

## **Academic Failure at Primary Level: A Qualitative Approach to Primary Education in Pakistan**

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This study adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the major reasons of academic failure at primary level in urban public schools in Pakistan. A group of experienced school teachers (N=12) teaching at primary level in public schools of Rawalpindi city were selected as the key informants of the study. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with participant teachers during school hours. Grounded theory approach was used for data analysis. The thematic analysis of the interviews of participant teachers revealed three main reasons for academic failure of students at primary level in urban public schools in Pakistan, which were further divided into sub categories in accordance with the teachers' perceptions. The three main factors that came out as a result of analysis are family, school and student. The participant teachers were of the view that these factors have not contributed to the academic failure namely, but they all markedly influenced this phenomenon at different stages. In the end, some useful reform measures for improvement of the quality of primary education in Pakistan were presented as proposed by the participants.

**Key words:** *academic failure, urban public schools, primary level, primary school teachers*

### **Introduction**

Causes of academic failure were investigated in different research studies both in developing and developed countries. A wide range of causes and factors were identified, both internal and external to the education system. Research evidence from several studies has suggested that the academic success or failure of a student is related to cultural and socioeconomic characteristics, and interactive relationships among children, parents, teachers, and peer groups, (Schneider & Lee, 1990; Gomes-Neto & Hanushek, 1994; El-Hassan, 1998). Moreover, those students are required to repeat grades who have not acquired the level of knowledge and skills expected for the completion of that grade.

In addition to this, research evidence suggests that fear of loss and insult is associated with expected academic failure, and students often work hard to save themselves. Sideridis (2006) argued that "feeling obliged to engage in an

activity and to do well was strongly associated with fear; fear of failure and fear of negative evaluations" (p.12).

Research evidence has revealed that a number of factors contribute in this phenomenon. Schneider and Lee (1990) stated while discussing the factors responsible for school failure that Explanations for differences in academic achievement among America's minority students have tended to be driven by theories that place the responsibility for school failure on a variety of factors which include student cognitive abilities, communication style, home environment, or the socializing and academic influences of the school and society (p.358).

Similar results were obtained from the study by Meisels and Liaw (1993). The authors used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) <sup>1</sup>for examining the

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<sup>1</sup>National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) is

phenomenon of retention in kindergarten through Grade 8. “Data on 16,623 White, Black, and Hispanic public school students showed that boys, minorities, and students from lower socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to be retained” (p.69).

It is also found that the factors associated with grade retention interact in a combination of two or more factors that may directly or indirectly cause failure. There is no standard mode for combination of these factors. Moreover, these factors do not influence in the same way everywhere and possibly do not describe the varying rates of grade retention. However, in many situations, especially in developing countries like Pakistan, these factors interact and make it even more difficult to deal with the problem.

Poverty is a major social problem in Pakistan, when a student fails in some grade, his/her parents do not agree to spend money for an extra year. As a result, majority of the students leave the school, thus increasing dropout rate. Besides this, those who repeat the same grade are subject to continuous criticism of fellow students as well as teachers because primary grade teachers in Pakistan are generally unaware of the self-esteem and other emotional factors having significant effects on the personality of students.

On the basis of above discussion, it was needed to carry out a study to find out the major reasons of academic failure at primary level, especially in the context of a developing country like Pakistan.

Therefore, the present study was designed to investigate the possible reasons of academic failure in public schools in the context of Pakistan. It was anticipated that, this study would be helpful to pinpoint issues related to primary grade students to develop effective strategies to handle this problem effectively in the primary education system of a developing country like Pakistan where the problem

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designed and conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education (Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

of dropout is still a big hurdle in the way of achieving the target of universal primary education.

## **Research Method**

This study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the major reasons of academic failure at primary level in the public schools. By employing theoretical sampling technique, a group of experienced school teachers (N=12) teaching at primary level in public schools of Rawalpindi city (one from each school) were selected as the key informants of the study. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with participant teachers during school hours. Teachers were asked to describe the main reasons of failure of primary grade students. The participants were given “authority over their own stories, which means that they were seen as expert” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.128). Interview data particularly facilitated the researcher in explaining how individual teachers interpret attitude and coping strategies of retained students. Semi-structured interviews (based on interview guide) were conducted with sample teachers, in the months of April and May 2009. A rapport was built with the primary grade teachers that enabled the researcher to observe their actions and interactions and to understand things from their point of view. They felt safe, comfortable, as “though what they were saying was valued” ((Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p.128). Interviews averaging approximately 25 to 30 minutes were briefly noted and later written in detail on the same day. Demographic data were collected at the end of each interview. Findings from the study were shared with the participants. Interview transcripts were coded as categories emerged from the data.

