

Examining the Learning Experiences of Orphans from a Critical Perspective

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Orphans are amongst the most vulnerable group of children. It is important to stimulate awareness as well as sensitivity to their issues. Framed within a critical perspective, we heighten awareness and sensitivity about the perspectives and needs of children living in an orphanage. As we examine their learning experiences and associated challenges in details, we project their views and beliefs about learning. We used multiple methods for the purpose of this study which include: drawings with follow up interviews, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest that participants have a strong tendency to link their educational goals with their unmet needs such as money, home, and family. Besides, their learning experiences are mainly influenced by three major factors including the teacher, classroom environment, and language.

Keywords: *orphans; orphanage; learning experiences; drawings, qualitative research; critical perspective*

Introduction

The quality of childhood is a critical factor in shaping the future of children. Learning experiences are largely determined by the care and protection children to receive or fail to receive from adults. Learners coming from a disadvantaged background are at the risk of receiving insufficient education, and that, too of inferior quality (Motha & Frempong, 2013). This is particularly true for orphans, who live a different kind of life, and experience learning in deficient ways than normal children. It is, therefore, important to examine their learning experiences and project their voices (Naqshbandi, Sehgal, & Hassan, 2012). Orphans have been described as children who are not yet 18 years old and have lost one or both parents (Daniel, 2005; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund UNICEF, 2015). More specifically, the term "double orphan" is used to describe a child who has lost both parents. Whereas, "maternal

orphan" or "paternal orphan" refers to a child who has lost his/her mother or father respectively. "Social orphans" classifies children, who have parents, but they are very poor and cannot afford to take care of their children (Dillon, 2008). Since they are not willing to take the responsibility of their children due to poverty, they send them to orphanages (Disney, 2013). As parents pass away, children become vulnerable and get subjected to various risks that pose significant challenges in terms of their education (Motha & Frempong, 2013). Some of the associated risks include lack of parental guidance and support, economic hardships, social isolation, psychological problems, learning limitations, and absenteeism (Yamano, 2006). Consequently, orphans are considered a highly vulnerable group which is exposed to several threats besides violence, child disability and abuse, and mental illness. A vulnerability has been explained as the individual's "susceptibility to negative

developmental product (negative behaviors and attitudes) that can occur under high-risk conditions" (Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994, p. 66).

While parents are considered to be primarily responsible for the moral, social, emotional, religious, and intellectual development of their children; their absence may influence a child's development across these significant areas. An orphan is vulnerable in a sense that he/she is exposed to behaviours, conditions or circumstances that he/she is incapable to control. In such circumstances, most of the children enter orphanages and ultimately, the state becomes responsible for providing them with quality education and life (Lassi, Mahmud, Syed, & Janjua, 2011). However, the attributes and circumstances associated with orphans present substantial challenges to sustain the quality of education.

Orphans' education has received considerable attention across the globe. This is evident in a number of studies conducted in various regions of the world in general; and Africa in particular (Motha & Frempong, 2013). Most of these studies have explored the life experiences of orphans living in orphanages. It is asserted that learners living in indigent communities are subjected to a variety of disadvantages and are at risk of receiving an education of an inferior quality. Education is mainly about learning. Learning is a process through which people reflect and solve problems. It brings some permanent change in an individual's knowledge or behaviour through meaningful experiences (Woolfolk & Greenberg, 2004). However, it is not always evident, intentional and deliberate; rather it can also be unintentional and unconscious. Among the vulnerable groups of children, orphans are considered critically

underprivileged in receiving and accessing positive learning experiences. Although issues related to orphans' learning and education have been well established through researchers in foreign contexts, a few studies have dealt with their experiences in general, and learning experiences in particular, within the Pakistani context (Lassi, et al., 2011). Consequently, more studies are needed to closely examine and understand their learning experiences in order to promote quality education for this vulnerable group of children. This study examined the learning experiences of children living in an orphanage from a critical perspective to access "the unique viewpoints of the oppressed group" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 21); and develop a deep understanding of their educational needs. More specifically, it dealt with the orphans of ages eight to 10 years, who are further considered a weakened group because of their limited capabilities to express and communicate feelings and who are subject to adults' dominance (Greig & Taylor, 1999). This is particularly important since there is a lack of research that examines the learning experiences of orphans, specifically within this age group, in Pakistan (Hussain, 2007). Consequently, the study provides a platform to express their beliefs as well as portray their learning experiences. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. How do orphans view learning?
What are their beliefs about learning and education?
2. How do orphans experience learning inside an orphanage? What difficulties do they encounter?

