk of disengaging due to family commitments. Within the context of Bhutan, policy makers must take into account the voices of students to make tangible policy reforms to assist in piratical ways (i.e., providing scholarships or alternative pathways to beyond Grade 10 be it to higher education and/or vocational education and training). Further, schools in Bhutan and to that extent all schools in general must measure the effectiveness of their support programs in terms of who they are helping, how they are helping, as this study has found that a great majority of students would have benefitted from counselling and support.

References

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