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Drop out study in basic education level of schools in Afghanistan

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Drop Out Study in Basic Education Level of Schools in Afghanistan

**Amir Mansory,
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May, 2007**

Acknowledgments

Many have contributed to make this report possible. This study had not been possible without the hard work of the SCA School Consultants (SC). In reality the most difficult job i.e. the data collection was done by them. I am greatly indebted to them for their contributions.

Many thanks go to the school staff i.e. the school principals, headmasters and teachers that they have spared their time to provide information and share their views on the issue of the drop out. Last, but not least many thanks to the parents and students who have communicated their views in this report.

Finally, I would like to thank the regional staff of SCA and others who facilitated this study and contributed through their suggestions.

Preface

This study conducted by Amir Mohammad Mansory, Senior Education Advisor on Research and Quality Assurance at the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), addresses aspects of the drop out rate in Afghan schools and provides some practical recommendations, which hopefully will be useful for planners and practitioners struggling with the challenges of bringing education to the children of Afghanistan.

Since 2002, Afghanistan has experienced a very rapid and large expansion of education facilities. Millions of children have been given access to schools and, although the quantity aspect is continuously significant, however, as repeatedly pointed out by His Excellency, the Minister of Education, Mr. Hanif Atmar, it is increasingly important to give more attention to the quality of education.

Enrollment in schools is only part of the picture, while completion of a cycle (mainly at primary level) is a minimum requirement of quality education.

Drop out, i.e. children who leave schools before completion of a school cycle is a common phenomenon in Afghan schools, which is visible in the school statistics. However, very little is known about the nature, scope and causes of the phenomenon. Needless to say, any intervention aiming at minimizing the drop out rates requires knowledge and insight of the causes and consequences of the occurrence itself. Mr. Mansory's study, which gives some answers, hopefully constitutes the beginning of a wider and more in depth research on this problem.

In short, according to Mr. Mansory's study, the 7-8 percent yearly drop out rate at primary level and higher retention rate of girls are promising findings, while the high drop out rate in the lower primary grades and the high failure rate after grade 3 are alarming indicators.

SCA has the intention of contributing further to research in the field of education and will of course share and disseminate its future studies and reports with all actors and concerned parties.

It is our hope that this report will serve as a contribution to the realization of quality education for all children in Afghanistan.

Kabul, August 2007

Anders Fange
Country Director
SCA

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Chapter One: Introduction

Afghanistan has experienced an enormous expansion as regards to access to education during the last years. The current number of children in schools (around 6 million) is the highest number of school children in the history and might be a record of rapid expansion of education facilities in the world¹.

That more children go to schools than ever before is a big success for the MoE as well as for the international community and not least for the parents. But still there is long way to materialize a Quality Education for All. Many questions and problems remain unsolved. What do children learn? How long do they stay in schools? To what extent do children leave schools? Who are those who complete a cycle and who are those who leave schools before completion of a cycle? Is there any difference between boys/girls, rural/urban, poor/rich etc children? What are the causes for drop out? What factors influence it? What are the possible interventions to influence the causes? Etc.

The quality of the education is another aspect. A minimum requirement of quality education is completion of at least the basic cycle of education.

The present study focuses on drop out; a phenomenon usually labeled as 'educational wastage'. The study aims to reveal some aspects of the drop out phenomenon. It is also hoped that the study will generate knowledge, of use for planning, interventions and quality improvement of education in the country.

The problem area

Although many studies and surveys have been conducted in many countries about drop out and repetition rates and have sought to find explanations to factors behind the phenomena, very little is known about the situation in Afghanistan. No reliable reports exist, but only assumptions and guesses, which indicate that the drop out problem exists, it is acute and presents a big problem of the education system in the country.

Studying the drop out in schools in Afghanistan does not need justification. It is obvious that any information or knowledge which discloses any aspect of the issue is appreciated and needed since "[f]inding ways to minimize school wastage must play a central role in any serious effort to reach the goal of Education for All" (p 5, UNESCO, 1998).

There is very little, if any, reliable information available about the size and/or the scope and nature of the drop out. It is not known whether all children enrolled (registered) in grade one actually start, for how long they continue or whether they leave during the first year. Very little is known about retention rates, if and when children leave school, whether they have learnt something useful when they leave school before or after completion of a cycle. Etc.

¹ For example, the global Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in primary education increased by only one percentage point (from 83.6 % to 84.6 %) between 1998 and 2002 (UNESCO, 2006).

The data collected from the schools include all registered students and that number is used for planning purposes; for example, when preparing distribution of textbooks and stationery, for division of sections of each grade and hence distribution of teachers to schools, and so on. It is not known how many of the registered students attend school on regular base and how many quit. It might be a very big portion that does not attend school at all but is registered in the administration register of the school, which will have implications for budgeting and financing.

It is a fact that there is big difference between geographical locations and different socioeconomic groups; in addition, the gender gap is well known. The reasons behind and causes for high drop out in one area and low in another area or for different social groups in the same area are not known. Why do some parents spend their last money on schoolbooks and not on something else? Why do some parents need child labor while others living in similar conditions do not? Why do parents in remote rural areas invest in their children's schooling at all? What do they hope to gain? Why are girls attending school to a higher extent in some areas and less in others? There are many questions but as yet only few answers.

To better understand the reasons behind the drop out it might be interesting to find the reason for participation in education at all and to find out why the students actually go to school instead of asking them why they don't or why they dropped out.

Do the findings in other countries apply also in Afghanistan? Does the Afghan context, i.e. a predominantly rural society, with the religion of Islam influencing all aspects of everybody's life, with the woman population living in extreme seclusion, characterized by low literacy rate (especially among the rural women), with infrastructure in ruins due to decades of fighting imply that manifestations and consequences of educational wastage are different? Does such a context imply other influences and causes for educational wastage? A number of questions can be raised and a number of topics remain to be studied in Afghanistan. This study can however, address but a few.

Aims of the study

The study aims at:

- To provide some information of the scope and nature of the drop out in schools;
- To discuss differences between schools as regards drop out;
- To explore possible causes of and factors of influence for the drop out;
- To provide recommendations for actions and interventions to minimize this phenomena; and
- To contribute to the capacity building efforts of the concerned actors in the field of education by sharing knowledge and experience by carrying out applied research in the field of education.

Methodology

A mixture of both quantitative as well as qualitative methods have been applied. To find out the scope and volume of the drop out rate, statistical analysis of data from final examination result forms collected from schools was conducted. Such data include number of registered children in each grade as well as the *Mahrooms*, i.e. those who are denied to continue to next grade due to too high absence during the passed school year. The final examination result form also consists of information about students who fail in exam and are assumed to repeat the same grade next year. Additionally, background information about schools, teachers, socio-economic conditions of the inhabitants, etc has been collected.

The data was collected at the end of the school year and the number of registered students at the beginning of the year of each grade (which include also *Mahrooms* of the last two years; see explanation below) was compared to the number of students who were entitled to participate in the final grade examination. The data on students who failed is presented in a separate column and analyzed separately.

To explore reasons and causes for drop out and to find information about those who leave schools before completion of the basic cycle structured interviews were conducted with both students, teachers and with parents (fathers).

When sampling, efforts were made to make the sample representative and to make the findings and recommendations generalized. A stratified sampling method was utilized. For practical reasons, only 12 provinces² of the 34 of the country were selected for survey and data collection. Four types of schools from three social strata (urban, semi-urban and rural population) were purposively selected (see table 1.) From each category, a random representative sample of 6 schools was surveyed (totally 72 schools).

Table 1: Sampling of schools for data collection on drop out

Location	Type of school	
	Boys'	Girls
Urban	Middle	Middle
	Secondary	Secondary
Semi-urban	Middle	Middle
	Secondary	Secondary
Rural	Middle	Middle
	Secondary	Secondary

The data collection and the interviews were conducted by well trained teacher educators (School Consultants of SCA), who in addition to their professional knowledge are very familiar with schools and geographical areas in the country. The school staff and other education authorities in the field cooperated with SCA school Consultants during the data collection. Permission was already obtained from the Ministry of Education.

² Nangarhar, Kuner, Parwan, Badakhshan, Takhar, Balkh, Baghlan, Kundoz, Samangan, Wardag, Ghazni and Paktika.