Theoretical Framework

This study examines the learning experiences of orphans in order to heighten awareness and sensitivity about the views and needs of this vulnerable, yet significant group of

children. Consistent with the critical perspective (Kristina, 2011), we remained sensitive to the issues of power, inequality, and restrictions throughout the study. We attended to some important dimensions of critical approach by identifying a representative group of oppressed children to highlight familiarity and sensitivity about their needs (Ferguson, 2003). Critical perspective served as an interpretative framework to examine views, experiences and other conditions in critical forms. We dwelled on creativity and reflection as means to uncover their experiences through social interference (Ferguson, 2003). Consistently, we asked participants to make drawings related to their learning experiences and reflect on them, and further engage them in meaningful conversations. We used evidence-based practices by employing dialogic methods to foster conversation and reflection (e.g., drawings with follow up interviews, participant observations and semi-structured interviews). This allowed us to generate thick, descriptive, consistent, and reliable evidence to project unheard voices and highlight deprivations of a subjugated group of society (Dilthey, 1999).

The Research Context

We conducted this research in a semi-government orphanage located within a below average/lower class area in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. Since we wanted to project underprivileged voices, it seemed appropriate to conduct the study in a disadvantaged neighbourhood.

The semi-governmental orphanage also receives support from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). NGOs are considered as the most commonly recognized organizations to provide basic developmental needs including education, health, and social awareness to vulnerable groups of society.

Although the orphanage benefitted from both, i.e., the government as well as NGOs, the structure and environment did not appear promising. As we became a part of the orphanage during the data collection period that comprised six weeks, we had several informal conversations with the head, Mrs Shaheen (pseudonym). She repeatedly mentioned that a number of challenges faced by the orphanage inhibit its capacity to promote quality education and lives of orphans. The inadequacies of basic necessities of life along with other challenges add to the complexities in the already deprived lives of orphans. In this way, the orphanage provided a rich context for the study. The orphanage followed the Act of 1976 implemented by the Government of Punjab, Pakistan in caring for the orphans. This Act defines an orphan as:

- any child under the age of eighteen years.
- the ones who have lost their parents or one of their parents and have an inadequate source of income.
- an unclaimed child.
- the ones whose parents are destitute or who have been destitute by their parents

We sought formal permission from Mrs Shaheen to conduct the study. We provided her with an information sheet that explained the purpose of the study. We assured her that the participation in the study is completely voluntary and that the identity of the orphanage or the participants would never be disclosed. Following her written permission, we proceeded with the data collection activity.

Methods

A total of 14 orphans participated in this study. Their ages range from eight to 10 years. As we approached the participants, we introduced ourselves and explained the purpose of our study in a simple language. Later, we invited

them to participate; however, we ensured them that they are free to refuse or even withdraw their participation at any time during the study. We repeatedly assured them that their identities would never be disclosed to anyone. Only those children, who agreed to participate, were included in the sample. We also contacted their guardians to seek approval. Out of the 14 participants, three were in Grade 3, while all other were in Grade 4. The average age of the participants was nine years. 11 were paternal orphans whereas three were social orphans. We developed a coding reference to refer to the participants in this manuscript. Thus, (Amar, G3, 9y, PO) refers to a child, who is: given a pseudonym Amar, in Grade 3, nine years old, and is a paternal orphan. None of the participants is identified with his real name. The data collection period lasted for six weeks. We triangulated data by employing multiple methods to develop a deep understanding of orphans' learning experiences. These include drawings with follow up interviews, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. This allowed us to substantiate findings by increasing their truthfulness (Weber, 2010). We used drawings as a tool for data collection in order to bridge the communication gap with young children (Sullivan, 2009). Drawing is considered as a comforting exercise whereby an individual's defensiveness is reduced and, as a result, communication is enhanced. This makes it an appropriate approach to explore their experiences (Driessnack, 2006; Young & Barret, 2011). Consequently, it allowed them to take control of the research process by shaping what they want to share with us. As the participants finished drawing the images that describe their learning experiences at the orphanage, we followed up with interviews. During the interviews, we clarified what and why