## **The Process of Data Analysis**

The interviews for this study were transcribed verbatim. All the transcriptions were “regarded as ‘the truth’ and each transcription was considered to contain a one-to-one correspondence between what was said orally and the printed word” (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p.345). The qualitative data were analyzed by using grounded theory method. This process involved “generating categories of information (open coding) selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model (axial coding), and then explicating a story

from the interconnection of these categories (selective coding)” (Creswell, 2003, p.191). The researcher read these transcripts in their entirety in order to understand individual teachers’ experiences fully. Interviews were semi structured, and while the interviews had provided some opportunities for unstructured responses, the interview data were analyzed with the goal of characterizing teacher responses to a key set of interview items (see the exact interview items in the analysis section) related to the research questions. Thus, after reading all of the transcripts, the researcher focused on pinpointing variables across individual participants (teachers) that would allowed her to better understand the main reasons of failure of students. The themes emerged during the process of analysis, were supported with existing research studies in the relevant field. Thus the literature was used for “supplemental validation” for the accuracy of findings or how the findings differ from the published data (Creswell, 1998, p.209).

**Teachers’ perceptions regarding main reasons of academic failure.** In the light of their daily experiences with students, participants were requested to express their perceptions regarding reasons of academic failure of primary grade students in the context of public school system of Pakistan.

Several themes emerged from the interview. These themes were then grouped together into larger perspectives that provide answer to the qualitative research question related to major reason of grade retention of students at primary level (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The main perspectives that came out as a result of analysis are as follows:

- Family
- School
- Student

In accordance with the teacher’s point of view, the above mentioned factors do not contribute equally to academic failure. As discussed earlier, these major themes or perspectives were the result of combination of several sub themes.

The participants expressed diverse viewpoint on each factor. Their views are discussed in detail as follows:

**Family.** Generally, schools are considered as places that provide appropriate learning environment for a child, but importance of family and home environment cannot be ignored in this regard.

The research studies revealed that family factors are responsible for scholastic failure of students, such as the support given by the parents and other family members, low socio-economic background, and environment of the home (Khan & Malik, 1999; Fan, 2001; Gonzalez- Pienda et al., 2002; Chohan & Khan, 2010).

A study conducted by Sahin and Gülmez (2000) in East and Southeast Turkey explored that cultural characteristics of the family affected the academic achievement and caused scholastic failure. The authors of the study concluded that “family-related factors that may be responsible for failure included the economic and social status of the family, family size, cultural characteristics of the family, working mothers, educational background, language, occupation, and uneasiness at home” (p.107).

After careful thematic analysis of all the interviews, the common sub-themes related to family factors that emerged are described as follows:

**Parental support.** All participants of the present study agreed that parental and family support is vital for academic success of the children. All participants were of the opinion that if family members especially parents do not provide adequate support to their children, then it is not possible for teachers to maintain their appropriate learning. Consistent with the teachers’ point of view, a research study conducted by AEPAM (2005) revealed that almost 83 % teachers agreed that in public primary schools, students repeat classes due to lack of proper guidance at home.

The lack of parental support creates major problem for school and the child also. Teacher Ms I.K said in this regard.

### **Carelessness of parents is the major reason of child's failure <sup>2</sup>**

These results are consistent with a number of research studies. Fan (2001) demonstrated that parents' educational aspiration for their children proved to be strongly related to students' academic growth. Similarly, Schneider and Lee (1990) "linked the academic success of the East Asian students to the values and aspirations they share with their parents, and also to the home learning activities" in which their parents involve with them (p.358). In fact, all parents have desired to do something better for their children according to their available resources. But the extent and effectiveness of parental support depends on a variety of reasons, such as, ethnicity, family income, and home environment and their awareness about the importance of education.