Schools, both government and NGO supported schools, which were selected for data collection and survey, were at least of basic education level i.e. middle schools with grades 1 - 9. This was done in order to avoid effects of unavailability of secondary level of schooling on the drop out rates.

Urban areas are commonly defined as city schools i.e. within a municipality order, where the majority of the population survives on small business, as daily workers, office workers and on other salaried jobs, etc. Semi-urban areas are places in the outskirts of cities and district centers where the population has a mixed style of life - partly agriculture and partly salaried jobs. Many have migrated into these areas from the countryside. Rural areas are those where the majority of the population has their outcome from farming, either on own land or as tenants.

About the concept and measurement of the drop out

Research describes drop out and repetition as educational wastage – as a waste of inputs since the output is not there as planned (UNESCO, 1998). In other words, educational wastage is defined as the input/output ratio, as an issue of cost-efficiency. Anything below completion of a defined school cycle is wastage – be it five years or one year of survival. Or, in the case of repetition, the years repeated are wastage as the student then occupies a place for someone else, or the cost for one of his/her school years is paid twice.

That a student who drops out or repeats represents an educational wastage might be true from a strict economic perspective but not necessarily for the student him/herself or for her/his family and community. The strictly cost-related definitions exclude other values of education, such as, for example, social gains, personal development, attitude changes, a wider view of the world and new visions for future.

Dropped out is a student who leaves school before completion of a cycle (e.g. primary level). Drop out as a measure of wastage or efficiency of school or education system is measured by a method of “cohort analysis”. “[A] pupil cohort is a group of pupils who enter the first cycle of a school in the same year” UNESCO 1998, p 14). The commonly used way of cohort analysis is that the enrolment in one grade “in a given year is compared with enrolment of the consecutive grade during the following years” (ibid, p14). The decrease from one year to the next year is considered as the drop out rate.

The “main weakness [of this method] is that it ignores repetition, so this method is appropriate only for countries that practice automatic promotion” (p. 14). It also ignores sudden and high influx of students to the school, as has been a common phenomenon in Afghanistan, due to refugee return, internal migration and a rapid increase in access to education. The particular rules applied in promotion further complicate the picture. To assess the drop out and repetition rate in Afghan primary schools is indeed a challenge as will be understood from the account on page 8.

The following concepts should be kept in mind when discussing absenteeism, drop out, repetition and retention rates in Afghanistan (the below text and the next chapter is based on Karlsson & Mansory: An Afghan Dilemma, forthcoming in 2007):

Mahroom:

Grades 1-3: students who are denied to continue to the next grade due to too high absence (more than 50 per cent)

Grades 4-6: students who are denied the right to participate in final examination due to too high absence (more than 25 per cent) during the school year.

These students are entitled to continue next year in the same grade and can return to school within the coming three years and continue their studies in the grade in which they left.

Passed:

Grades 1-3: students pass according to the teacher's general judgment

Grades 4-6: students pass with more than 35 per cent scores on average in final grade examination

Failed:

Grades 1-3: students who do not get approval by the teachers

Grades 4-6: students with less than 35 per cent scores on average in final examination (or in more than three subjects).

Those who fail have to repeat the grade for next year.

Conditionally passed:

Students who get less than 35 per cent scores in up to three subjects are given a second chance to participate in a new examination by the start of next school year.

It is very common that conditionally passed students pass the second chance and go to the next grade.

Problem of definitions and statistics

A student who is absent more than what is allowed (maximum 50 per cent of the time in grades 1 – 3 and 25 per cent in grades 4 - 6), a student who does not participate in the annual examination or a student who has quit school during the school year is considered *mahroom*, i.e. s/he is denied the right to continue to the next grade, or, in other words, this student has dropped out the current year but may come back another year. He or she may repeat the school year and has the right to do so within three years; this rule applies also for a student who has failed in a final grade examination. Until three years have passed the student continues to be registered in the grade to which s/he belongs, which means that the registration or enrolment statistics not only include children who actually are students the current year but also those who may return in the coming three years. After three years s/he is expelled from school and only then s/he can be considered as a dropped out student. For example: A student, after passing the first three years in primary school, may fail in grade four examination the fourth year, stay at home the next year, repeat grade four the sixth

year and pass, fail in grade five exam the seventh year, stay at home the eighth and ninth year, repeat grade five the tenth year and pass the grade conditionally, i.e. will get a second chance before next semester starts, etc etc. During such circumstances it is extremely difficult to determine the average drop out rate per grade per year without several years of follow up of each and every student who has been absent more than what is permitted (50 or 25 per cent depending on grade), who has not participated in the final examinations, who has failed or who has taken a “time out” for a year or two³.

Until recently, students were tested in annual examinations by the end of each grade (final examinations) in each subject. Students had to achieve a minimum score of 35 per cent to pass in order to be entitled to the next grade. If not, the student is counted as “failed” and should repeat the same grade next school year. From 2003, the grades 1 - 3 are exempted from examinations and progress to next grade is to be based on the teachers’ evaluations. Consequently, progress to next grade in the lower grades is not based on students’ examination results but depends rather on the student’s presence and on the teacher’s general judgement, which normally allows all students to pass. From grade four there are still final examinations in each subject. Those who fail in too many subject examinations should repeat the grade next year.

³ In a forthcoming study by Karlsson, P. & Mansory, A. (2007) the *grade completion rate*, a reverse indication of the drop out rate has been utilized as a proxy indicator for the drop out rate.

Chapter two: The findings

General findings

Although the data allows for more complicated statistical analysis, for practical reasons only simple data analysis of data was conducted. Averages were compared and simple correlation analysis was done. Findings are shown in tables and charts to visualize and make them reader friendly. Besides the drop out rates more general findings as socioeconomic compositions are first reported.

Totally 72 schools of different strata with 88,327 students in 2,021 classes (sections) were surveyed. There were 29 boy, 29 girl and 14 co-educated schools, out of which 32 included also secondary grades (grades 1 - 12) and 40 were middle schools (grades 1 –9) out of which 11 had not yet reached grade 9 but only included primary grades 1 –6). Out of the total number of schools, 20 were located in urban, 25 in semi-urban and 27 in rural areas. 58 schools were supported by MoE, out of which 13 had recently been handed over to MoE. 10 schools were SCA supported and 4 schools were supported by other NGOs.

It was found that the average distance between schools is around 4 km. 61.5 per cent of the students study in school buildings, while the rest study outside the classrooms (in tents, *Masjids*, private houses or in open air). Thirteen per cent of the surveyed schools have no building at all. On average a child walk around 2.5 km to the school.

The student per class ratio was 44 when all the registered students are considered. When only students who attended on regular basis are included, the ratio falls to 34. A comparatively high variation of the student per class ratio is observed between school levels. See table 2.

Table 2: Average number of students per class of primary level

Level	Average number of students per class		Difference between these two ratio
	All registered students	When mahroom students are excluded	
Grades 1-3	50 stud /class	39 stud/class	Minus 22 %
Grades 4-6	40 stud/class	32 stud/class	Minus 20 %
Grades 1-6	48 stud/class	37 stud/class	Minus 23 %
Grades 7-9	37 stud/class	30 stud/class	Minus 19 %
All grades (1-9)	44 stud/class	34 stud/class	Minus 23 %

The school and class size may have some correlation with drop out rate, as a higher drop out rate was reported in lower grades (see page 10).

In regards to source of living 26 per cent were landless farmers, 29 per cent were farmers on own land, 12 per cent lived on small business, 26 per cent as daily workers and 8 per cent had salaried jobs.