the participants had drawn a particular image/picture? What was the underlying meaning they attach to their drawings? What type of experiences or messages did they want to convey through their drawings? This strategy was deemed less threatening than asking direct questions. Consequently, they became more involved in the research process. We also conducted participant observations to observe learning experiences of participants in natural settings. We entered the field with a brief structure of what to observe. However, we kept it open to observe changes that may occur over time (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). It allowed us to develop a better understanding of their experiences by actually observing them in different activities inside and outside the classroom at the orphanage. A total of seven classroom observations spread across the six weeks of data collection activity were conducted (at the orphanage) in the classrooms of participating children. Four of these sessions were conducted in Grade 4, while three sessions were conducted in Grade 3. Teachers' written consent was obtained before conducting observations. Each session lasted 30 minutes during which details were recorded on an observation protocol developed specifically for this purpose. We also conducted semi-structured interviews on one to one basis with the participants during the last week of data collection activity. Each interview lasted for 10-15 minutes and was recorded on a digital audio-recorder. Unlike interviews which were conducted earlier and which focused on extracting meaning from drawings, these interviews emphasized learning experiences. We began interviews by allowing children to tell their "life stories" to help them feel comfortable (Seidman, 1991). Later, we asked questions related to their learning

experiences. These include questions about classrooms, facilities etc. (physical conditions) as well as social and emotional conditions related to learning. Overall, we remained sensitive to the feelings and emotions of the participants throughout the data collection period. Since these children are vulnerable, we took every measure to reduce any possible risk of unexpected hurt. In doing so, we remained sensitive to the information that they revealed, listened to them patiently even if they did not specifically answer the questions asked, provided them with a relaxed environment to express their views, did not force them to reveal information that they don't want to share, assured them about confidentiality and repeatedly reminded them about their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Data Analysis

It is important to reduce the huge amount of collected data to generate themes and make appropriate interpretations (Lecompte & Schensul, 1999). We followed several stages in a cyclical, back and forth fashion including examining and re-examining of data, highlighting important concepts or experiences, encoding, categorizing, revising codes and categories, interpreting, and representing. We coded data generated from drawings according to different themes informed by our understanding and interpretations. We specifically examined the meanings and understandings that the participants attached to their drawings during follow up interviews. We transcribed the recorded interviews and developed data sets. Each set, at this stage, comprised a drawing with a transcript of the follow-up interview. This analysis relied mainly on the comparison of drawings with their accompanying interview data. As a first step, we examined and

interpreted the drawings alone to develop broad categorizations of their logical content. Later, we linked them to the corresponding verbal explanation in the transcripts. Thus, our interpretations drawn in the first step were re-framed within the participants' perspectives.

Thematic Analysis was used for the analysis of data generated through interviews and observations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We followed six steps: (1) write down data, revise data, and note original ideas (this involves preparing transcripts, cleaning up field notes and organizing data sets); (2) create initial codes; (3) search main themes; (4) review themes; (5) describe and name themes; and (6) select answer, extract and analyse these excerpts according to the research questions. As we analysed the data and generated themes, our aim was to achieve mutual agreement among us (the researchers) about the assigned codes, relevant data excerpts from the transcripts, and themes generated. We achieved this consistency by developing consensus while assigning each code and category to the data. We kept the codes open and revised them several times as soon as new information and patterns emerged from the data. As the themes emerged, we revisited them to identify similar patterns, potential conflicts, and unique ideas. We merged the themes that were similar and compressed the list. This helped us to identify the major themes that are presented in the following section.

Findings and Discussions

This section is organized into two sub-sections including orphans' beliefs and values about learning; and orphans' learning experiences.

Orphans' Beliefs and Values about Learning

This section presents orphans' beliefs and values about learning through data generated from drawings with follow-up interviews, semi-structured interviews

and informal conversations. Grounded in the critical perspective, it highlights oppressed voices of orphans to project views about their learning experiences. The findings are organized around three major themes including

- Orphans' interests and inspirations for learning
- Symbolizing learning
- Outdoor learning

Orphans' interests and inspirations for learning

Interest plays an important role in **Table 1**

learning and helps to achieve educational goals. We asked children if they like to learn, why, why not? We also inquired them about their educational goals. Most of them expressed considerable interest in learning and stated that they have set their personal goals for future learning. This is evident from their quotes presented in Table 1.