All the teachers had complained regarding parents' lack of awareness about the importance of family support for their child. The teacher Ms. S.B told that when the parents are called, they become angry with us and say that if they are themselves responsible for their children's education, then what is the point of sending them to school? Teacher Ms N.S endorsed.

When we call their parents for intimating them about the progress of their children, they say, "*We do not want them to become doctor or engineer, so we cannot spend all our limited resources on their education*"

The teacher I.A mentioned that most of the parents are manual workers. They go for labor after sending their children to school. They think that their children are safe in school; they are not very much concerned about the benefits they can get from school. Many parents do not even bother to know, whether their child attends school properly. Most of our students do not wear neat and clean uniform as parents do not care about their cleanliness. Similar

results were obtained by Okpala et al., (2001), who found that "children from high-income backgrounds are more likely to have academically supportive home environments than most children from low income homes" (p.115).

The teacher Ms K.B mentioned that if parents do not pay attention to their child, it is impossible for him/her to be successful in studies. She was of the view that there are few people, who are very concerned about the studies of their children, and it is seen that the academic progress of such children is relatively better than others. Research studies also indicated that parental involvement in doing home tasks has significant effects in students' achievement, (Singh et al., 2002; Eilam, 2001).

Likewise the teacher Ms S.B shed light on the issue, "Majority of laborers send their children to public schools. They are busy all day in work, how can they give proper attention to their children."

The findings of this study supported the effects of family involvement in student accomplishments in the middle grades.

**Relationship of Parents** All participants were agreed that the nature of relationship among parents is very influential in the success or failure of the child. They added that good relationship among parents is crucial for the wellbeing of the child. Due to high illiteracy ratio and poverty, strained relations among parents and domestic abuse are much more prevailing in families having low socio economic status. A non educated person does not realize that how can domestic problems divert the attention of child away from the studies. The teacher Ms F.Y explained, "*If father is drug addicted, he will frequently beat his family, this repeated phenomenon will result in academic failure of his children*"

The teacher Ms N.S told that attitude of jobless father is also more or less same as drug addict father towards his family. She was of the view that parents should behave moderately with their children. She added

The more a child is mentally satisfied, the more he/she will be attentive towards studies

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<sup>2</sup> The comments of the teachers are translated and presented in bold to make their voices distinct and audible.

All participant teachers were of the view that presence of both parents is vital for the better development of the child. The absence of one member, either due to death or the separation causes serious problems for the child.

The teacher Ms S.S mentioned, “Divorce between parents is seriously damaged the personality of the child.”

Research studies also demonstrated that the effects of divorce on children are mostly negative (Amato, 1991). Similarly, another study by Amato (2000) found that “children from divorced families, as a group, score lower than their counterparts in married-couple families on a variety of indicators of well-being” (p.1282).

Likewise, the teacher Ms K.B expressed, “*The child coming from separated family or single parent homes, might be intelligent, but never excel in studies*”

Research evidence has revealed that domestic problems have caused negative effects on the academic achievement as well as psychological wellbeing of the children. The child is unable to take interest in a stressed environment, but it is a common practice in low socio economic families. A research study by Pong, Dronkers, and Hampden-Thompson, (2003) explored that children from single-parent families face greater hardships than two-parent families because of more limited income resources in single parent families.

**Family structure.** There are different types of family structures existing in Pakistani culture, such as joint family, single family, polygamous family, large family (family having large number of children) etc. Participant teachers were agreed that family structure has significant consequences on the academic progress of the child. Some types have negative effects on child development. For instance, majority of teachers were complaining about joint family system. Teachers were of the view that there is interference of many people in the joint family. This creates tumult which diverts child’s attention. The teacher Ms S.B expressed, “*Majority of Pathan families and migrant families (Afghan refugees) send their children to public schools. Many Pathan families living together in little place, and each*

*family has a lot of children. It is because of this reason; their children do not take interest in studies*”

Consistent with this view, Sahin and Gülmez, (2000) concluded that “in East and Southeast Turkey, the crowded houses were a factor causing failure” (p.105).

The teacher Ms I.K explained while discussing the negative impact of large families, that the studies of a child are affected being a member of a large family. The eldest child among siblings especially has many other responsibilities that ultimately cause his /her academic failure. Similarly, it is often seen that the youngest sibling in a big family is spoiled due to extra love, and the proportion of failure of such cases is high among other children.