The size and features of the drop out rate

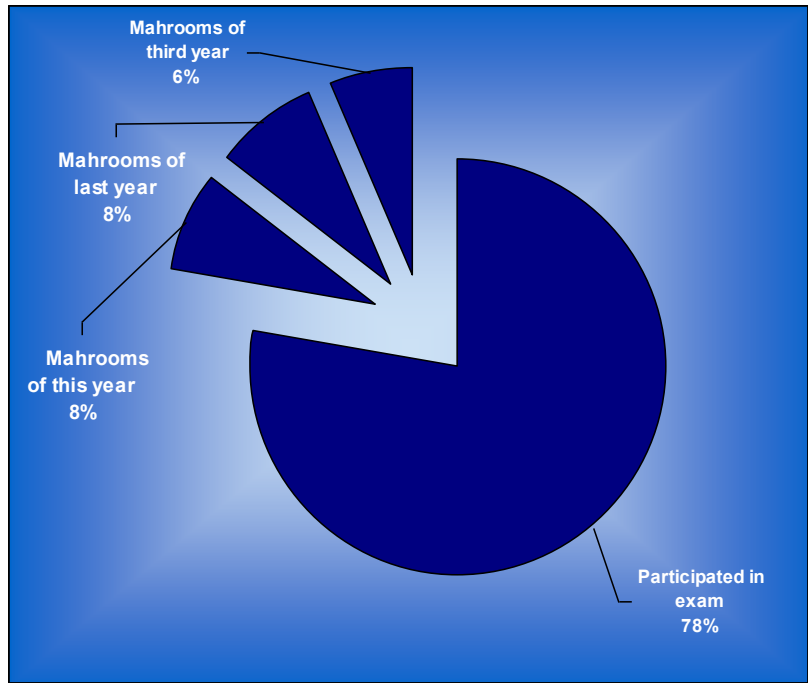
In this report Mahroom and Drop out are used interchangeably, where Mahroom is used instead of drop out although the two concepts not fully correspond as was explained earlier. The over all picture of Mahrooms is shown in Table 3 and chart 1 below.

Table 3: Percent of Mahrooms per grade and per year

Grades	Sections (classes)	Tot Registered students %	(2006) 1385 Final Exam Results				
			Participated ⁴ in exam	Dropped out (Mahrooms)			Total
			Percentage of total registered	This year	Last year	Two years ago	
1	256	100	79.9	7.3	6.8	7.1	21.4
2	262	100	70.8	10.0	9.2	8.1	28.8
3	287	100	77.4	6.5	8.9	5.8	21.9
4	293	100	74.6	8.7	11.5	3.4	25.5
5	310	100	83.4	7.6	4.8	3.5	16.5
6	163	100	81.4	6.3	8.1	3.8	19.0
7	268	100	77.7	6.8	7.0	5.2	19.5
8	104	100	79.9	6.2	9.2	4.6	20.6
9	78	100	82.0	5.8	8.8	3.4	18.1
Sub total	2,021	100%	77.7	7.7	8.3	6.3	22.2

⁴ For grades 1-3 it means the admitted students were present to a degree which entitled them to continue to next grade

Chart 1: Mahrooms as percentage of total registered students



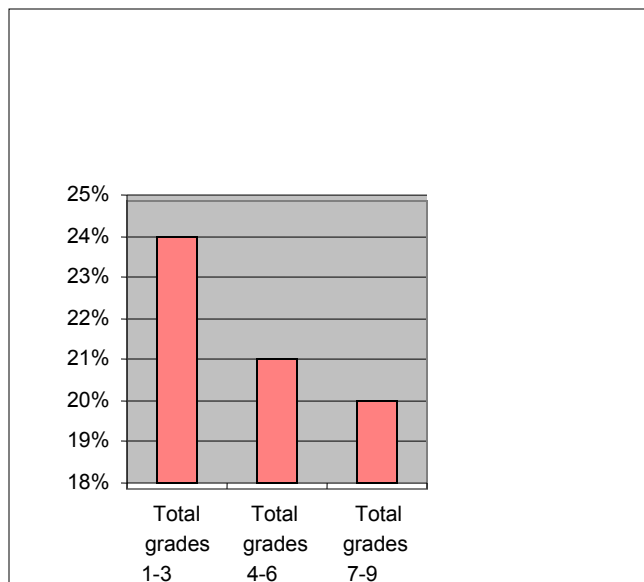
On average 22 per cent of the registered students do not participate in final examinations (see table 3)- they became Mahrooms. In other words, 78 percent of the registered students complete one year education (also those who failed are counted as having completed the school year). 22 per cent comprise the Mahrooms of three subsequent years and an accumulated number of students who did not participate in the final examinations during the last three years (including the current year). This is a percent of the totally registered students in this year- since the Mahrooms of the last two years are still kept in student attendance books as registered students. It is found that around 7-8 per cent of children leave school i.e. quit during each school year. This is confirmed by other studies and reports (for example SCA school data from South Eastern Region (SRO), 2006).

What makes the difference?

Is the situation different at different school level?

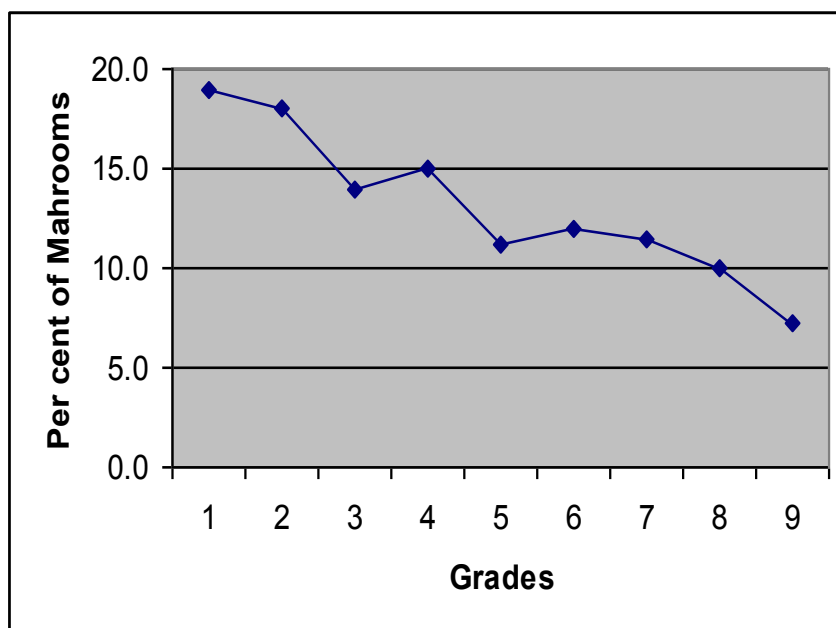
When the rate of Mahrooms was analyzed for students at different levels of basic education, the result shown in chart 2 has been obtained. As we see in this chart every four child leaves school before completion of the third grade (24 per cent), while one out of five students of grade 4 leave school before completing grade 6 (21 per cent).

Chart 2: Percentage of Mahrooms per school level



When the percentage of Mahrooms from two subsequent years, i.e. of 1384 and 1385 were processed, the following picture of Mahrooms per grade was obtained.

Chart 3: Mahrooms per grade



As seen in chart 3, the rate of Mahrooms there is a decreasing trend along with the grades, with the exception of a small, but visible, jump around grade 4. A well informed guess is that the high Mahroom rate in grade 4 has some correlation with a high failure rate in this grade. As will be shown later on in this report, grade 4 is characterized by a very high failure rate. Consequently the study confirms findings from other countries that students with low achievement level are in high risk to leave school (Karlsson, 2001).

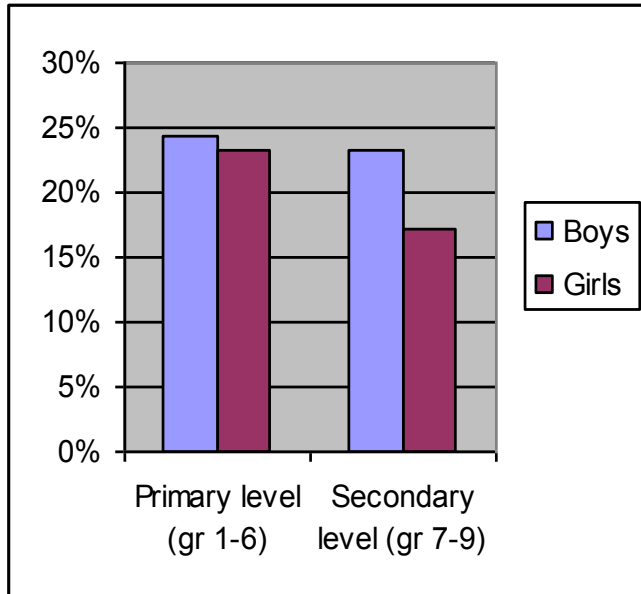
Whether the high drop out rate in lower grades is influenced by overcrowded classes, too immature students admitted to grade one, instability of habitation (migration of the population), low achievement level of students, or if it has other causes is not clear and should be studied further.