Orphans' interests and inspirations for learning

Evidence	
Interest and inspiration for learning	
Love for learning	<p>"I like to learn because no work is possible without learning" (Imran, G4, 8y, SO)</p> <p>". . . I enjoy when I learn" (Salman, G3, 8y, PO)</p>
Learning for a respectable profession	<p>"I like to learn because I want to work like an officer when I grow up" (Hasher, G4, 10y, PO)</p> <p>"I like to learn because I want to become a doctor"(Imran, G4, 8y, SO)</p>
Learning for money	"I want to become a doctor and earn money for [my] family"(Usman, G4, 10y, PO)
Learning to go back to home	<p>"I like to learn because I want to go back home after completing my studies from the orphanage"(Hassan, G4, 10y, PO)</p> <p>"I like to learn because I want to go back home as soon as possible"(Umar, G4, 9y, PO)</p>
Learning from others	"I like to learn because I want to build an orphanage"(Waqas, G4, 10y, PO)
Learning for family	"I like to learn because I want to do some work for my family" (Amar, G3, 9y, PO)

The comments presented in Table 1 provide insights into children's inspirations for learning. Most of them expressed a love for learning. However, their interest in learning appears to be

driven by the future goals they have set for themselves. These include a respectable profession, money, home, orphanage and family. Their comments suggest that they tend to associate their

goals with their unmet needs. For example, Usman wants to learn so that he can earn money for his family. Hassan and Umar want to be at home “as soon as possible” and this is why they like to learn.

Stelzer and Ernest (2004) argued that attitudes and beliefs about learning which children set in childhood are best indicators of their future decisions. Our data further suggest that the beliefs of orphans are influenced by their unmet needs as a result of orphanhoods such as lack of money, and an absence of a home.

Symbolizing Learning

The computer is an influential source of learning which plays an important role in students’ achievement and motivation (Skaalvik, 1997). When we asked orphans to draw something that describes their life and learning at the orphanage, some of them drew computers to represent learning (see Figure 1). Participant observations revealed that although there were a few computers at the orphanage, the children had limited access to these resources. Children who drew computer to symbolize learning explained in the follow-up interviews that they want to learn through the computer.

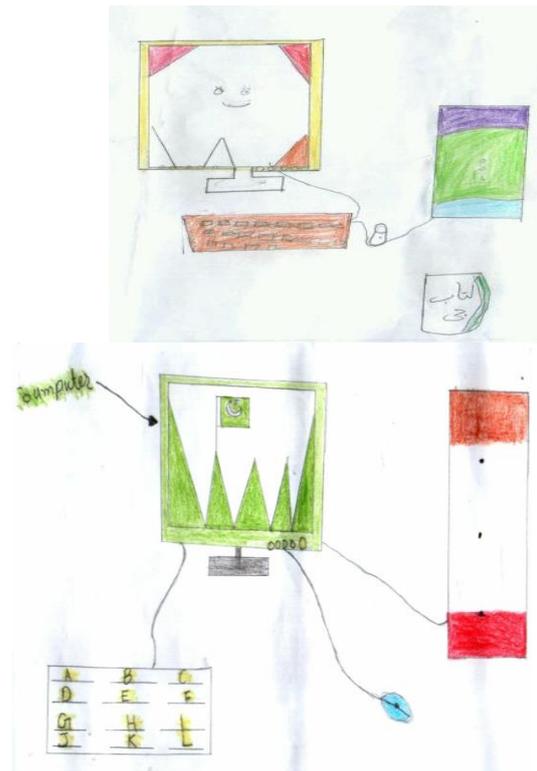


Figure 1.

Computers, a symbol of learning for the orphaned children

The drawings presented in Figure 1 reflect a desire to learn from a computer. Most of the participants mentioned that learning through the computer is a source of enjoyment for them, for example, "I enjoy learning from computer because I play games, draw painting [on computer]" (Ehsan, G3, 8y, PO). They reported using computers for drawing and painting. They expressed a desire to learn new things through the computer, Ahmad (G4, 10y, PO), mentioned: “I like a computer because I draw pictures and get them through print copy, and I learn something new through the computer.” Although we noticed a few computers in the computer laboratory at the orphanage, we did not observe children using it, even for once, during the six weeks long data collection period.

The participants' views about learning through computer suggest that they want to get educated through different and modern resources. They

believe that computers can help them to learn new things. Their views about computer are significant, for the reason that computer appeared to be a shaping factor in orphans' beliefs of being successful learners.