However, some participants disagreed with the above statement and said that large family itself does not hinder, it is the atmosphere of the family that affects. If parents are well aware of the importance of education, then the children will perform well, whether they belong to large or small family. Contrary to the teachers’ view, a research study by Palafox et al., (1994) demonstrated that “family size is inversely correlated with student achievement, perhaps indicating less time and exposure to parental stimulation in large family households. In addition, there probably is less money for culturally and educationally stimulating materials and events in such households” (p.176).

**Non-Literate Parents.** Analysis revealed that one of the major contributing factors of children failure is lack of education of the parents. The participant teachers were of the view that now only poor and illiterate parents send their children to public schools. There is no proper coaching or guidance for children available in such families. The parents have no awareness about the importance of education. These findings are consistent with the findings reported in the study conducted by AEPAM (2005). It indicated that literacy level of both parents does have a positive impact on the academic achievement of their children. When parents have not themselves been to school and are illiterate and innumerate, the school cannot expect that they will understand its aims or activities. Research studies have found that parental educational level has a

significant impact on child's learning (Khan & Malik, 1999). Similar findings were revealed by Kaplan et al., (2001) who concluded in their study that "children in homes with parents with high levels of educational attainment would likely be exposed to many resources that would support and foster their educational achievement" (p.367).

According to Pakistan Social and Living Measurement Survey, (2007-08) the overall literacy rate (age 10 years and above) is 56% (67% for male and 44% for female) in 2006-07 (GoP, 2009-a). In a country where nearly half of the population is still illiterate, it is very hard for children to seek proper guidance in academic matters after the school hours.

In general, the parents cannot be taken as a single unit; often one parent is illiterate, whereas the other is not. But, as the teacher Ms I.A emphasized the education of mothers is considered more crucial for better performance of the children. The teacher Ms I.K expressed, "*The parents, who have a passion to educate their children, make every possible effort in this regard*"

Consistent with this view, the findings of the study by Schneider and Lee (1990) explored that

Parents' expectations are extremely powerful and are transmitted through a cultural context in which education is highly valued because it leads to self-improvement and increases self-esteem. ... Asians do well in school because their parents expect it. ... Parents help Asian students succeed by carefully structuring their out-of-school time so it is directed at academic-related skills (p.374).

The children also seek emotional support from parents when they face some academic problems at school. Educated and careful parents always encourage their children and give proper guidance in school related matters, but illiterate and economically deprived parents may act violently and thus upset their child more. A study by Repetti (1996) indicated that children described themselves as more demanding and difficult with their parents on days in which they had earlier perceived more problems with peers, such as being teased by another child or feeling excluded by friends, or more academic problems, such as receiving a poor grade

or having difficulty with schoolwork (p.1477).

**Financial Problems.** Research evidence has suggested that poverty is said to be the one of the characteristics most closely related to grade retention. Okpala et al., (2001) examined the influence of socio economic status of parents on Mathematics Achievement scores of fourth grade students in a low-income county in North Carolina. The findings support the notion that "economic circumstances are correlated with academic achievement" (p.110).

El-Hassan, (1998) endorsed in his study of in Lebanon, that 53% of the retainees attended public schools; the share of the public sector in the Lebanese education system was only 30%. The higher incidence of retention associated with low-SES children is caused by a poor environment that does not favor the normal physical and mental development of the child and that is lacking in teaching facilities and resources (p.285). Consistent with the research evidence, teacher Ms K.B said, "*The financial position of the parents does affect the studies of the child.*"

The teacher's statement is confirmed with a meta-analysis by Sirin (2005) who reviewed the literature on academic achievement and socioeconomic status (SES) in journal articles published between 1990 and 2000. The main finding of this review showed that "school success is greatly influenced by students' family SES" (p.445).

Generally, parents are not directly involved in the teaching-learning activities in school. They are only expected to provide help in doing homework assignments and the financial support for the children's schooling. The interactions among parents and their children are influenced by the socioeconomic and cultural factors of that particular society in which they survive. For instance, the way a family manages the learning activities of its children at home is dependent upon parents' socioeconomic position and their resources in term of money and time.