Does gender make a difference?

The rate of Mahrooms was further analyzed per gender and level (chart 4). No difference between boys and girls was observed (24 % and 22 % respectively dropped out), but when both factors i.e. gender and school level were considered simultaneously, it was found that girls stay on longer than boys. It means the rate of Mahrooms for girls on primary but in particular at middle level was lower than for boys, a fact, which contradicts common believes and guesses in the country. This finding confirms the worldwide results (for example the findings reported in GMR of UNESCO 2006). This might be explained by the fact that a “selective sample” of girls attends school. It is assumed that girls who participate in school, and especially those who pass grade 6, are daughters of parents with positive attitudes towards girls’

education while the girls to parents with negative attitudes towards girls' education either do not participate in school at all or leave school at an early stage.

Chart 4: Mahrooms per school level and gender

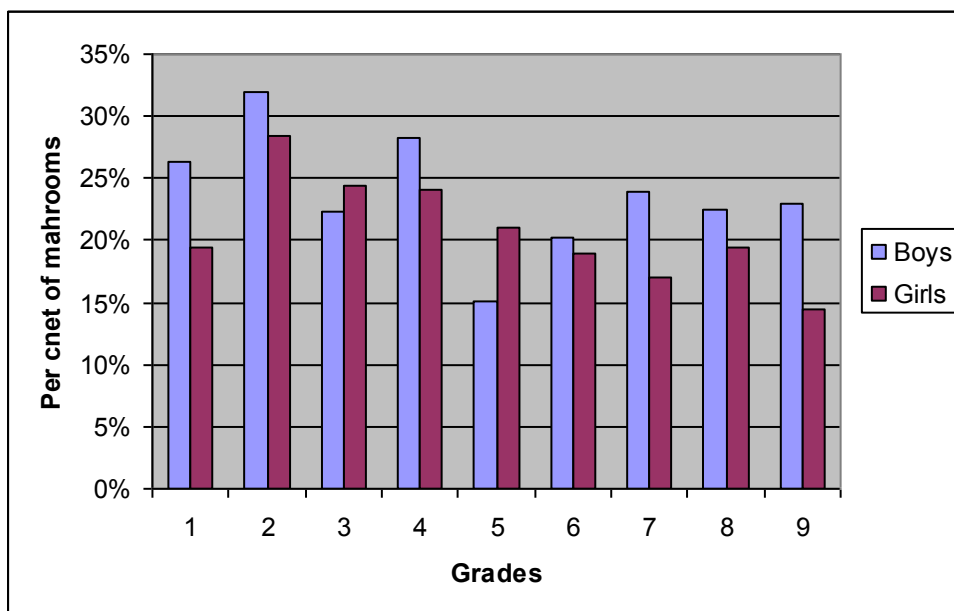


When the drop out rate per grades for boys and girls was considered, it was found that in all grades, with exception in grades three and five, girls dropped out to a smaller extent than boys did. This might be interpreted as a second stage of selection, i.e. among those girls who are enrolled in schools, the ones who want to quit schools they do so in these grades.

Table 4: Drop out and failed rates per gender and per grades

Boys' results							Girls' results								
Grades	Tot Registered students	1385 Final Exam Results					Mahro oms	Grades	Tot Registered students	1385 Final Exam Results					Mahro oms
		Participated in exam				Condit. passed				Participated in exam				Condit. passed	
		Participate d in exam	Passed	Failed	Condit. passed					Participate d in exam	Passed	Failed	Condit. passed		
1	100%	74%	59%	0%	0%	26%	1	100%	81%	68%	0%	1%	19%		
2	100%	67%	53%	0%	0%	32%	2	100%	72%	64%	0%	0%	28%		
3	100%	78%	56%	7%	0%	22%	3	100%	74%	62%	4%	0%	24%		
4	100%	72%	42%	4%	6%	28%	4	100%	77%	57%	5%	6%	24%		
5	100%	84%	39%	3%	9%	15%	5	100%	80%	62%	2%	5%	21%		
6	100%	80%	53%	2%	8%	20%	6	100%	82%	66%	4%	5%	19%		
7	100%	72%	38%	4%	10%	24%	7	100%	82%	73%	1%	2%	17%		
8	100%	78%	43%	2%	9%	23%	8	100%	81%	67%	1%	3%	19%		
9	100%	77%	45%	2%	10%	23%	9	100%	87%	72%	0%	2%	14%		
Sub total	100%	75%	49%	3%	5%	24%	Sub total	100%	78%	64%	2%	3%	22%		

Chart 5: Per cent of Mahrooms per grade for boys and girls



As seen in table 4, girls pass the examination tests and thus to the next grade to a higher extent than boys do in all grades. Girls are not conditionally passed to the same extent as boys; also an indication that girls in general achieve better than boys do. Also the drop out rate is lower than boys' - with one important exception: after grade five 21 % of the girls leave school while only 15 % of the boys do.

Does school location matter?

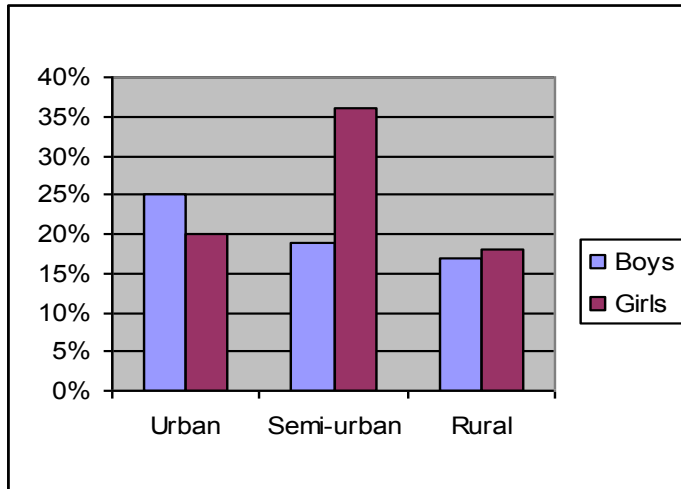
There is a very big gap of drop out rate between individual schools, the lowest rate is 4 per cent and the highest 52 per cent. The first example was reported from a small village school, recently established which not yet has reached grade 6, while the second case represented a big school located in a semi-urban area. The reason as explained by the headmaster for the high DOR was that other optional schools, especially for girls had opened in the school's catchment area, and many girls students left school and continued in other learning places, for example in literacy classes. Such reasons of and causes for drop out, especially in case of girls, may indicate other meaning for retention and drop outs in schools.

When school categories were considered, the highest average rates of Mahrooms were observed in semi-urban schools (26 %) - see chart 7. When the data was further scrutinized it was found that there is difference between both boys and girls of rural and urban schools. The highest rate of Mahrooms was found among of semi-urban girls (36 %), while the lowest rate is reported among rural boys (17 %). The very high rate of Mahrooms for semi-urban girls might be explained by a relative instability in settlement of the inhabitants in such areas. Rural families who have had to leave their villages or returnees from refugee camps settle in the outskirts of cities and since the environment is alien parents do not allow their daughters to walk to

school. The fact that urban boys drop out more than rural boys may be explained by the fact that in cities boys find more job opportunities and therefore leave school prematurely.

As seen in the chart 3, rural boys and girls perform similar (17% and 18 % respectively), while in urban and semi-urban areas the difference is visible.

Chart 6: Mahroom rate per gender in urban and rural schools



Which other factors make a difference in Mahroom rate?

A simple correlation analysis was conducted between some different school variables and Mahroom rate. The correlation coefficient is reported in Table 5.

Table 5 : Correlation coefficient of Drop out and schools' variables

	Type of school (ordinal order)			Learning space – percentage in:			
	Establishment date of school (old, new)	Supporting agency (MoE, SCA, SCA/MoE) (1,2,3)	Refugee in areas (%)	Building	Masjid, Private house, etc	Tents, Open air	Distance to school
Correlation coefficient of Mahrooms with:	0.29	- 0.3	0.33	0.2	0.24	0.3	- 0.3

Some of the existing correlations confirm, while others contradict common sense and widespread guesses. The drop out rate has a positive correlation with variables such as school building and school history (old or new school). Students studying in proper buildings seem to be more motivated to continue than those who study in open air or in tents. New schools maybe not be so well organized as old schools; they have for example, more often experienced headmasters. That the drop out rate is higher in

areas with high proportion of refugees can be explained by instability in the lives of the returnees. Concerned organizations need to pay attention to such factors.

