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Article

Presenting a Model for School Dropout of Girls in Deprived Areas Based on a Qualitative Investigation: A Case Study

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Abstract: Education plays a key role in human societies and the development of nations. Providing social justice in a country creates educational justice, and educational justice grants equal opportunities for growth and prosperity to the members of the society. In reality, there are differences between urban and rural educational facilities, as well as between girls and boys. Deprived and rural areas are full of losses, from economic problems to intellectual and cultural blockages. Failure to enhance these areas leads to further decline in these environments, and one of its consequences in education is the dropout of students. Girls are especially exposed to this problem due to gender discrimination, traditional and religious views, and living conditions. The purpose of this research was to obtain in-depth information about the experiences and reactions of girls in deprived areas and to identify its factors. This case study was conducted in the Khuzestan province of Iran using the grounded theory, and the results of the interviews were categorized after coding and its paradigm model was presented. In the end, solutions were presented to reduce the dropout rate of girls in deprived areas and prevent this problem.

Keywords: educational justice; rural girls; school dropout; deprived areas; grounded theory

1. Introduction

Education is the cornerstone of development, growth, and progress and has a central role in shaping the future of individuals and societies (Meyer, 2022). Justice refers to the importance that all people regardless of background, ethnicity, race, gender, or social position, they have equal opportunities for success and advancement (Biesta et al., 2022). Schools and communities have a mutual influence on each other. Social activism should form a vital component of social school leadership (Richard et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to take care of schools in all dimensions, especially cultural and social. Although developed societies provide some education for free to their citizens, funding for education is always in competition with the need to provide other social goods for citizens (Shields et al., 2017).

Dumont and Ready (Dumont & Ready, 2020) examine whether schools reduce or exacerbate inequality and how the relationship between student achievement and achievement growth affects our understanding of the role of schools in educational inequality. They examined how school and socio-economic level and racial/ethnic backgrounds relate to student learning. Their findings show that seasonal comparative scholars, who generally argue that schools play an equalizing role, and scholars focused on school compositional effects, who typically report that schools exacerbate inequality, reach these contradictory findings. Bartee and Brown (Bartee & Brown, 2007) state that the status quo culture still maintains expectations that are homogenous and revolve around traditions associated with the middle and upper classes. This phenomenon applies to different racial compositions even in a high-performing, high-achieving school.

Many poor people cannot enroll in well-equipped schools, so the students are segregated from their peers. Also, due to some racial/ethnic divisions at the secondary level, we see a different composition in charter schools, which itself creates a kind of inequality in the educational environment (Frankenberg & Lee, 2003). For decades, boarding schools or residential learning communities have been an effective tool for increasing student success. Since their fundamentals have changed recently, the impact of living in them and their effectiveness have been investigated (Hurtado et al., 2020). In terms of enrollment rates and educational coverage, as well as in terms of access to teachers, urban areas are superior to rural areas and boys are superior to girls and are at a higher level. In terms of access to educational spaces, urban areas are better than rural areas, and regarding the rate of educational efficiency, girls are superior to boys and urban areas are superior to rural areas (Han et al., 2023).

Even in urban areas, students of low socio-economic status and students with low academic performance are usually served by weaker teachers (Barrett et al., 2015). In 2008, about 20 percent of U.S. children were enrolled in schools in rural areas, and after studying the importance of education in those areas, they concluded that most teachers were not fully prepared for rural schools, and found that rural schools suffer from a lack of trained teachers (Burton et al., 2013). In Iran, the progression rate from primary to secondary school was 96% for boys and 94% for girls in 2016. In 2022, the literacy rate of adult males was 93%, while this rate was 85% for adult females in Iran (UNESCO, 2024). Women, as half of the human resource of the country, have been subject to inequalities for many years. In a way in all countries, especially in deprived and rural areas, the intellectual ability and talent of girls is practically the least used. Not paying attention to this ability is more evident in less developed countries (Adelman & Szekely, 2016).