Poverty leads to many other problems as well. The frequent fighting among parents and child labor are said to be the cause of limited financial

resources. The children of poor families become helping hand of their parents at a very young age; this in turn diverts their attention from studies. They do not give adequate time to their studies.

After school hours, they leave for labor, so do not find time for rest or studies. They just rely on in-school learning. The teacher Ms T.M explained, *“Their basic concern is earning, not education. They carry out their studies partially”*

Child labor is considered as a major hindrance in achieving universal primary education in all developing countries. A study by Canagarajah and Nielsen (2001) revealed that child labor is widespread in the developing world. The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that in developing countries the total number of working children age 5-14 years is 250 million. Of these, 120 million work full-time, and 24 million are below the age of 10. In absolute terms, child labor is most prominent in Asia because approximately 150 million working children live in Asia (p.72).

Research studies indicate that socio economic status is correlated strongly with parents' educational ambition for their children. Khan, Khan and Zubairi (1999) stated that *“interacting with and sharing the child's activities is affected by level of parents' education and income”* (p.92). Similarly, Fan (2001) also concluded that socio economic status is correlated most strongly with parents' education aspiration for their children.

The teacher Ms N. S reported, *“The laborer child thinks that he can earn at least hundred rupees daily by laboring or paper picking. What can he/she get from school?”*

Here also contradictory themes emerged related to child labor. Some participant teachers thought that child labor does not have negative impact on studies. They are of the view that laborer child is more responsible than others. The teacher Ms S.I said,

*“My experience tells that children who do labor side by side with their studies are more serious towards their studies.”*

Similarly, the teacher Ms I.A was of the view that every other child in public schools goes for

some labor in the evening. Child labor does not affect, however personal interest and family care are necessary conditions of success of any child.

The teacher Mr. S.M added, *“I think poverty is the major cause of the failure of students. Poor parents do not pay proper attention towards their child's education.”*

Similarly, the teacher Ms F.Y was of the view that the appropriate study environment cannot be created in one room residences.

There are also some contradictory themes related to poverty that emerged during analysis. Some teachers argued that poverty is not important a reason as others might be.

Teacher Ms I.A mentioned that almost all children coming in public schools belong to poor families. There are good students among them as well as poor performers. In her opinion poverty is not responsible for the worse situation. Parents' attention is needed.

Similarly, the teacher Ms N.S added that there are children from poor families, who are very serious about their studies.

**School.** The research studies also revealed that school factors are responsible for the grade retention of students, (Khan and Malik, 1999; Fan, 2001; Gonzalez- Pienda et al., 2002).

Analysis of interviews of teachers revealed some important themes related to school factors. Participants were of the view that if teachers are vigilant and responsible, then the ratio of grade retention will obviously be decreased. Rivkin et al., (2005) explored that school policy can be an important tool for raising the achievement of low income students, (p.449).

A study conducted by Sahin and Gülmez (2000) in East and Southeast Turkey explored that

--- teacher and administrator qualities have an effect on students' failure or achievement, and other school-related factors such as school facilities are also important. Perhaps more importantly, the uniform curriculum and textbooks from which no deviation is allowed may be the cause of failure with regard to cultural differences (p.107).

Similarly, the study by Robinson and Biran (2006) explored the connections between academic achievements and the school quality and found that “schools can increase the motivational levels of --- students to excel academically by helping them to become more aware, proud, and willing to work for the benefit of their community” (p.67).

**Teacher.** Teacher plays a key role in the success and failure of the student. Rivkin et al., (2005) concluded in their study that “achievement gains are systematically related to observable teacher and school characteristics” (p.449). All participants of the present study had recognized the significant role of the teacher in education system. They were of the view that the responsibilities of a teacher increases many times, in a situation where the child is totally deprived of family support or coaching in studies at home. Majority of students of public schools come from very low socio economic back ground and their parents are illiterate. In such circumstances, teacher must have missionary zeal to adorn the life of their student. Teacher Ms S.I said, “The teacher should pay special attention to those students, who do not have any proper coaching facility available at home.”

All teachers agreed that the student cannot fail if he/she receives special attention and care from the teacher. The participants who considered the teacher as responsible for the failure of students, also proposed effective strategies to improve the situation.