The negative correlation of the distance to schools and the drop out rate means that the longer the students walk to schools, the less they drop out of schools. This seems to be a contradiction to ordinary common sense. It might be a result of the combined effect of “selection” of students and distance to school. Students who walk a long way are those who are strongly motivated and determined to continue in school but many children from such distant villages may not be enrolled in school at all.

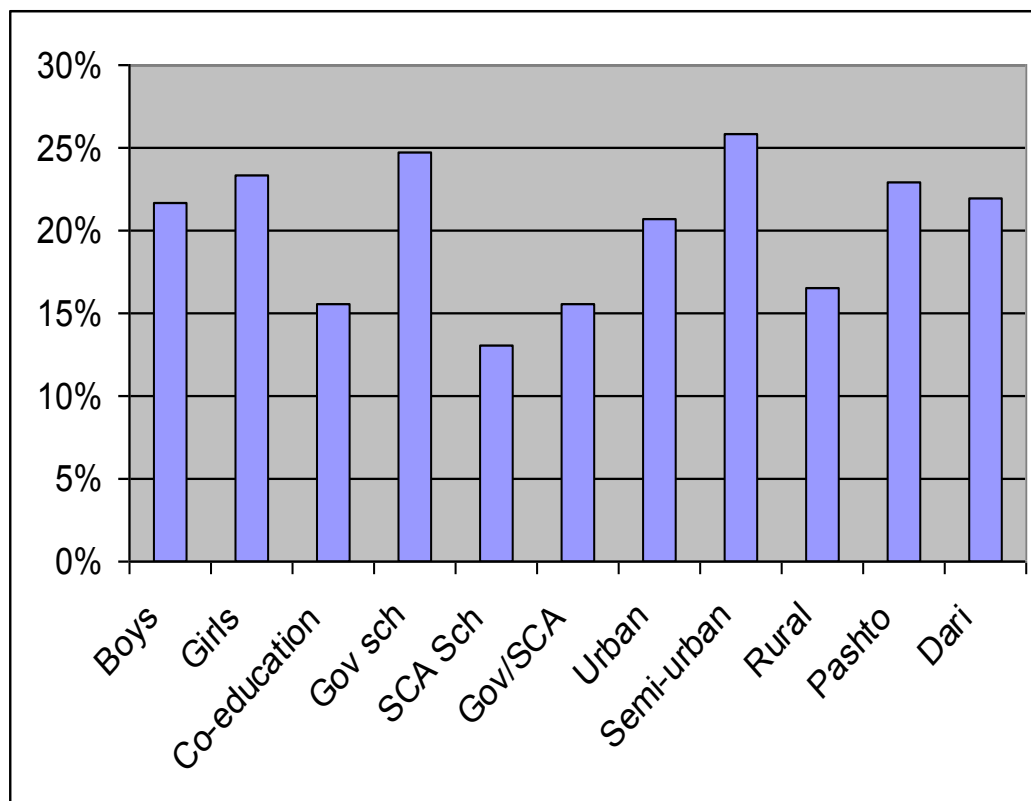
The rate of Mahroom of different categories of schools ranged between 16 per cent and 26 per cent. For comparative reasons the DOR of all kinds of schools is shown in chart 7 below (although some are discussed earlier in this report). As seen in chart 7, there is a visible difference between schools. Some can be explained while others require a more profound study to find about the factors related to school type.

It was found that schools supported by NGOs (e.g. SCA) excelled other public i.e. government schools. It can be assumed that regular supervision, better professional instructions to teachers, community involvement, etc have influenced the performance of schools in this regard. It might be a problem of record keeping; e.g. some schools record all the three years permanently absent students while others may not have recorded them. Further study is needed to explore the causes for this difference.

Co-educated schools excelled single sex schools. It is worth mentioning that in co-educated schools both boys and girls study in separate classes or even at separate times and there is no single class in this material where both boys and girls are in the same class. (at least in rural and semi-urban areas, while in some cases in cities and in lower primary level it might be but still very rarely). This clarification eliminate the influence of single sex on DOR in co-educated schools but co-educated schools as such may represent areas with more positive attitudes towards education in general which may explain the difference in DOR in areas with co-education.

Rural schools seem to be better in regard to DOR; the reason is not known. Maybe it is due to the “charm of novelty”, the size of schools, other factors or combined effects. Further study is needed.

Chart 7: Drop out rate in different kind of schools



Note: Gov/ SCA schools were schools which were supported by SCA in past and handed over to the MoE

Failure in school

As mentioned early, the exam and assessment of learning achievements are not standardized in the country and tests are based on individual school (teachers') judgments. As such, comparison of failure (repetition) rate between school is not possible in a real comparative sense. But even as such, a comparison of the failure rate between the grades and level of a school can provide interesting information.

The data collection for this study took place at the end of school year, while still final examinations were not executed in all schools and in others the examination results were not yet finalized. To examine the rate of failure in schools, it was necessary to process the data from the previous school year. The data was collected from the same time period for three subsequent years.

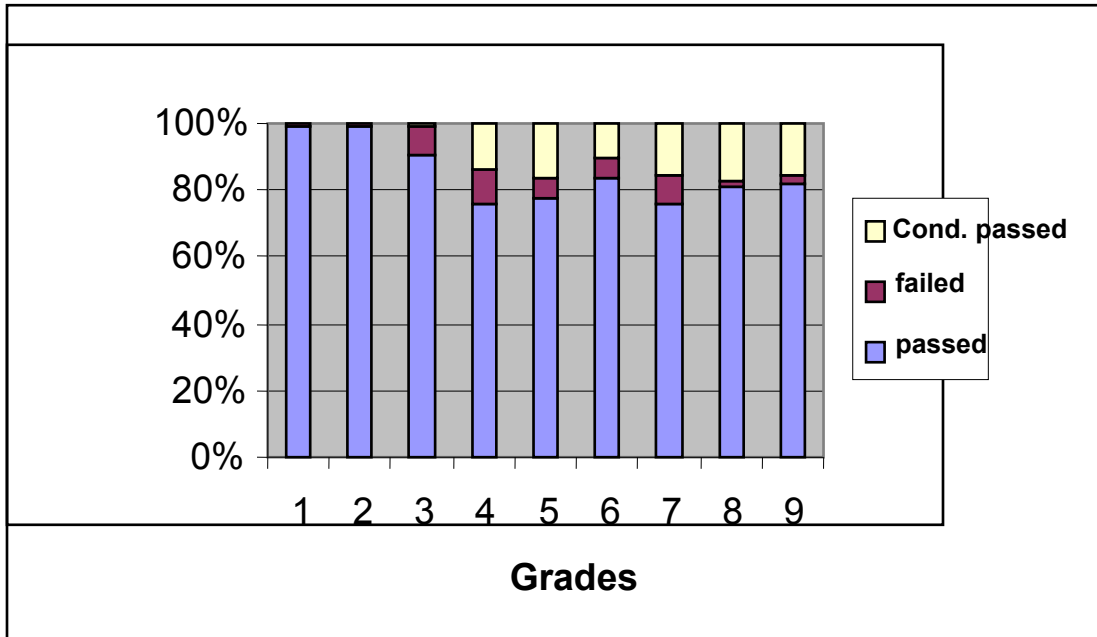
Table 6: Failed and passed students in schools

Grades	Tot Registered students	1384 Final Exam Results			
		Participated in exam			
		Participated in exam	Passed	Failed	Conditionally Passed
1	100%	79%	98%	1.1%	0%
2	100%	81%	99%	1.1%	0%
3	100%	84%	90%	9.0%	0%
4	100%	82%	76%	10.1%	14%
5	100%	86%	77%	6.3%	16%
6	100%	86%	83%	6.2%	10%
7	100%	87%	76%	7.9%	16%
8	100%	88%	81%	2.1%	17%
9	100%	89%	82%	2.3%	16%
Total	100%	83%	87%	5%	7%

The average failure rate was 5 per cent of all the students who participated in final examinations. As seen in the table, high failure rates are reported in the grades around the transition levels, i.e. in grades 3, 4 and 7, where nine, ten and eight percent of the students respectively failed. This fact indicates that a large per cent of students at the end of a school cycle (end of grades 3 and 6) have not mastered the content and are not mature enough to continue in the next level. This is also according to teachers' views. The teachers are probably right in their assessment and want the students to repeat the grade in order to become better prepared to continue at the next level.