Some of the participants drew a teacher with a stick to represent their learning experiences (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Teacher, a symbol of strictness
The discussions in the follow-up interviews revealed that participants view their teachers as strict and rigid, as Salman shared, “The teacher’s behaviour is so bad, every time [the teacher] punishes me” (Salman, G3, 8y, PO). As we asked Hassan to explain what did he draw (see Figure 2), he explained that he drew fire and teacher. We probed him to explain why did they (fire and teacher) have the same colour,

he replied, “the teacher is on fire” (Hassan, G4, 10y, PO). These drawings and comments suggest that teacher is a symbol of strictness for some of the participants. This is a critical issue related to their learning experiences since teachers' behaviour influence students' views and learning.

Participant observations also revealed that the teachers used ineffective strategies and methods to teach. For example, during one of the observations, the teacher came to teach Maths. She wrote a question on the board and was about to leave the classroom when a student requested her: “Teacher, please explain the question [you wrote] on the blackboard.” She replied, “I explained this question last week, other students understand [the] question, what is the problem with you?” Overall, this teacher does not appear to have a positive impact on students' learning.

Children used different symbols to represent their views and experiences about learning in an orphanage. Besides computer and teacher with a stick, they also drew pictures of the book, home, and pen to represent learning experiences (e.g., see Figure 3).



Figure 3. A drawing of a house.

Overall, the drawings and the follow-up interviews suggest that orphans have their own beliefs about learning. Some of them are positive (e.g. a book, a pen, and computers) while other representations are negative (e.g., a teacher with a stick, home). In particular, the drawings of a home represent their distress. Since they do

not have a home, parent(s), and siblings; their drawings represent a yearning for home and feelings of continuous grief.

Outdoor Learning

Another significant theme that came to the surface through analysis of data was a strong desire for outdoor learning. Every child has a right to an education that fosters respect for the natural environment and opportunities to participate in the cultural and artistic activities (Ham, 1992). Orphans' views and drawings revealed that they felt deprived of such a basic right. Consequently, they desired for outdoor learning opportunities (see Figure 4). One of the participants drew a boat to describe his learning experiences. Intrigued by his drawing, we asked how does he relate boat to learning. He revealed that he had travelled in the boat with his brother, a few years ago. However, the pleasant memories of that experience are still fresh in his mind. Other children also mentioned that outing is a source of learning and enjoyment.



Figure 4 Outdoor learning

The sense of freedom mentioned by one of the participants, Aadil (G4, 10y, SO), during travel and outdoor learning provided him with an opportunity to learn and reflect. He insisted that

learning cannot be confined to the walls of a classroom and said, "I feel free when I go for an outing. I don't only learn in the classroom. I also learn through the outing."

This is a very critical issue because an outing or an excursion is a part of learning about the external environment and societal aspects (Crompton, 1979). Outdoor learning signifies free-choice learning, during which, learners are engaged in formal and informal experiences of learning within real-life settings. However, the orphans who participated in the study appeared sadly deprived of such unique learning experiences.

Orphans' Experiences regarding Learning

This section explains orphans' real-life experiences related to learning. Since learning experiences are positively related to students' achievement and academic involvement (Gallagher, 2011), it is critical to examine orphans' learning experiences in detail. The drawings and interviews of participants along with our participant observations revealed that their learning experiences are largely influenced by three major aspects including the teacher, classroom environment, and language.

The Teacher

Teachers can make a difference in students' lives in general, and learn in particular, through their knowledge, practices, and behaviour (Hattie, 2003). The quality of teacher-student interactions is positively linked to increased students' self-efficacy, achievement standards, enjoyment and interest in school, engagement, and goal orientation (Maulana, Opdenakker, Stroet, & Bosker, 2013). Consistently, data from this study reveals that learning experiences of the participants were greatly influenced by their teachers. This was evident from multiple sources of information including drawings, interviews and

participant observations. Figure 2 illustrates the drawing of a teacher with a stick. This clearly reflects that these children have been influenced negatively by teachers. Salman's comments confirm this negative influence, as he said, "the teacher's

behaviour is so bad, every time [the teacher] punishes me" (Salman, G3, 8y, PO). The participants reported that teachers do not come to classrooms and highlighted other negative influences (see Table 2).