The number of women in educational management is also very low compared to the number of men in educational management. Women's knowledge and experiences as principals and supervisors have contributed to educational management, which is written mostly about men and by men (Shakeshaft et al., 2014). Education empowers women and leads to greater participation in family and community decision-making (Rodriguez-Modroño). Various theories have explained gender roles from different perspectives. In the theory of "Woman in development" in the early 1970s, as well as "Gender and development" in the 1980s, dimensions such as equality in the legal base, access to resources and services, equal opportunity in education and employment were considered (Walby, 2005). Paying attention to deprived areas to improve the general conditions of girls and women is one of the priorities of all societies.

A review of previous studies shows that there has not been a comprehensive view of the dimensions and factors affecting rural girls' school dropout, and every researcher has pointed to these factors from a specific perspective. One of the most important challenges in investigating this issue is the multiplicity of factors and variables that are effective and involved in this field and the various concepts that have been made from different cultural and local situations of these factors. Sekiya and Ashida (Sekiya & Ashida, 2017) analyzed the patterns of elementary school dropouts in Honduras and showed that low educational expectations and the need to enter the labor market were among the reasons for dropping out. Ada and Anyaogu (Ada & Anyaogu, 2016) studied economic recession and student dropout in five eastern states of Nigeria, found that economic recession negatively affects school enrollment and drives many students out of school and onto the streets.

The inattention of parents to the education, illiteracy of parents, their neglect of the importance of education and literacy, society's inattention to the process of education and school programs, mixing of both genders, male teachers, family poverty, the attitude of the society and parents towards the education of girls, the inappropriateness of educational materials for learning and the flourishing of creativity, the lack of experienced and compassionate teachers, and the lack of regular and timely prevention in various cases of students' attendance at school causes them to fail and dropout of school (Atasayar et al., 2024). The results of the research by Jana et al. (Jana et al., 2014) showed that parental resistance and lack of attention to girls' studies as much as boys were among the causes of girls dropping out of school in Bengal. Gouda and Sekher's research (Gouda & Sekher, 2014) showed that

dropping out of school in students with illiterate parents four times more than children with literate parents.

Bukhari et al. (Bukhari et al., 2019) in their research list factors such as poverty, illiteracy of parents, lack of motivation among students, learning problems, lack of extracurricular programs, and school environment among the reasons for dropping out of primary schools in Pakistan. In the research that Killion conducted in America by examining 300 poor students in rural areas to examine the role of management in improving educational services and school quality, he said that "Strengthening principal leadership is only one piece of the puzzle" (Killion, 2015), meaning that there are many effective factors to enhance educational services. Students in rural China are dropping out of secondary education at alarming rates. Analysis of a survey of nearly 25,000 students shows that the cumulative dropout rate across all secondary education courses may be as high as 63 percent. Dropping out of school is significantly associated with low academic performance, high opportunity cost, low socio-economic status, and poor mental health (Shi et al., 2015).

There are several solutions to deal with the mentioned factors. Arriaza (Arriaza, 2015) introduced the restorative justice method instead of punitive methods for social behavior issues in schools. It seems that this approach can be implemented in the case of rural girls dropping out of school. The spread of COVID-19 created many challenges for education, and for various reasons, including the lack of access to the internet for everyone and the high cost of digital devices; it caused many students to fall behind in their studies and even drop out. It also increased educational inequality. Research has been conducted on this matter and the way school leadership in the post-corona era has been presented (Hesbol, 2022). Ozdemir et al. (Ozdemir et al., 2024) stated that open high schools provide students with the opportunity to continue their education and prepare for university entrance exams.

Khuzestan province is one of the border provinces and has many undeveloped areas in the southwest of Iran, which has its own cultural, economic, and social characteristics. One of the most important educational issues in these environments is the girls dropping out of school. Some past research has been done according to the specific cultural and indigenous situations of other regions of Iran, which cannot be generalized to the whole country. In the present research, by using the qualitative approach based on the grounded theory, an attempt is made to present a paradigmatic model of factors affecting rural girls' school dropout and provide suitable solutions to prevent it.

2. Method

For new researchers, there is an almost bewildering array and volume of resources for qualitative approaches available. In addition, in the literature of many approaches, there is a complex history of development, key figures, and changes resulting from the approaches, which can lead to confusion and frustration in novice researchers. Seven common qualitative research approaches in education studies include case study, discourse analysis, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative inquiry, participatory action research, and phenomenology (Delmas & Giles, 2023). This study is a case study based on the grounded theory method, in which interview, observation, documentary methods, and audio or video recording are the main methods of data collection. The participants in the research are secondary school dropout girls. The reason for choosing them as the research population was that they all had a more tangible and close relationship with the factors affecting girls' dropouts relying on their experiences and views can have a more realistic understanding of these factors.