The teacher Ms K.B mentioned in this regard,

*“Our teacher is not serious, if every Teacher does his/her duties with full passion, come daily to school, take classes in time, then the rate of failure of students will obviously be decreased.”*

Similarly, the teacher Ms I.K stated that the teacher, who pays extra attention to weak performers in the class, can save the children from failure.

Analysis has revealed a variety of opinions related to the responsibilities of a primary teacher and the hindrances in performing his/her duties properly. The participants complained that every

primary teacher has multiple responsibilities besides teaching in schools that he/she cannot pay proper attention to students. Teacher has only six to seven hours in school, and he/she has to take attendance of all the students, listen to their lesson, and check their written assignments, within that limited time. In addition to this, school administration also distributes some extra duties among teachers due to limited clerical staff and other resources in our primary schools.

Although all teachers agreed that individual attention should be given to every child, but in the presence of all other extra duties, it looked impossible.

The teacher Ms T.M expressed, *“It is not possible for a teacher to give individual attention to every child in a period of forty minutes.”*

In the same way, when the teachers were asked about the role of inexperienced teachers in the failure of students, different opinions were observed.

Majority of the participants stressed that inexperienced teacher cannot deal with the problem cases effectively. They believed that through experience, a teacher learns how to handle slow learners.

The teacher Ms S.I emphasized the importance of the professional experience in teaching. She was of the opinion that the experience helps in teaching. She further added that if a highly qualified teacher cannot guide the students effectively and does not teach them according to their mental caliber, then his/her qualification is of no worth.

Two participants were of the opinion that only experience is not very important, a highly qualified teacher can use effective strategies to handle slow learners. The teacher Mr. S.M said, *“A primary teacher should have at least master’s degree in addition to his/her professional qualification.”*

Contradictory to the teacher’s view, a research study by Rivkin et al., (2005) found “absolutely no evidence that having a master's degree improves teacher skills” (p.449).

The teacher Ms R.C has given an unusual



response in the light of her experience. She argued that teacher should be highly educated; experience does not count much. She believed that a fresh and highly qualified teacher can successfully handle problem cases. Rivkin et al., (2005) endorsed in their studies that “there appear to be important gains in teaching quality in the first year of experience and smaller gains over the next few career years, and there was little evidence that improvements continue after the first three years” ( p.449 ).

**Discipline in Schools.** Research evidence had revealed that “disciplinary practices, even those that are viewed as ordinary and acceptable, may affect well-being in important ways” (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996, p.165).

One important sub theme that emerged during thematic analysis related to school factors is the lack of discipline in public primary schools. Some participants were of the view that the proportion of failure of students has increased due to disobedience of discipline rules. Moreover the negligence of school administration further deteriorates the problem. The teachers expressed that one of the major reason of grade retention of a student is his/her continuous absenteeism from school. The study conducted by AEPAM (2005) also indicated that more than 70% teachers considered the absenteeism of a student as an important reason for repeating a class. When this problem is observed, it is the duty of the administration to take strict action. The teachers viewed increased absenteeism as a flaw in disciplinary practices in primary schools. The teacher Ms K.B said, “*If the children are firmly asked about their absence from school, the rate of absenteeism obviously decreases.*”

There are certain serious issues related to discipline observed in developing countries especially in Pakistani context. Administration and teachers frequently use corporal punishment for maintaining the discipline in schools. Corporal punishment or physical punishment refers to "the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child pain, but not injury, for purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior" (Straus & Donnelly, 1993, p. 420 as cited in Turner & Finkelhor, p.155).

Despite of absolute ban on corporal punishment

in all public schools of the Punjab, it is still practiced to some extent. Majority of the participant teachers were vocal against punishing children. Research evidence has also revealed that “corporal punishment significantly contributes to both psychological distress and depression” (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996, p.163). Similarly, Rohner et al., (1991) concluded that “severe physical punishment is modestly but significantly related to youths' negative adjustment” (p.691).