Table 2

<i>Teacher's influence on learning</i>	
Teacher's influence on learning	Evidence
Teacher's behaviour	"I do not ask a question a second time because the teacher punishes me." (Umar, G4, 9y, PO) "The teacher punishes me during class"(Amar, G3, 9y, PO)
Teacher's absence	"The teacher does not come to the classroom; he came to the classroom for only a few times. Many people (outsiders) meet the teacher during class."(Usman, G4, 10y, PO)
Teaching style	"If I ask a question, the teacher says, 'ask some other children.'" (Ahmad, G4, 10y, PO) "[There is] no learning in my classroom. The teacher asks us to memorize the lesson and writes it. [The teacher] does not teach us." (Imran, G4, 8y, SO)
Learning difficulties	"I do not understand the questions, so my work gets wrong." (Ahsan, G4, 9y, PO)

The comments presented in Table 2 suggest that teachers' behaviour causes problems for learning at the orphanage. Teachers frequently use punishment (e.g., Umar & Amar, Table 4) which can be a source of humiliation, emotional instability and distress for the already disadvantaged children (Kilmici, 2009). Teachers have a great impact on students' achievement and learning (Hattie, 2003). However, the participants revealed that teachers are mostly absent from the classroom and do not take interest in their learning (see Table 4). Usman's comments reflect his desire to learn more since he is not satisfied with the time his teacher devotes to the classroom. The unavailability of teacher makes learning difficult for him. Other factors that participants associated to negative teachers' influences include ineffective strategies and teaching methods (e.g.,

Ahsan and Amar have issues in understanding the lesson/questions), and lack of interest in teaching (e.g., Imran, Table 4). Participant observations confirmed teachers' absence from the classrooms and lack of motivation in orphans' learning. Often, we noted that the teacher came and wrote a few words on the blackboard and left. In some other instances, the teacher asked students to memorize and write the lesson and then left the classroom. Although each class session lasts for 30 minutes, the teacher would leave the classroom after five to seven minutes. It was also observed that either the teacher would not come to the classroom or meet other people during the class time (even though we had a planned schedule for classroom observation). Overall, our observations and participants' comments indicate their desire to learn (this is evident when they ask questions in the

classroom), however, teachers do not appear to have a positive influence on their learning.

The Classroom Environment

Classroom environments, as supposed by students, have a number of characteristics which influence their growth and learning. Classrooms that are perceived as protected, warm, helpful and non-threatening support learning and accomplishment (Charles, 2005). The participants raised a number of concerns about their classroom environment which were further substantiated by us during the formal and informal observations.



Figure 5. A classroom at the orphanage

Figure 5 illustrates the physical settings of a classroom at the orphanage. It appears shabby, with a lack of furniture, blank walls and empty cupboards. We also observed that structural and organizational features of the classroom were not suitable for learners. For example, the classroom was too small to accommodate 50 students. Four children shared a single bench. The blackboard was also in a bad condition. While participants of the study expressed concerns about the overall classroom environment, they appeared to be less worried about the physical settings. Most of them highlighted noise and disturbance as major factors behind their disapproval of the classroom environment, for example, Ahsan (G4, 9y, PO), said, “I dislike the classroom environment because of a lot of noise.” Furthermore, the participants reported fighting in the classroom (Hasan, Table 3), and attributed lack of discipline and other disturbances to the absence of the teacher (Imran, Table 3), lack of learning activities, and lack of classroom rules (Hassan, Table 3).

Table 3

<i>Classroom environment</i>	
Classroom environment	Interview excerpts
Lacking learning	“I do not enjoy learning here [in the classroom] because the student is totally free and no one teaches us.” (Imran, G4, 8y, SO)
Absence of classroom rules	“I like a classroom but I feel disturbed when children make noise and there are no rules in the class. I feel very bad when

	children fight in the classroom” (Hassan, G4, 10y, PO)
Emotional disturbance	“I feel very disturbed when children make noise and teachers do not silent them” (Ehsan, G3, 8y, PO)

The classroom environment is vital for students' cognitive and affective growth and development. Students' learning improves when they have positive views about their classroom environment (Dorman, 2001). However, in this case, orphans' learning appear to be negatively influenced by classroom environment due to lack of teacher's interest, positive environment, and facilities.