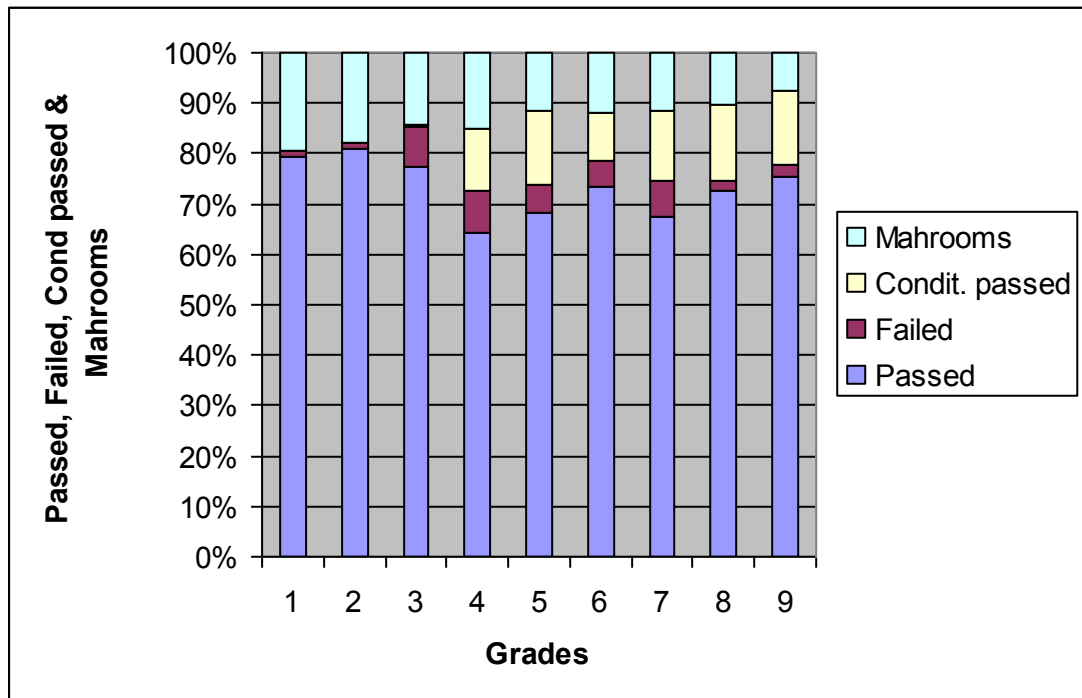
Chart 8 : Students who pass and fail in examinations per grades

Per cent of passed, failed and conditionally passed



When the failure rate is added to the Mahrooms rate, the following picture emerges

Chart 9 : Passed, failed, conditionally passed & Mahrooms from the totally registered students per grades



As seen in the above chart, in addition to the Mahrooms many students fail and normally repeat the grades. Students who are conditionally passed, i.e. they have failed in examination but are given second chance to pass the grade, are also quite many, especially after grade 3. Such students commonly pass the second chance but it is a clear indication that they do not perform well and according to teachers they have to study hard to be able to continue in the next grades.

Consequently, five per cent failure rate and 22 per cent drop out rate constitute “school wastage” of 27 per cent in schools. The 22 per cent drop out rate is an accumulated figure of three years, while on average 8 per cent of the students leave school every year. The 5 per cent failure rate added to 8 per cent drop out rate makes the yearly “school wastage” 13 per cent.

Who leaves school and why?

To find out the reasons behind drop and who is in risk of leaving school too early, interviews were made with children who had left school, their fathers, related school (class) teachers and the headmaster of schools.

What do students say themselves?

When children were asked why they dropped out boys and girls provided different reasons.

Table 7 : Students’ reasons for drop out

Why have you left school?	Boys’ answers	Girls’ answers
Needed for work at home	50.0%	26.3%
Did not learn any thing	14.3%	15.8%
Didn’t like school	10.7%	10.5%
Nothing useful learned in school	7.1%	7.9%
Failed many times	7.1%	5.3%
Long distance to school	3.6%	13.2%
Sickness	3.6%	5.3%
Other reason (bad security, no support from family, over age, early marriage)	3.6%	15.8%
All	100 %	100 %

More than 50 per cent of the boys said they had left school because they were needed as labor at home to help supporting their families. A 14 year old boy who had dropped out in grade 4 said that his”father is too old and there is no one else to care for house and family”. Need for work also cause long term absence of such children

during a school year and consequently become mahroom for subsequent years (more than 2 years), which is a reason to be ejected from schools. A 12 years old boy said: "We are poor and I was helping my father in the farm, so I became Mahroom for the last two years and expelled from school". Such students when asked whether they will come back to school and continue their education mostly responded that they wished the conditions were prepared for them to continue in school.

Also for girls the most frequent reason for dropping out of school was the need for work at home, but still only 26 per cent of the girls mentioned household work as the main reason. "My mother died and there was no one else to do house work" said a 13 year old girl who dropped out in grade 4. A 19 years old girl school had quit after grade 4 provided several reasons. Due to sickness of her mother and death of a grand mother, she was not able to be present in school regularly and beside this "we had economic problems as well."

For some students the need for work at home seemed to be more like an excuse for leaving school. For example, a 12 year old boy said: "I have to look after animals at home" but also "from grade 1 to grade 4, I have not learned anything, I cannot even write my name correctly" so "I don't like school" and "nothing useful is learned in school". Another 13 years old boy responded, "I was needed to work at home" and "I couldn't learn anything in school". By saying, "I couldn't learn anything in school", students mostly wished to blame the school environment for not being conducive for learning, but some students also blamed themselves for not having enough capacity to learn. A girl, aged 10 years dropped school in grade 3 says that "I was needed to work at home" and besides "I couldn't learn my lessons". A 14 years old girl in grade 4 said: "I was needed at home... Nothing useful was learned in school... and there was a long distance to school". A 12 year girl who dropped out in grade 4 said that "nothing useful is learned in schools". A combination of reason is provided by a 13 years old girl who dropped out in grade 4: "Sometimes my mother needed me to help her. I couldn't learn my lessons. I did not like my school, because I have not learned any thing and no one taught anything in school, if anything was learnt taught it was through the *Kiptan* [the leader student of a class]. I was absent a lot because I had long distance to school still I was treated as present." For this girl the main reasons for leaving seem to be the low quality of teaching and learning.

Math was the most "awful" subject in schools, for those who hated school. For example, most of the children who responded that they don't like school, frequently responded to questions "which subject do you like most and which not" said: "I liked the language books, Islamic education was good too, but I hate math." Another one said, "I liked Pashto very much but I hate math, so I learned Pashto, but I did not understand anything from math" (15 years old boy, dropped out in grade 3). Another 13 years old boy says: "I liked Islamic education and liked somehow also Pashto, but other subjects I did not learn at all".

Long distance to school was an important reason for 13,2 per cent of the girls but only 3.6 per cent of the boys mentioned this reason for drop out. On average boys had longer distance to school than girls, though. Bad security was also a more serious obstacle for girls. To be averaged for a boy did not constitute a big problem but for girls it provides a reason for leaving school. A 17 year old girl who left school in grade 4 said: "I was too old to continue" – and added: "I failed many times". Early marriage was not mentioned explicitly as a reason for drop out by girls themselves,

may be for cultural reasons, but was hidden in the big group of other reasons, which constitute almost 16 per cent for drop out of girls. Being “big” or over age, indicate time for being marriage (see the response of fathers and headmasters). Other reasons, such as parents’ negative attitudes towards education, particularly girls’ education were also mentioned. A 14 years old girl said that she was number two in here class but discrimination against girls caused me to drop out school.