Based on grounded theory, the information collecting continues until the researcher concludes that conducting more interviews will not provide him with more information and is merely a repetition of the previous information; in this case, the researcher stops the collection of information. This type of sampling is called theoretical sampling where the analyst simultaneously collects, codes, and analyzes his findings and decides what data he needs and where to find them (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Therefore, the number of the studied sample in terms of reaching the theoretical saturation of the data was 17 people, and the process of selecting the participants continued until the data

saturation was reached. The research tool including semi-structured interviews has been used to get information about the opinions of the studied participants.

The interview started with a broad and general question such as “reason for school dropout” and continued with phrases such as “explain, describe”. The duration of the interview varied from 10 to 70 minutes. In grounded theory, the minor concepts are linked to the central concepts under a series of relationships, and the relationships between the major concepts are defined under a model (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In data analysis, first, each interview was read several times to fully understand the subjects. Then the important sentences were identified and to extract the meaning from these important sentences, an effort was made to place the extracted codes in specific thematic(central) concepts. Then the formulated and related meanings were put in the form of concepts so that the results could be combined into a comprehensive description of the reason for rural girls dropping out of school. In the end, to check the final validity, the findings were shared with the participants.

3. Results

According to the paradigm model, collected data can be examined in three parts including conditions (contextual, causal, and intervening), strategies, and consequences (Packer-Muti, 2016; Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024). In this research, the phenomenon is the dropout of rural girls, and the causal conditions here are the events that affect the phenomenon. Contextual conditions are more related to the context under study, and the intervening conditions are the external conditions affecting the occurrence of the phenomenon. The interactions or strategies are the responses that people or groups give to the issues and events that arise under those conditions. The consequences are the outcome of interactions. The findings obtained from the content analysis process, after coding, were categorized in the form of seven major concepts (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. The coding and concepts of findings.

Major concepts	Central codes	Open codes
Causal conditions	Economic and livelihood challenges	Poverty/ inability to meet livelihood needs/ inability to provide education expenses/ seasonal family income/ not having a fixed and monthly provision/ relying on teenage girls as human resources/ not benefiting from the insurance or similar organizations
	School and educational environment	Absence of secondary schools in rural areas/ lack of commuting services for schools in other areas/ commuting risks/ closure of schools due to widespread diseases/ relocation of the educational environment/ lack of continuous presence of teachers/ relocation of teachers/ lack of educational facilities
Intervening conditions	Teacher and student interactions	Inappropriate behavior of teachers and classmates in case of academic failure/ feeling ashamed of academic failure/ humiliation/ corporal punishment/ discrimination between low-income, poor and wealthy students/ racial and ethnic discrimination/ harassment by boys/ sensitivity and mental fragility of puberty
	Family problems	Illness of the parent/ weak supervision of the parents/ illiteracy of the parents/ death of the parent/ absence of a boy in the family/ the old parents/ size of the family population/ addiction of the parent/ divorce or abandonment of the family by the parent/ unemployed graduated sibling
Contextual conditions	Ethnic, religious and social beliefs	Paying attention to the role of housekeeping for girls/ preferring marriage over continuing education/ not allowing girls to continue their education in nearby villages/ puberty/ child marriage/ negative attitude towards male teacher/ disagree with mixed classes/ not demanding people about education
Strategies	Academic harms	Frequent absences/ weakening of academic level/ lack of interest in studying/ reprimands of parents and the school system

Consequences	Negative attitude towards the literacy	Believe to the futility of studying/ believe to the adequacy of primary education/ Early marriage and pregnancy/ physical and mental disease/ Dropping out of school
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According to the mentioned findings, a paradigm model of rural girls dropping out of school is presented in **Figure 1**.