The Language

Another important factor that influenced orphans' learning is language. They faced difficulties in learning because the curriculum is in a foreign language (i.e., English). However, the teaching and learning of English as a second

language has remained a daunting task till to date in Pakistan (Tariq, Bilal, Sandhu, Iqbal, & Hayat, 2013). Consistently, a vast majority of students and teachers, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds such as rural areas, face difficulties due to English as a medium of instruction. Although keen to learn English (see Table 4), orphans faced a number of problems due to limited language skills. This tendency was apparent in their drawings as well where a few of them drew English books to represent learning. It suggests that they consider the English language to be an important element of their learning.

<i>Language problems</i>	
Language	Evidence generated through follow-up interviews after drawings
Learning difficulties	<p>“I like English book because it has lots of stories. But while reading this book, I face a lot of problems” (Umar, G4, 9y, PO)</p> <p>“I like Maths and Science, but I face difficulties in these subject because these books have a lot of difficult words ” (Usman, G4, 10y, PO)</p> <p>“I like blackboard because it is a source of learning. I have faced problems in science book [due to the English language]” (Hassan, G4, 10y, PO)</p>

The comments presented in Table 4 reflect participants' desire to learn English language. This orientation could be attributed to their desire to pursue higher education. Garcia (2014) examined students' motives behind learning foreign languages in Pakistan. She argued that students tend to learn a foreign language(s) because of instrumental reasons such as plans to pursue higher levels of education, employment, and/or working with/in foreign companies. Although

participants of this study have a positive orientation towards learning the English language, they find it difficult and consider it as a negative influence on their learning. As we probed further, they were able to identify relevant challenges such as limited vocabulary and language skills. Research also suggests that language plays a vital role in learning and limited language skills can influence students' learning (e.g., Talyzina, 1981). Overall, participants reported that although they love to learn

English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies. However, they fail to understand the content due to language issues and eventually lose interest.

Conclusions

This study examines the learning experiences of children living in an orphanage. This group of children was vulnerable, oppressed, and their views, experiences, feeling and emotions had never been considered important. Framed within a critical perspective, we examined their learning experiences and projected their views, problems, challenges and experience regarding learning. The study demonstrates that the orphans' beliefs and values about learning are shaped by their personal and social circumstances. In particular, their unmet needs influence their desire to learn. For example, they have a strong tendency to link their educational goals with unmet needs such as money, home, and family. While some of these children want to learn so that they can earn money and make up for the deficiencies in their lives, others wish to reunite with their families (e.g., siblings). Overall, the learning experiences of these children are influenced by three major factors including the teacher, classroom environment, and the language. Unfortunately, teachers do not appear to have a positive influence on the learning experiences of the participants. Generally, teachers (who were observed in classrooms at the orphanage) use ineffective strategies and remain disinterested in their well-being, learning, and education. The situation is worsened by classrooms that are overcrowded with little or no facilities. Sometimes, children have to sit on the floor because of lack of furniture. Overall, the classrooms pose a threatening environment. Children are disturbed by regular noise and fights in

their classrooms. The participants further identified language as a major barrier to their learning. This is because the syllabus is in a foreign language and they lack sufficient skills. Yet, they express an interest in learning English language and consider it as a significant factor that can contribute to their learning and progress. This pattern is consistent with the research findings that Pakistani students learn foreign language(s) because of instrumental reasons including progress and development. However, despite favourable attitudes, English language remains a barrier to a majority of students' learning due to poor quality of teaching programs, outdated syllabi, and lack of teachers' training (Mansorr, 2003). The rich and thick descriptions of orphans' learning experiences highlight their views and project their problems. This working knowledge can be used to develop insights about how to improve the overall environment in general, and learning environment in particular of the institutions that are responsible for the education of orphans and other vulnerable children (OVCs). The insights from the study can further inform the developmental programs and strategies to improve the learning of OVCs. We also noted that these children face a number of other problems that significantly influence their learning. Some of these include lack of proper health care, behavioural issues, and psychological problems. However, we did not investigate these issues due to our specific focus on their learning experiences. Similar studies are needed to address such issues in detail. In all, we intend to highlight and project the voices of an oppressed group of children to create a better realization of their needs and rights. Imran's comments presented below appear as the best representation of the oppressed voices generated through this study. Consequently, we use it as the most

convincing evidence to close the report. Every person has a good character, but I don't have. Nobody likes me and everyone says that I am very bad, so, [now] I call myself bad. Before any other person says this, it's better than I say it myself. Please tell me if there is anyone in Pakistan, who would say that I am good except you [pointing to the interviewer]. . . . This is why I don't want to learn. (Imran, G4, 8y, SO.

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