The teachers were of the view that corporal punishment is a risky practice. The child gets nervous, and often forgets a learned lesson also. The learning is always being better in a friendly environment. The teacher Mr. S.M added, “*The corporal punishment damages the abilities of children, and thus increases the chances of his/her failure.*”

Similarly, the teacher Ms T.M was not in favor of beating and insulting the child. She said the teachers should not scold the child in the presence of other children, as the child gets embarrassed and often become rebellious. She proposed that the child should be warned in isolation.

The teacher Ms R.C was also complained that the teachers want children to quit school. She suggested that extra love and care can create a big change in the attitude of a child towards learning.

On the other side, the participants who favor corporal punishment and scolding were of the view that it is necessary to some extent. The teacher can improve the child learning by limited use of this practice. The teacher Ms I.K explained, “*The three things that improve the performance of a child are love, desire and fear.*”

The teacher Ms S.S admitted that the loving behavior is more effective, but sometimes it does not work. The fear of teacher is necessary to put the child on the right path.

Similarly, the teacher Ms N.S was of the view that a little pressure on the child enhances his/her learning. The teacher Ms S.K added that there are very few children who can be handled with polite manners. The child does not know what is right or wrong. It is the duty of the teacher to use check and

balance strategies.

The teacher Ms I.A was complained that due to some governmental policies the role of teacher becomes insignificant in success and failure of students. Teacher is totally powerless now.

**Accountability by the Department**  
.Supervision has always played an important role in maintaining the quality of education. It is the duty of supervisor to “identify positive teaching behaviors, which should be maintained and negative behaviors which should be changed in order to solve the problem” (AEPAM, 2007, p.10).

The accountability procedure of education system in Pakistan is not well established yet. Akhtar (1992) stated that the field supervisory staff is not trained especially in the field of supervision. They lack the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes to help and support teachers. The job description and supervisory functions are not clear to them. They are even not aware of the objectives, role and importance of instructional supervision. This is why supervision is not succeeding in improving qualitative instruction. It is only succeeded in keeping a number of people employed as “masters over teachers” in the education organization (p.21).

The teacher Ms R.C complained about the negligence of supervisory staff. She expressed that supervisors emphasized only the physical checking of the school, and nobody is concerned about the teaching and learning situation inside the class room. She argued that there is no concept of accountability of irresponsible teacher in public schools.

Similarly, the teacher Ms K.B was also complained about the irresponsible behavior of supervisory staff. She was of the view that the supervisors do not perform their duties efficiently. They highlight only quantitative aspects of education and thus ignore the qualitative aspects of teaching and learning.

Rest of the participants does not respond on this topic (they considered it as sensitive and may harm their career).

**Difficult Syllabus.** Diverse opinions appeared

regarding the syllabus of grade four in public schools of the Punjab. Majority of the teachers thought it suitable for primary level in general and for the age group studying at grade four in particular. However, a contradictory point of views also emerged. Teacher Ms I.K complained that the syllabus of grade four is difficult. The students could not comprehend it properly and eventually failed in the examination.

The teacher Mr. S.M was also dissatisfied with the current syllabus. He was of the view that the syllabus does not meet the challenges of the fast changing world. Teacher Ms F.Y held the view that the syllabus of grade four is a bit difficult and not according to mental capabilities of our students. Weak students are promoted in earlier grade due to automatic promotion. These students do not have ability to cope with the syllabus of higher grades. Thus the chances of failure of these students are increased.

Research evidence has also revealed that difficult syllabus is a contributing factor in grade retention of students at primary level. A study conducted by AEPAM (2005) has revealed that 50 % teachers thought syllabus as an important cause for repetition at primary level.

**Student.** Analysis of responses of the participant teachers explored that personal weaknesses and family engagements of the students are also contributing in his/her academic failure. These results are consistent with the research studies at primary level, that revealed student is also responsible for his/her academic failure (Khan & Malik, 1999; Fan, 2001; Gonzalez- Pienda et al., 2002).

**Personal weaknesses.** All participants agreed that the major reason of failure of student is his/her lack of interest in studies. They were of the view that unless the child takes keen interest in studies, he/she cannot learn. A research study by Schneider and Lee (1990) revealed that “East Asian students succeed in school because they spend much of their time studying rather than playing with their friends or participating in organized group activities” (p.374).