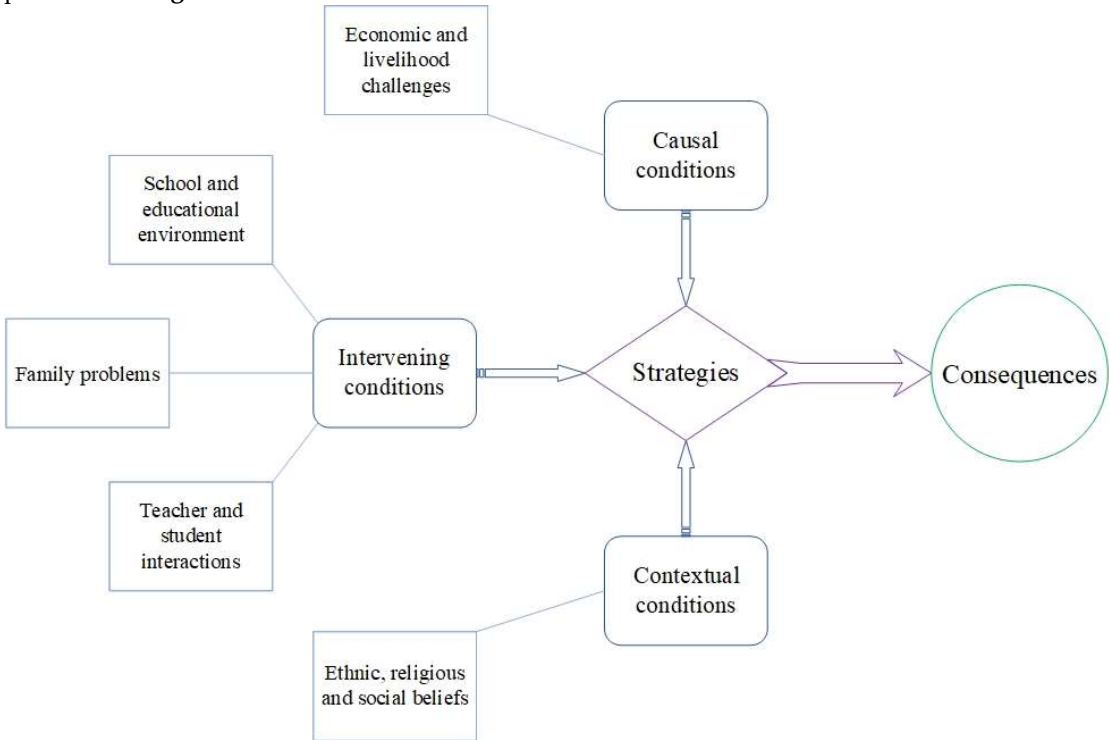


Figure 1. The paradigm model of rural girls dropping out of school.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The phenomenon of rural girls dropping out of school is affected by causal conditions, intervening conditions, and contextual conditions. In order to improve the phenomenon of rural girls continuing their education, the mentioned conditions should be changed in order to reach strategies to prevent academic harm. Here, some solutions for each concept are introduced.

- i) Economic problems: providing free textbooks, allocating scholarships to underprivileged children, free meals, free transportation for students, following up on the implementation of the law prohibiting child labor, economic development of the region and job creation by the government.
- ii) School environment: increasing the number of teachers, choosing active managers (Gonzales et al., 2024), improving educational tools, renovating and equipping schools, allocating specialized devices such as an educational tablet, establishing secondary schools for girls in villages and nomadic mobile schools, employing female managers (Shakeshaft et al., 2014), allocating more quota to recruit teachers in “Farhangian University (teacher training centers)” for nomadic and rural areas with the goal of staying in these areas.
- iii) Interactions at school: hiring new teachers with high morale, teaching the principles of psychology to teachers (Bondi, 2013), continuous monitoring of schools, promoting the motivation and responsibility of teachers (Raymond-West & Rangel, 2020), changing the atmosphere of schools, eliminating discrimination (Muñiz, 2021), assigning coach or educational counseling to schools in deprived areas (Bettinger & Baker, 2014), changing the behavioral approach instead of punishment (Arriaza, 2015).
- iv) Family problems: holding family education classes and introducing students’ parents to psychological issues, developing literacy classes for parents.

v) Beliefs: cultural advertising, making positive attitudes towards education, full implementation of compulsory education law, employment of native teachers and women in rural areas with the aim of gaining people's trust in schools.

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