After having dropped out students were asked whether they will have use of things they had learned in school. 83 per cent of the girls and 60 per cent of the boys responded positively to this question and believed that they have learned things, which could be useful in their life. The reason for girls to be more positive might be that they had dropped out for other reasons than failure in examinations. Only 17 percent of the dropped out girls had repeated one or more grades, and 39 per cent of these girls had dropped out because of becoming Mahroom. For boys this situation was 55 per cent and 40 per cent respectively; the majority had failed in grade 4. This indicates that boys who drop out of schools are those who repeat grades (an indicator of lower achievements) while the dropped out girls have similar achievement as those who continue.

No father of these children had education beyond primary level.

Parents’ (=fathers’) views on drop out

The fathers provided five types of reasons as explanations to why their daughters had left school:

1. She did not learn anything.
2. She was needed at home to help her mother.
3. It was too long distance for her to walk to school.
4. She was going to marry.
5. She was absent too much.

The responses are distributed almost equally to the five explanations.

Reasons for the sons’ drop out 50 per cent of the fathers mentioned poverty and the need for them to work to support the families as the main reason. 25 per cent blamed the school environment and claimed that the children do not learn anything so they did not see any use of going there. The last 25 per cent mentioned other reasons, such as sickness, overage, low interest of student in schooling, general disinterest of education in the family, etc.

What do teachers say about drop out?

According to teachers’ views, children of poor families as well as children with low achievement level in schools (those who fail many times) are in higher risk of dropping out from schools.

One reason of drop out is said to be the decreasing interest in education and a perception of education having less value. A teacher of grade 3 said: “When people see engineers, military officers and teachers in bazaars selling things beside the roads, they lose their belief in the power of education and may not wish to continue to send

their children to school”. Another teacher of grade 4 believed: “people are interested in education and in schools for their children, but in schools children do not get proper knowledge, the government have even decreased Islamic subjects in schools. These are the main reasons for drop out schools”.

Other reasons of drop out according to the teachers are fathers’ low interest in education. Teachers argued that children whose fathers are not aware of the importance of education leave schools before completion of a cycle.

In case of girls early marriages, distance to school, lack of female teachers and “what people say” were the main reasons for drop out.

According to most teachers, 90 % of those who become Mahrooms never appear again the coming years. This means that the 7-8 per cent of annual Mahrooms likely constitute the annual drop out per grade per year.

Teachers confirm that children leave schools mostly after grade 3 or 4. When they reach grade 5 they usually finish grade 6 too.

The reasons for high drop out in the lower grades are, according to teachers, that many of the children who start the beginning of the school year are not interested and/or not mature to be enrolled in school. They just insist to be admitted to get something. A teacher of grade 4 said: “At the beginning of the school year many children are admitted in grade one and continue for one or two months until they get books and notebooks and then they quit. Next year again they come to school in the beginning.”

Headmasters have also some thing to say about the drop out in schools

When headmasters were asked if it is true that children of grade 6 constitute only 20 % of the students who once enrolled in grade one, the responses were different. Mostly they confirmed this idea. One headmaster added, “if the current situation continues it will worsen”.

As reasons for drop out the headmasters mentioned: poverty, the need for children’s labor, lack of interest in education; low learning achievements in the lower grades, too much and heavy content in the books for lower grades, disinterested parents, lack of higher education institutions; security situation on local level (safe traveling to school!), early marriage age, lack of transportation to schools, lack of proper schooling conditions (culturally) for girls, decreased Islam in schools, conservative attitudes.

The fact that more boys than girls drop out was confirmed by one headmaster who said: “NGOs support girls education; boys work and have to support their families, boys drop out in different grades (due to many reasons), girls continue until they are ready to marry; girls drop out due to lack of female teachers,

According to headmasters, to decrease the drop out rate in schools it is necessary to improve the working conditions of teachers, to improve teaching capacity, decrease the number of children in classes, promote awareness of education, adopt the school period to local needs e.g. summer or winter vacations, improve employment opportunities for graduates, increase possibilities for higher education, etc.

Chapter three: Discussion on the findings

Conclusion

The average accumulated figure for the Mahrooms was found to be 22 per cent, i.e. totally 22 % of the enrolled number of students (listed in student attendance books) became mahrooms i.e. did not participate in final exam during the last three years (including current year). Two third of the 22 % constitute those who are mahrooms since two and three years and one third are the mahrooms of one (current) year. On average 7-8 per cent of students drop out annually, i.e. they become Mahrooms and are not allowed to participate in the final grade examination due to too high absence during the school year. There was a very big difference of DOR between schools (the lowest was 4 and the highest was 52 per cent). There was also a big difference when categories of schools were compared; differences ranged between 16 to 26 per cent. Some explanations are provided in the report, while a more profound study is recommended in the future.

That there was no visible difference between boys and girls was explained by selective enrolment of girls.

Socioeconomic factors, such as unstable situation of villagers' settlement, were found important for DOR; for example, areas with high percentage of refugees or returnees, and semi-urban areas with new settlements were characterized by higher DOR. Rural schools excelled other schools and lower DOR.

Among school related factors, such as regularly supervised schools as opposed to only inspected schools and schools with proper buildings, were found to have the lowest DOR. The size of schools and the number of students per class were also found to be positively correlated with the DOR in schools.

The reasons for drop out were mainly the need for work at home (poverty), that nothing useful was learnt (content) and that it was not possible to learn anything in schools (poor teaching and learning conditions). For girls, early marriages and distance to school were reported as important reasons for drop out.

Children from poor and illiterate families drop out more than others; an indication that the gap between poor and rich may widen as regards education.

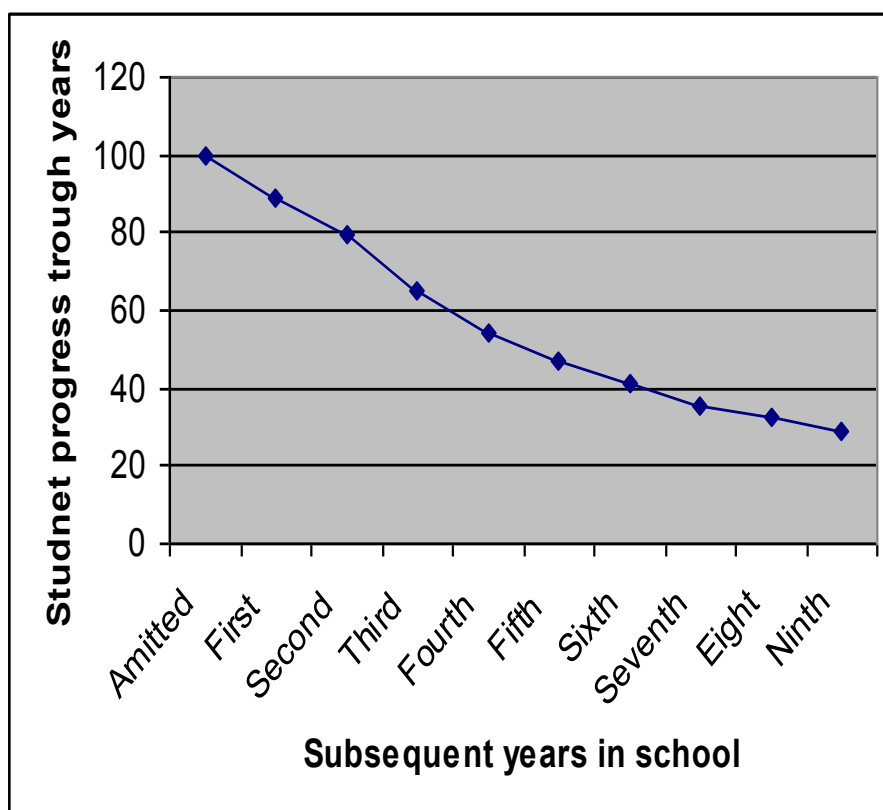
A high failure rate was reported to occur in grades 3, 4 and 7 i.e. at the transition grades from one level to another, which indicates a low level of students' achievements and result in students not prepared to continue in the next grades.

To illustrate the situation of drop out rate in schools, an imaginary case (school) is assumed where 100 students are admitted in grade one (first year) and then tracked the following years in light of the findings of this study. What will happen to these students along a nine years education? In the below table and chart information on students who drop out and fail in examinations is compiled.