Teachers illustrated a number of reasons of this

lack of interest. Some of these are lack of family support, carelessness of parents, bad company and mental incapability. All of these factors are interlinked to some extent. Teachers were of the view that when the children go back to their homes after school, they waste all their time in playing games and watching T.V.

Teacher Mr. S.M complained, "These children do not even bother to open their school bags at home for doing home assignments."

This perception of teacher can only be partially true as most of these children belonged to poor families and they have to work either inside or outside the home (as revealed by their profile and perceptions of most of the teachers).

Similarly, a study conducted by AEPAM (2005) also explored that almost 70 % teachers were of the view that lack of proper interest in studies is the major reason of repeating class at primary level in Pakistan. The parents do not have sense or time, to sit with them and help them in doing home assignments. In addition to this, most of the parents do not have the literacy skills to provide this support.

The teacher Ms T.M affirmed that some children are often left behind because of shyness and unfair treatment of the teacher and fellow students. She further stated that sometimes the student does not understand what the teacher has explained in the class, and thinks that fellow students will laugh at him/her or the teacher will scold him/her. Consistent with the teacher's perception, findings of the study by Powell and Arriola (2003) indicated that "there was a strong negative association between the way the student copes with unfair treatment and GPA" (p.179).

All the teachers agreed that mental capability is the necessary condition of academic success of the student. If a child is mentally incapable, then he/she cannot pay proper attention towards studies.

The kind of company a student keeps also has an effect on students learning. All other teachers agreed on this point except one, who said that at times some students having bad company also show good results. Two teachers argued that our students come

from families with very low socio economic status, and it is a usual practice here to see criminal people around them, that retards the students' abilities.

Analysis revealed that continuous illness also affects learning. The teacher Ms S.K argued that a sick child can only show improvement in studies if his/her parents give extra care and attention towards his/her health and studies.

**Family Engagements.** The participants were of the view that majority of our students come from migrant families. Parents often take their children to their native villages and stay there for long intervals. So the continuous absence from school also diverts the attention of the child from studies. The students thus cannot cover the lessons they have missed, and are left behind other class fellows. A research study by Romanowski (2003) also demonstrated that "migrant students are in desperate need of consistency in their school experiences because they spend parts of each academic year in different schools across the country" (p.31).

The teacher Ms S.I stated, "*In majority of homes, there is no appropriate atmosphere for studying. Frequent get-togethers on marriages and other ceremonies divert the child's attention away from studies.*"

Likewise, the participant teacher Mr. S.M explained that non-literate parents are unaware of the importance of education, so their children also show careless attitude towards their studies.

## Results and Discussion

In the analysis of the present study, the family emerged as most influential and dominating factor in accordance with teachers' beliefs. Some participants were of the view that family and school are equally responsible in academic failure of the student; however the thought pattern of some participants suggested that the impact of family factors is stronger than school related factors. Parents and their socio economic status were frequently blamed during the interviews for the sorry state of children's failure.

The general thought pattern of the participants revealed that majority of them blamed the students

themselves and their family factors to be primarily responsible for their academic failure. Though they recognized that school related factors are very important in the academic success and failure of the students, but they all thought that neglect of parents and the children themselves is the main cause of failure. It has appeared from the responses of the teachers that they lacked the missionary zeal that is needed in such circumstances where poverty and illiteracy are prevalent and are a major hindrance in promotion of universal primary education. The participant teachers criticized the different categories of parents not realizing that an illiterate person is equally vulnerable as an innocent fourth grade child. Similarly a child's personality is the product of school and home environment. A primary school child does not have any sense to realize the importance of learning. Attractive school environment can enhance children's interest in studies.

The overall analysis of the teachers' perceptions revealed that they emphasized the importance of parental support for the academic success of the students. Most of them were of the view that teacher is overburdened and cannot be held responsible for teaching and character building of the students alone.

In a nutshell, the analysis of the responses of participant teachers exposed the typical thought pattern of Pakistani primary school teacher. The teaching at primary level in the education system of Pakistan is low paid profession and requires matriculation as minimum academic qualification for recruitment of a primary school teacher<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Though, recently it is decided by higher authorities of education department that the minimum qualification required for the recruitment of primary school teacher should be graduation, but in the existing school system, the majority of the primary school teachers held matriculation certificate along with professional degree of PTC (Primary Teachers' Certificate).

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