Table 8: Students who drop out and fail in examinations during a nine year period (imaginary case, based on findings from the study)

School Year	Number of students				Dropped out and failed rates
	At the beginning of the school year	At the end of the school year	# of drop outs	# who failed	
First	100	89	10	1	10% dropped &, 0.1 % failed
Second	89	79	9	1	10% dropped &, 0.1 % failed
Third	79	65	8	6	10 % Dropped & 9 % failed
Fourth	65	54	4	7	7% Dropped & 10 % failed
Fifth	54	47	4	3	7 % Dropped & 6 % failed
Sixth	47	41	3	3	7 % Dropped & 6 % failed
Seventh	41	35	3	3	7 % Dropped & 8 % failed
Eight	35	32	2	1	6 % Dropped& 2 % failed
Ninth	32	29	2	1	6 % Dropped & 2 % failed
Total	32 out of 100	29 out of 100	45	26	

Chart 10: Diagnosis of drop out in schools



Out of 100 students admitted in grade one (the first year), only 29 will remain after grade nine. 71 students have dropped out or failed to pass to the next grade. What is most alarming is that 46 of these 71 students, 65 per cent, drop out or fail to pass during the first four grades, which indicates that the majority of children who attend school only become semi-literate or remain illiterate. That 29 out of 100 complete grade nine may not appear that disastrous comparing other countries in similar situation⁵ BUT what is worrying is that the drop out occurs so early in the cycle. Had at least 60 per cent completed grade six we had got a literate generation as a result of primary education. Now, 54 per cent of the students drop out or fail during the first four years, which indicates that **education for the majority of children who enroll have resulted in - at the best - only semi-literate people.** This assumption is further confirmed by the fact of the high failure rates in grades 3 and 4, that is, these students have not mastered the minimum level of subject content to pass. Moreover, Afghanistan has a very short school year, limited number of school hours per week and accepts 50 % absence in the first grades to pass – a situation that adds to extremely low standards. There are reasons to believe our children learn very little in school. The educational wastage is huge. However, there are some promising findings too, in particular as regards girls' education. Although girls still constitute only 30 % of all students and less than half of all girls enroll in school at all this study shows that girls who do enroll in school tend to survive for more years and they achieve better in schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation can be made:

1. Much more attention has to be paid to the lower grades. At present the highest number of students are found in the lowest grades (sometimes more than 100 per class!) a fact that most likely contributes to the high drop out and failure rates. The student-teacher ratio must decrease. Teachers should get more support on how to teach small children the basics of literacy and numeracy.
2. Admission procedures to grade ones i.e. of new students, needs to be revised and some kind of rules are needed to increase parents' commitment towards their children when in school. Such measures may decrease the drop out from grades ones.
3. A more supportive form of supervision of schools should replace the existing inspection system. Through quality supervision, teachers would receive guidance, support and advice. Another, more open atmosphere is needed in schools, so that school staff “dares” to bring up problems and questions in order to find solutions together with the supervisor.
4. The school reporting system should be revised so that the Final Exam Result Forms include additional columns for the Mahrooms of the last two years. This would eliminate the so called “ghost students”.

⁵ In many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, few countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Malawi, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, etc in 2001 only two third of the enrolled children in grade one reached last grade of primary level. The lowest rate was for Malawi-22% (UNESCO, 2006).

5. The examination and evaluation system needs to be standardized, so that students in lower grade are properly evaluated **in order to promote learning**. The automatic promotion system in lower grade requires more attention and possibly revision.
6. The content of books and number of subject are other aspects to be revised. Six – seven subjects per grade in the lower level seem to be too much. The content of the books is heavy and often not adapted to children’s level. A thorough revision of subjects and textbooks is recommended.
7. Why some girls attend school and others do not require more studies. Successful interventions need to be spread.
8. The wide gap between different types of schools should be studied further and the main reasons for lower and/or higher rate of drop out should be searched. The findings may result in recommendations for applicable interventions.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Approval letter of the Ministry of Education

Annex 2. Data collection tools: Questionnaires and interviews questions

Form No 1: Final Exam Result Forms

Grades	Sections	Registered Tot students	1385 Final Exam Results							
			Participated in exam				Dropped out (Mahrooms)			
			Participated in exam	Passed	Failed	Condit. passed	This year	Last year	Third year	Total
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
Total										

Form No 2: Information about school and inhabitants

a. School:....., Province:....., District:....., Village:.....
Type: Boys Girls Co-education Shifts: 1, 2 or 3

b. Building:

Student sit: ...% in tents,.... % in private house,.... % in Masjids, ... % under tree
(open air); ... % in other places,% in proper school building

c. Type of school:

Location	Boys	Girl	Co- educa tion	Middle (grades 1- 9)	Secondary (grades 1-12)	Last grade
Urban						
Semi- urban						
Rural						

d. Distance to other closest school: Km

Per cent of school age children enrolled in school: Boys:... %, Girls:....%

Estimated population:....., Number of villages (in the coverage areas of school):.....
The distant village to school:.....Km, Average distance to school:.....Km

e. About the villagers:

Occupation: Farmers:...%, Own land farming:.....%, Small business:....%,
Daily workers:...%, Other:.....%
Ethnic group(s):....., Language (school):.....
Average education level of the villagers:

Form No 3: Interviews with students who dropped out school

School:,
Name:....., Age:, Sex:

Parents' background:
Grade:....., Institution:....., Graduation year:....., Current
job:.....

Family income resources:
Salary Own farm Small business Farmer Daily working
Other

Questions to be answered by students (who dropped school this year):

- a. In which did you drop out from school?.....
- b. Why did you drop school? 1. Need to work for family 2. Couldn't learn
3. Don't like school 4. No useful things leaned in school 5. Failed many times
6. Long distance to school 7. Was sick 8. And..... or
- c. How many times and in which grade failed?.....
- d. Were you so you left school? Or you fail and left school? Or Other reason?.....
- e. Did you like school or not like t?.....
- f. What things in school you did not like?.....
- g. Will you use things you have learned in school?.....
- h. Will you come back to school or never?.....
- i. Which subject did you like most and which you did not?.....
- j. Which subject did you learn better and which was difficult for you?.....

Questions from father of a dropped out student (preferably mothers in case of girls):

1. How many more children of you are in school? Boys:.... Girls:...
2. Who decided (you, the child or both) to leave school?.....
3. Why did your son/daughter left school?.....
4. Did s/he learn any useful things?.....
5. Is any other of your child left school?.....
6. What is s/he doing now?.....

Form No 4: Interview with teacher (of a grade from which a student dropped out)

School:

Name:....., Age:, Sex:

Educational background:

Grade:....., Institution:....., Graduation year:.....,
Experiences as teacher:..... In primary:....., In Middle:.....,
Teacher training: Length: Year:... By whom?.....

Any other job besides teaching? What type?.....

1. How many students in your class were Mahrooms this year?.....

2. Who were those who disappear during the school year?

Poor achiever Talented Poor families Reach families,
Regular present Irregular present Native villagers Immigrants
Illiterate parents Educated parents And/or others

3. What are the main reasons for students dropping out from schools?

1. Need to work for family
2. Couldn't learn
3. Don't like school
4. No useful things learned in school
5. Failed many times
6. Less motivated parents
7. Was sick
8. And..... or

4. What happen to mahroom students?

Come again next year:..... %

Continue in other school:....%

Leave school forever:..... %

The families leave the areas:.... %

5. In which grades mostly children leave in your schools?..... and Why in this grade?.....

6. This (name) of your student who left school this year, how he was? describe as:

A clever? A weak? Regularly present or absent?

Is s/he or the family cause that s/he left school?..... Or other reasons:.....

Form No 5: Interview with Headmaster of schools

Name:....., Age:....., Sex: Male Female

Education background: Grade:....., Institution:....., Year:.....

Experience as Headmaster:....., Teaching experience:.....,

Teacher training: Length:....., By whom:....., When:.....

1. Average education level of teachers in this school:.....

2. Work experiences (as teachers):.....

3. Which per cent of your students drop out from schools (*ikhraj*):
4. How many this year?
5. If one look to the registration books, in each school children of grade 6 constitute around 20 % of the students of grade ones. Is it true that around 80 % children do not get to grade 6?
6. Three main reasons for drop out schools?
7. Is there any difference between boys and girls in drop out rate?
8. What should be improved in schools to decrease the drop out rate?.....
9. Who are the most frequent dropped out?